

# Seal management in Estonia

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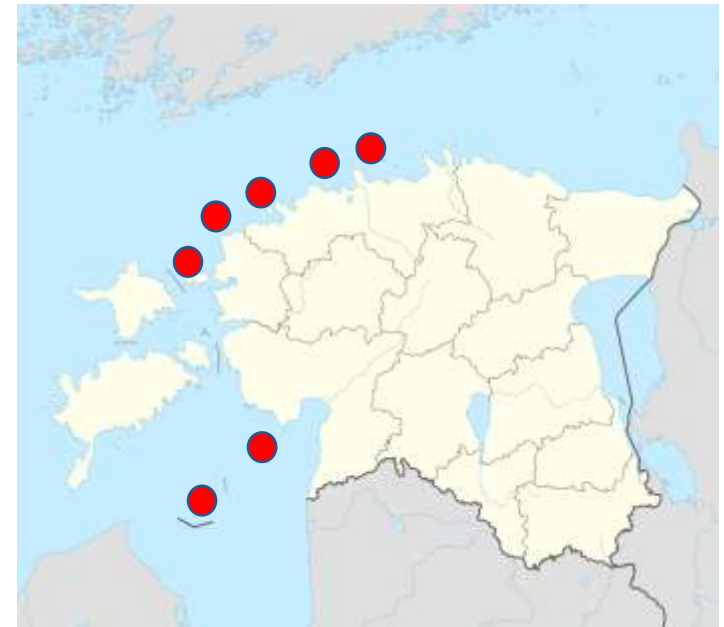
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# Seal hunt history in Estonia



- Seal hunting, or stalking, was the most important and profitable, but also the most difficult and dangerous job for the men of Ruhnu (Gulf of Riga), and even in the 1930s it was also **the main source of livelihood** for the islanders.
- Seal hunting was also very important on Kihnu (Gulf of Riga), Vormsi, Odenholm, Nargö and Prangli islands (Gulf of Finland), and in lesser degree in most of the coastal areas.



# Seal management in Estonia



*Grey seal conservation  
action plan 2015-2019*

Hunting season:

In Estonia Gray seals may be ambushed or stalked from April 15 to December 31.

(1) The following data shall be collected for each hunted gray seal:

- 1) hunting date and hunting license number;
- 2) the county and geographical coordinates of the hunting place;
- 3) sex, trunk length and, if possible, weight of the specimen;
- 4) thickness of subcutaneous fat tissue;
- 5) name and contact telephone number of the data collector.

