



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

FOPO • NUMBER 009 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, June 15, 2006

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Chair

Mr. Gerald Keddy

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• (0900)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC)): Order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the Canadian seal hunt. We welcome our first witnesses this morning: David Bevan, the assistant deputy minister of fisheries and aquaculture management; and Ken Jones, senior fisheries management officer.

Due to the fact that we do have a technical briefing this morning, our witnesses may want to go a little bit over the 10 minutes allotted to them. We'd probably all be better off if you did that. In the meantime, I'm sure you won't mind us taking extra time for questions if you go too long.

Welcome.

Mr. David Bevan (Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Aquaculture Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll try to keep it as short as I possibly can to allow for questions. I'll go through the deck fairly rapidly.

The objectives for the hunt are sustainable use, conservation, humane hunting practices, and the fullest possible use of the killed animals. One thing we want to make clear is that we do not have an objective to limit the size of the population for the purposes of trying to control the ecosystem. We did have that question put to an expert panel, and they were unable to provide advice; it's far too complex a web or food chain, and we could not determine any rationale to limit the size of the population.

"Fullest possible use" is a policy we seek, but it's really dependent on markets. It's not something we are able to require, but it is an objective we would pursue, although not through regulatory means.

I think people are quite familiar with where the hunting takes place—on the front, off of Labrador, or around the Magdalen Islands. This year that wasn't the case as much. We had the hunt take place more to the north.

Looking at slide 4, we have six species of seals. The vast majority of the seals killed in the hunt are harp seals because of the large size of that population. We have TACs for hooded and grey seals as well. There are no quotas for ringed, harbour, and bearded seals, although those are taken in aboriginal subsistence hunts. The majority of the hunt takes place between March and May, with the March opening in the gulf and the April opening in the front.

In the seal hunt we have established an objective-based fish management process and also the precautionary approach. We have set conservation limits that will dictate the actions we take when those limits are reached. We also have set those limits based on the highest estimated population, around 5.5 million in 2001. That actually has gone up somewhat since that time. The population hasn't gone up but the estimate has increased to 5.8 million, I believe.

In slide 6 you'll see that we have some zones for the management of this population. The limits are noted there. The maximum observed is 5.82 million, and 70% of that gives us 4.07 million. Between 4 million and 5.8 million is a zone that we feel is quite safe to manage the population in that area. We leave debates on the TAC with the industry, and setting TAC, predominantly for socio-economic reasons, in that zone. However, should we reach lower than 4.07 million, then we would start changing the management regime to focus more heavily on conservation. That focus on conservation would further increase if we hit the buffer at 50% of the maximum, and at the end limit, 1.75 million, we would stop all hunting.

So as we move down in the population toward those limits, our focus on conservation would increase to the point where below the 50% level we would have a very significant pressure on us and on the industry to move back into the safe zone above 4.07 million.

Those are already understood by the sealing industry. They know that we would shift our focus if we got into those levels of population. I think the interest of all is to keep the hunt in the area where we have the opportunity to pursue markets, etc. That's above 4.07 million, and that's where we're trying to keep the population so that it provides the maximum yield for the industry.

● (0905)

In terms of consultations, every five years we have a new survey, a detailed survey of the population based on overflights, exhaustive counting of the animals, and analysis of the data. That then triggers a seal forum. The last one was in 2002, I believe. It was then because we had the last available data, but we upgraded that data last year. Last year on November 7 and 8 we had a seal forum, where we invited a large number of people from 200 groups; 100 attended. That was followed by a seal advisory committee on November 9 and 10 to deal with access and allocation issues.

The forum sets the conservation framework for the five-year plan, and the advisory committee deals with the specifics of the individual year. The advisory committee on November 9 and 10 was to deal with the plan for 2006. What we would do is have another advisory committee to go over the 2006 seal hunt, and that would be used to make changes for the 2007 hunting season.

The results of those consultations were that we set out the framework, as you saw before, with the conservation limits and the understanding of how the rules would change in the event the population fell. That was set out for the 2006 to 2010 period. We did not, however, set out a TAC for those years. We left that to the seal advisory committee to set the TAC on an individual year in conjunction with the scientific advice and whatever happened the previous year in the hunt—under or over—and what the market conditions will bear. So there'll be no multi-year TAC this time, unlike the previous plan, but there will be setting of the TAC after those consultations.

