

## Canada's seal hunt off to weak start

by UPI

ST. JOHN'S, Newfoundland - The annual Canadian seal hunt was off to a weak start with just two boats of 40 eligible working the waters of the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence. Fisheries Department spokesman Phil Jenkins said the first of three stages of the hunt opened Monday, but warm weather has created poor ice conditions that has decimated the number of baby seals, who need solid ice as they can't swim for the first few weeks. Conditions were so poor, 38 boats decided not to participate in Monday's hunt, the Daily Mail reported. Wednesday, the second phase of the hunt opens in the more northerly Strait of Belle Isle, between Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador. A date for the third phase, off northern Newfoundland, has yet to be set. The quota this year is 270,000 seals, down by 65,000 from last year. Fisheries officials estimate Canada's seal population at 5.5 million. As in past years, various animal rights groups are monitoring the hunt, and several have criticized the federal government for allowing the hunt to continue.

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