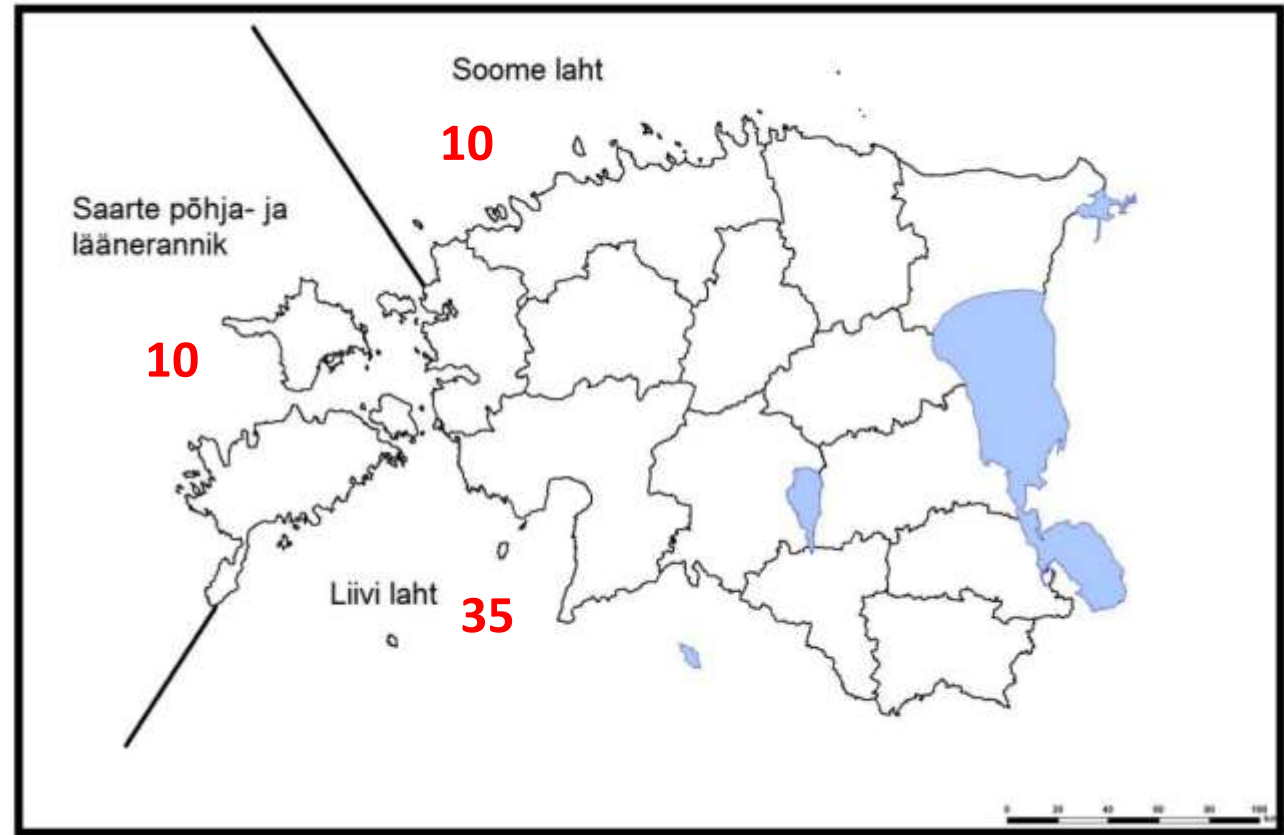
(2) The following biosamples shall be collected from each hunted gray seal:

- 1) uterus of at least one-year-old female with ovaries;
- 2) a 1–2 cm long section of the root of the mandible or mandibular canine tooth;
- 3) A 5×5×5 cm piece of subcutaneous adipose tissue with skin.

(3) The county, hunting date and hunting license number must be marked on the bio-samples mentioned in paragraph 2.

(4) The data and biosamples specified in paragraphs 1 and 2 shall be submitted by the owner of the hunting permit to the Environmental Agency by January 10 of the current year at the latest."

- In Estonia, the hunting quota for the gray seal is according to the “Action plan for the protection of the gray seal 2015-2019” (i.e. now no longer valid) 1% of the number of specimens counted last year.
- At the same time, due to the weather conditions prevailing during the censuses, the annual fluctuations of the census results might be quite large. To mitigate the possible significant differences in the size of the hunting quotas depending on the census results, the hunting proposals are based on the average of the last three years counts.



