By reducing the numbers of top predators such as seals, populations of predator species at the next level down the food chain will increase. In turn, those species will likely then have a greater predatory effect on the populations of species of interest to fisheries than seals themselves would have had if they had been left alone.

Due to these complexities, the idea that reducing seal numbers would benefit fisheries has largely been discredited among scientists since the 1980's. Modeling studies conducted in South Africa by world-renowned experts showed that culling seals there would have the likely outcome of seeing a reduction in the important hake population. In addition, increased cannibalism manifested among hakes as a result of seal culling would lead to an even lower fishery yield.

Protecting Namibia’s fisheries requires better management. The Ministry should abide by fishery catch levels recommended by scientists to reduce over-fishing. It should prohibit destructive fishing methods to decrease by-catch levels and reduce damage to fish habitats. It should take steps to combat illegal fishing fleets.

It is these elements, not the seals, which combine to jeopardise Namibia’s fisheries.

Cape fur seals, which are listed as a threatened species by CITES (Appendix II), have suffered mass die-offs in recent years, most likely due to a reduction in prey availability. Better management of fisheries will therefore benefit the fishing industry and its customers as well as the seals.

**SPAIN’S HAKE APPETITE THREATENS NAMIBIA’S MOST VALUABLE FISH**

"Spanish companies are catching an estimated seven of 10 Namibian hakes in what has been considered one of the world’s richest fishing grounds. Despite warnings that the stock could drop further from an already alarmingly low level, the government of Namibia this year increased the quotas for hake catches.

Meanwhile, some players ignored the rules entirely and don’t even bother to hide it. José Luis Bastos, a Spanish fishing magnate, was blunt: “We are over-catch hake, and I don’t have a problem telling the [fisheries] minister this.” Bastos exceeds quotas without fear of harsh punishment because he is among a dozen well-connected Spanish ship owners who control almost all trade in hake, the southwest African nation’s most lucrative fish.”

Marcos Garcia Rey and John Grobler in Looting the Seas II. Center for Public Integrity and The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (2012)

**NAMIBIA’S MASSACRE OF CAPE FUR SEALS**

Each year from July to November, the Namibian government authorises the killing of 80,000 – 85,000 nursing Cape fur seal pups and 6,000 adult bulls in several of their breeding colonies along the desert coast of Namibia. Every morning, clubbers come to the seal rookeries to club and stab the pups and shoot the bulls. In some years, clubbers kill all the pups without meeting the quota. This is the largest slaughter of wildlife in Africa.

The seal pups are killed mainly for their fur. Their blubber is also sold as “omega-3 supplements.” Adult bulls are shot mainly for their genitalia, which some consider an aphrodisiac in certain Asian countries.

Demand for seal products worldwide has greatly declined since 2009, when the European Union banned trade in all seal products. It further declined when Russia and Taiwan also introduced bans in response to the cruelty of seal killing practices.

**Killing Methods**

Men wielding clubs enter the seals’ breeding colonies early in the morning, rounding up large numbers of seals. As the seals panic, older animals are allowed to escape, but pups that have been rounded up are contained in a large, dense herd.

Regulations require clubbers to allow smaller groups of pups to escape from the group towards the sea between two rows of men, who then club them as they pass.

This is supposed to ensure that clubbers strike the pups accurately on the head and kill them immediately. Clubbers are then required to stab pups through the heart to bleed them out. Such regulations lead to pain, suffering, and panic for the young seals and for the seals that hear and see all the killing around them.