For 2006 we set the TAC at 325,000 animals, with a 10,000-animal reserve for aboriginal hunting in the Arctic and for personal use hunts. We are looking at adjusting the TAC of 10,000 for hooded seals. We should have a survey on hooded seals, and that will allow us to revise the hooded seal TAC. Having said that, the 10,000-animal TAC is not taken; hooded seals are not taken more than a few hundred animals each year. That may change in the future.

Regulatory and policy changes are being contemplated. We're looking at working with the independent veterinarians working group to determine if anything should be done in order to make the hunt even more humane than it currently is.

We're looking at new licensing criteria. We had a licence freeze in the past. That is going to be reviewed due to the fact that there have been shortages of crew to work on the sealing vessels. We're going to have to work with the industry to re-evaluate how to go about the licensing.

Vessel registration requirements for small boats are going to have to be considered. We've had a problem with hails. People are hailing late and hailing low. They may have 100 animals on board and we may be told there's 50; they only upgrade it later on. We have to deal with that so that we can have a better handle on the number of animals being killed on a daily basis.

We're going to have to consider some move on the blueback issue. We have a regulation that prevents hunting on the youngest animals—in harp seals, the whitecoats. Until they start to moult and turn into beaters, we don't have the hunt. The hooded seals actually moult in the womb the first time, and then at around a year

or 18 months, while they're in the blueback stage, they're completely independent. The question is, would we change the regulations to allow some hunting on that? There are strong views on both sides of that issue. We're going to be discussing all those issues with the industry stakeholders and interested parties.

● (0910)

On enforcement, we have at-sea inspections from large vessels, small vessels, Zodiacs, aircraft overflights, dockside and plant inspections, vehicle inspections, observers on sealing vessels, vessel hails on a daily basis, processor and buyer receipts, and VMS for the longliners, the satellite system that tells us where the longliners are located. So we have a large investment in monitoring the hunt on an annual basis.

It is the first big fishery that takes place in Atlantic Canada, the first economic opportunity for many people, and this year it's been a very important contributor to people's bottom lines. Without this, many people would not be making a go of it this year.

Proper sealing methods are a big issue. We want to make sure that the animals are killed very quickly and humanely, that they lose consciousness irreversibly and almost instantly. We're looking at the proper use of firearms and in some cases the hakapiks and clubs. In any regulated activity, there's always some non-compliance. In 2005 we had 50 charges, for example, and about 30 charges so far in 2006, with 37 warnings.

So in terms of accusations that these are unregulated activities, that's clearly not the case. We do have numerous warnings and charges. But to put that in perspective, there were about 14,000 licences issued this year; you can see that the vast majority of participants are complying with the requirements.

In addition, we have seal hunt observation licences. There were 73 licences issued this year from 97 applications. We declined to offer licences to 24 applicants. There were 60 licences issued in 2005, and 42 in 2004, so the interest is obviously going up.

In 2006, seven Humane Society of the United States members and a Reuters freelance photographer were arrested. The investigation on that is ongoing. Charges have not yet been laid. That remains an open investigation.

In 2005, 12 unlicensed observers were fined \$1,000 each after being charged and convicted.

That, Mr. Chairman, is the presentation. We're open to any questions the members may wish to pose.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you to our witnesses.

The first question will go to Mr. Matthews, for 10 minutes.

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): I won't need all that time, Mr. Chair. I have just a couple of questions.

You already answered the question I was going to ask you, about the observer situation; it's going up. But why is the number of people who want to go out there going up? Is it a money issue? Is it that the more that go out there, the more money is raised for their cause?

What is your observation on that?

Mr. David Bevan: I can only speculate, but clearly the pictures and the material for the websites are very important for people. If it is a big operation, obviously these groups do gather substantial sums, so I can only assume that there is a great deal of interest in observing the hunt. They have a right to be there under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and they exercise that right in order to observe the hunt, take photographs, and get material for their websites and their pamphlets, etc.

Mr. Bill Matthews: The McCartneys, of course, were the big media event this year. I think the whole world saw it. They were lying down, cuddling a seal.

I notice that 50 charges were laid for violations in the hunt and other things. I mean, is that acceptable? We know why *they* did it, but does the department accept that somebody can go and lie down on the ice, with Heather touching the baby seal and all this stuff, and not be charged?

Who gets charged if they weren't?

Mr. David Bevan: The regulations do require people to keep at least 10 metres away from seals.

Having said that, I think judgment is exercised. One doesn't want to provide photo opportunities that might just further the cause, not if it's not necessary, if there's no interruption of the hunt or no real problems.