# Estonian gray seal quota and hunting statistics

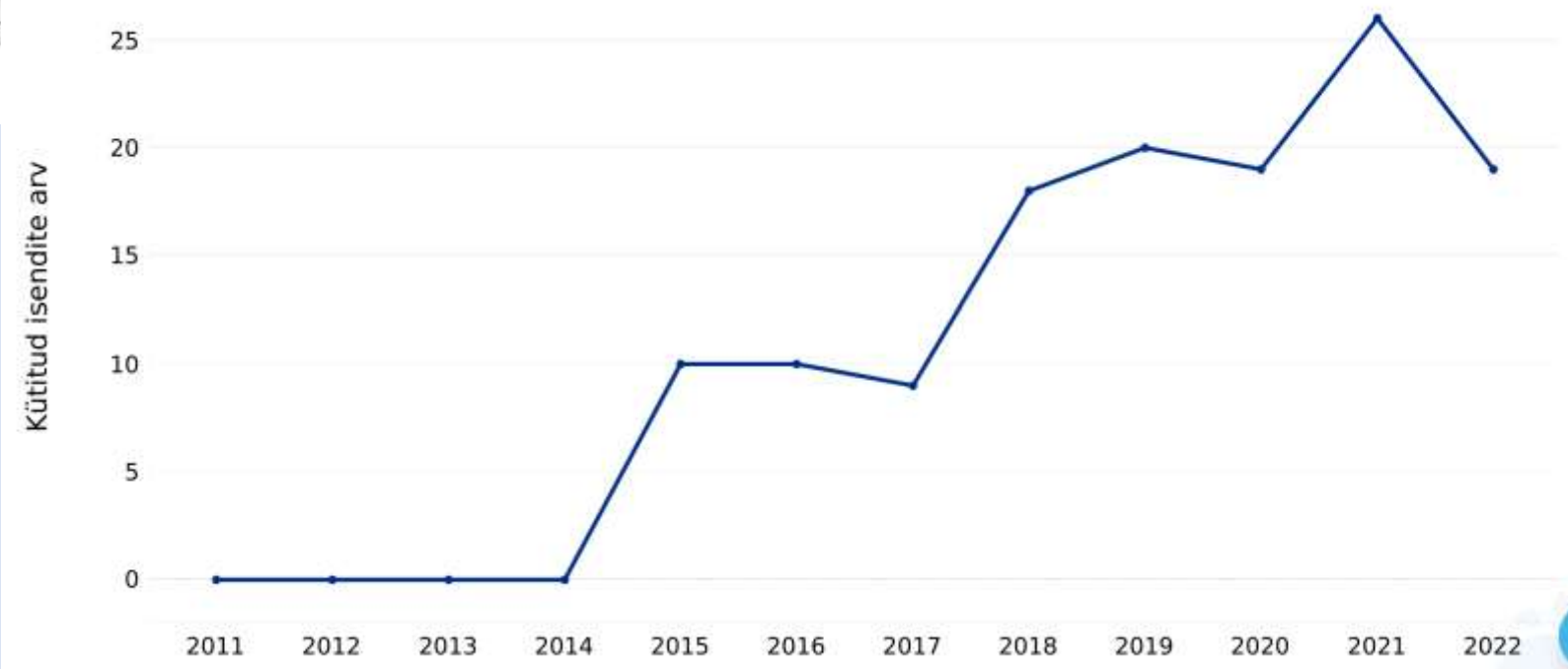
Year	Estonia	
	Quota	Hunted seals
2015	53	10
2016	42	10
2017	45	9
2018	37	18
2019	58	20
2020	50	19
2021	55	26
2022	55	19
Total	395	131

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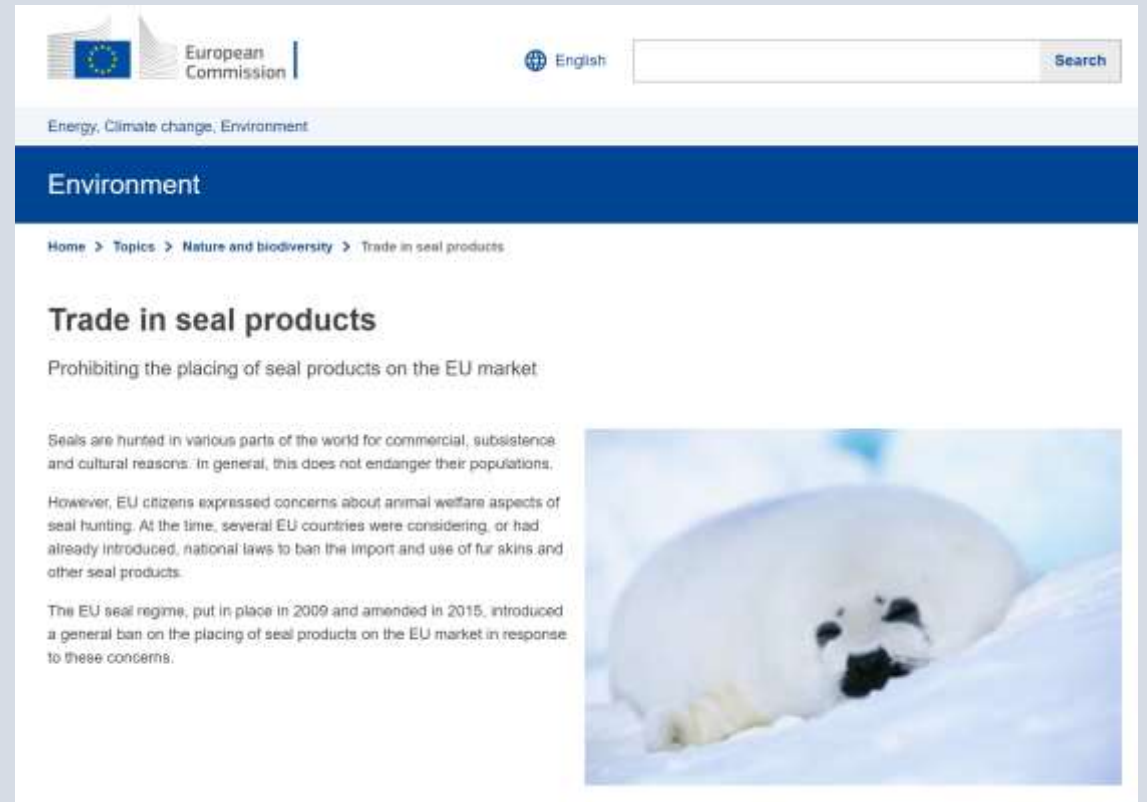
### Küttimistrend: Hallhüljes

Kogu Eesti ▾



# Main problems related to hunt:

- Seal hunting is allowed, but there are severe spatial restrictions. In short, hunting is not allowed there, where seals can be successfully hunted (nature protection areas)
- Trade ban of seal products



The screenshot shows the European Commission website page for 'Trade in seal products'. The page features the European Commission logo and a search bar at the top. The main content area is titled 'Trade in seal products' and includes a sub-heading 'Prohibiting the placing of seal products on the EU market'. The text discusses the concerns of EU citizens regarding animal welfare and the introduction of a general ban on seal products in 2009. A photograph of a white seal pup is visible on the right side of the page.

European Commission

English

Energy, Climate change, Environment

Environment

Home > Topics > Nature and biodiversity > Trade in seal products


## Trade in seal products

Prohibiting the placing of seal products on the EU market

Seals are hunted in various parts of the world for commercial, subsistence and cultural reasons. In general, this does not endanger their populations.

However, EU citizens expressed concerns about animal welfare aspects of seal hunting. At the time, several EU countries were considering, or had already introduced, national laws to ban the import and use of fur skins and other seal products.

The EU seal regime, put in place in 2009 and amended in 2015, introduced a general ban on the placing of seal products on the EU market in response to these concerns.