I stand corrected: it has to be 10 metres away from sealing, not from the seal. So I'm not sure any regulation was broken.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I just wondered, like a lot other people did, how they could go out there like they did. But your comment about furthering the cause through more publicity has a lot of validity, and I accept that. I just wanted to ask that question because people in our position get asked the question many times about how they could go out there like that and not be charged.

You talked about the hooded seal population, and you went on to say that there are only a few hundred of them taken. Could you inform the committee on why there is such a low number of hooded seals taken when the TAC is much higher?

Mr. David Bevan: They're supposed to be taking adult animals. Adult animals are found in the water after the seals are whelped. After the week or so that they take to be weaned, the animals are then found in the water. They're just dispersed more, and difficult to

harvest. I guess the market for adult animals is not as well developed as it is for harps and for other products.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I noted your comment about the economic value of sealing to the people who participate. You're so right; without this income, particularly this year, it would have been very difficult for a lot of people in our communities and in our fishing industry.

What's your observation on the supply to the market with the current TAC? Is the market fully subscribed to, fully supplied? Or is there any room, in your estimation or your department's estimation, for more seal products into a marketplace?

Mr. David Bevan: Obviously there was good demand this year, and the prices were very good, notwithstanding the size of the TAC. We set the TAC, as noted, in consultation with the industry. We are trying to set it at a level that is sustainable. We don't want to drive the population down below those conservation limits that I mentioned earlier. We also don't want to oversupply the market.

So it's a balance between sustainability and supplying the market. I think the industry has basically said that the level of TAC we have is about right for the supply of the market.

Ken, do you want to add something?

• (0920)

Mr. Ken Jones (Senior Fisheries Management Officer, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Sure.

We had the seal forum in November, with industry and a lot of other groups there. I was surprised that those in the industry generally were picking the figure of 325,000 a year. They're the ones who wanted, more than anybody, a one-year TAC and to adjust it.

Just to be clear, we are harvesting above a sustainable yield level now. That could be in the range of 200,000 to 250,000 seals, depending on the harvest by Greenland. So we are taking more seals, and we are reducing the population, but that falls within that objective-based management framework, where above 70% we can harvest more aggressively. Everyone knows that we're harvesting more aggressively now.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I have just an observation, and perhaps a question on that, to finish my questioning.

As I understand it, from what I've read, your department says that a herd of 2.2 million animals is sustainable. I may be off a bit, but I know it's somewhere around 2 million. Your last survey showed there were 5.6 million or 5.8 million animals. So I'm losing you somewhat on this sustainability thing.

If a herd is sustainable at 2.2 million animals, and it's now at 5.6 million or 5.8 million, and we're taking 325,000 or 350,000—of course, to that you have to add the natural mortality rates and other things—it would seem to me there's no question about whether or not this amount of take would affect the sustainability of the herd.

Mr. Ken Jones: Yes, but let's be clear; we went from a model in the past of replacement yield, where each year we'd look at that number and gauge the thing, to a model where, when seals were at record highs, we'd give a higher-than-replacement yield level. So technically we're above the sustainable level of harvest now, but we're going to do it in a range.

We know that the population rate now is the maximum it's ever known, at 5.82 million, so we know that we can harvest more with a degree of safety. We use two factors for safety. We use an 80% probability that it will be within that range in our science—that's the precautionary approach—and we use this benchmark. When the population falls to 70%, we're now going to set the level of harvest at a level that will bring it back above that 70%.

What sealers know is that the higher the population is, the more they can technically harvest in a year. That's why they're cautious about 325,000. If we wanted to be truly sustainable, we might have a harvest actually in the area of 250,000, but it's 325,000 now. It's that aggressiveness we can use above the 70% benchmark.

The Chair: Mr. Simms, there are about three minutes left.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Okay.

First of all, it's good to see you again; it's nice to be back.

I recently had the honour of going to Paris to deal with the parliamentary council. I told them that we have good regulations when it comes to the sealers, but they seem to be of the theory that it's widespread, that it's a hunt that takes place over a wide area across the Atlantic coast. I told them basically there are two areas, the front and of course the gulf.

Basically, I'm asking you to add to my argument.

Mr. David Bevan: It's clear that it takes place on the front and in the gulf. It's an area that we can monitor because of the use of aircraft, helicopters, etc. We know how many animals are taken as a result of the fact that we have good working relationships with the buyers and with the processors, etc. We have a good handle on that.

Mr. Scott Simms: What has changed recently? What have you done recently to enhance that regulation?