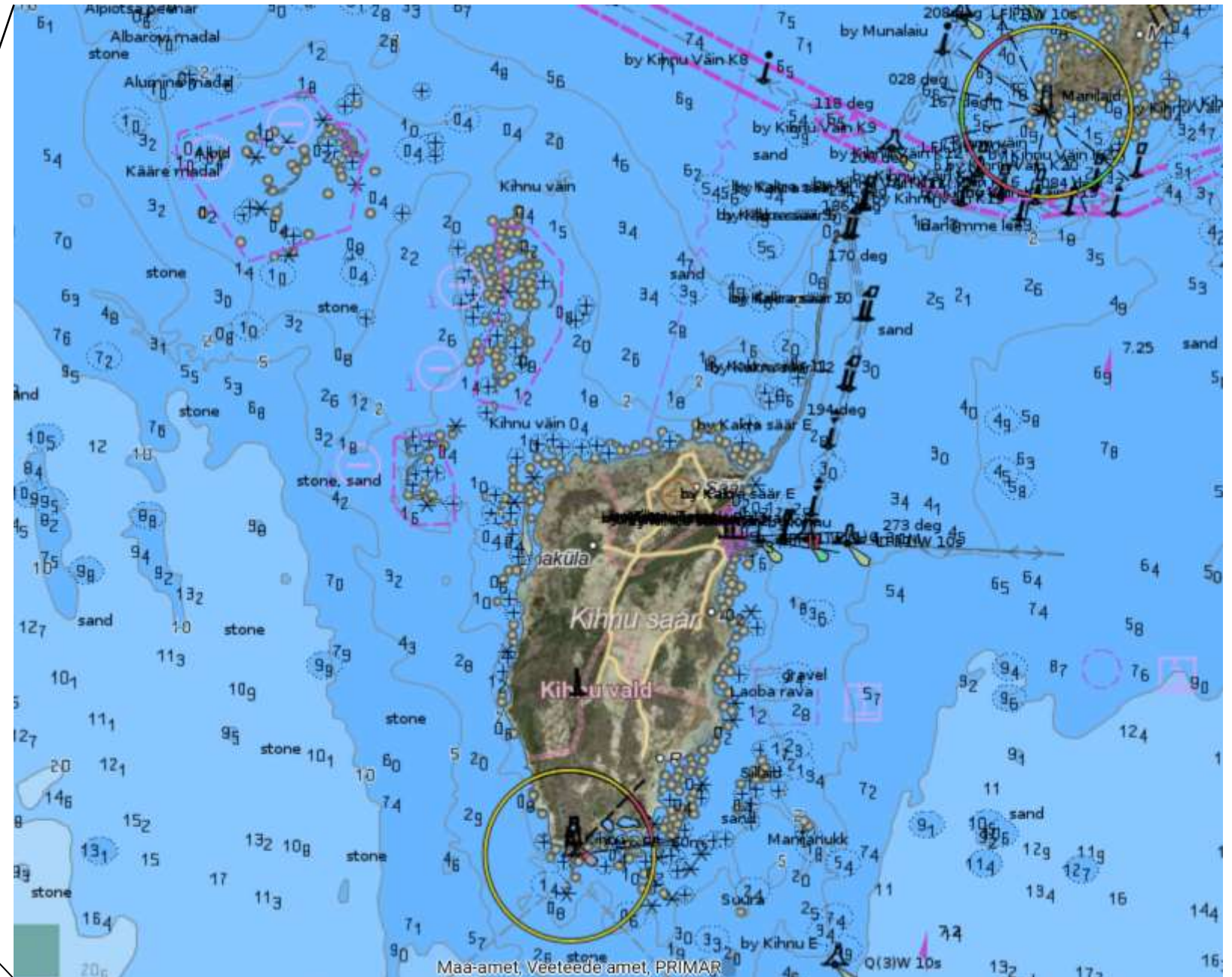




Different nature protection regime areas in West-Estonia



- Sangelaid ca 5 km from Kihnu island
- Potential spot for the seal hunting tourism





- Kihnu island (there are around 500 inhabitants) Cultural Space was included in UNESCO's list of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in November 2003. In 2008 it was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



# Possibilities for improvement?

*Kihnu island Cultural Space was included in UNESCO's list of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in November 2003. In 2008 it was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.*

- The lift of the Trade ban is maybe not likely to happen in close future, but...
- ... it seems that in Estonia the main problem is the spatial restrictions (Natura areas) of gray seal hunt. If some protected areas could be opened (it is more like the decision of the Estonian administration, not EU?) then seal hunting tourism could be boosted!



Evald Lilles, seal hunter from Kihnu island



# Ringed seal sanctuaries near Kihnu island





Gift: *“Traditional food. Hairy fish from Kihnu”*