Mr. David Bevan: As a result of controls in all other fisheries, we have vessel monitoring systems on all the larger vessels. The longliners are the ones that take the large quantities of seals. The added feature there now is that we know exactly where they all are, so it's not something that we have to determine through overflights or going to find them. We know where the vessels are, we know where they're concentrating, and we can send our enforcement and monitoring teams to those locations.

That's the change in recent years.

Mr. Scott Simms: Some of the other numbers were way out of whack. They said there was a high degree of “struck and loss”—or is that the correct term?

Mr. David Bevan: Struck and loss would assume that animals are hit, presumably through firearms, and then lost in the water. Obviously that's not what sealers are about. There's no percentage there. They need to catch the animal, they need to kill the animal, and they need to retrieve it. That would occur if there was hunting in open areas or hunting on small pans, but I'm not sure that's been something we've observed.

Do you have anything you want to add, Ken?

• (0925)

Mr. Ken Jones: People who oppose the hunt like to use figures from the past in the high Arctic and the Greenland hunt, in open seas, colder water, where animals will sink quickly and animals are shot in the water. Most of our animals are killed on the ice, or the vast majority of them are. For ones that are clubbed, you're obviously there, and for ones on the ice, the chances of a kill are much better. We've had estimates in the order of 2% or less for clubbed animals and 5% or less for shot animals.

Mr. Scott Simms: I guess my time is up.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

Monsieur Roy and Monsieur Blais are splitting their time.

Monsieur Roy.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll ask two brief questions, then turn the floor over to Mr. Blais, who is more concerned by the question than I am.

If I understood correctly, you said that the seal population in Greenland was approximately 5.82 million, but that there had been an increase since those figures were provided.

Mr. David Bevan: They've changed the process for estimating the seal population and have determined that there are more of them than we believed. According to the scientists, the population hasn't increased, it's just...

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: ... an estimation.

Mr. David Bevan: ...a change in the estimation process.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: In fact, the 5.82 million figure isn't correct, if I understood correctly.

Mr. David Bevan: It's an estimate. The population is between approximately four million and 6.5 million, but the average is 5.82 million.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: All right. How many are there, including all six species?

Mr. Ken Jones: We don't have the right figures for all species. There's a new way of calculating the number of grey seals, and the people responsible for that are preparing a new way to calculate the hooded seal population. The seal population of Greenland is estimated every five years, but that's not done for the other species because they aren't hunted as much.

The true seal population isn't concentrated like the grey seal, hooded seal and harp seal populations. It's a lot easier to estimate the harp seal population because they form large concentrations every year for newborns. In addition, scientists include baby seals, if you will, in their population estimates. The other seal species aren't found in such large concentrations.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: So we don't know the total seal population in the water?

Mr. Ken Jones: Not really.

Mr. David Bevan: We know there are more than six million seals in the Arctic region.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: I have one final question to ask you before handing over to Mr. Blais.

In your presentation, you said, "Control of seal predation has not been an objective." Ultimately, you could have added that that was because you didn't have enough knowledge. Is that correct?

Mr. David Bevan: Yes.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Is the department interested in the impact that seals have on their environment?

Mr. David Bevan: That's far too difficult to understand. For example, seals eat cod, but that's often adult cod, large cod. However, a number of fish eat cod eggs. It's really too complicated to understand the connection between the seal population and predation on cod...

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: And the other species.

Mr. David Bevan: ...and the other species. It's impossible to predict the result in the case of a decline in the seal population.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Good morning, gentlemen. I have a criticism to make of you.

First, why are you absent from the international scene, when a Council of Europe commission is looking into this matter?

• (0930)

Mr. David Bevan: We recently sent a number of people to Europe to talk. We sent someone to Berlin and another person to The Hague. We started discussions with governments in Europe to convince them that the seal hunt was...

Mr. Raynald Blais: Can you send us a detailed copy of the minutes of that meeting, that is to say when it was held, who was present and the circumstances in which it took place?

Furthermore, I also want to criticize the laxism you showed in 2006. The people of the Magdalen Islands, whom I represent, are frustrated. Ultimately, they're angry at seeing that they were the only

ones observing the quotas, when there was an explosion elsewhere. Let me tell you that the wrong message was sent, in terms of management. Ultimately, your laxism amounts to saying, "What the heck, let's go at it!"

What happened in 2006 that can justify that situation?

Mr. David Bevan: In 2006, we shared the quotas among fishermen. For example, there was a quota for fishermen from the Magdalen Islands, another for those from the Lower North Shore, one for Newfoundland, and so on. We established a process for getting data from those fishermen. Unfortunately, they didn't provide the right information on the number of seals they had killed. For example, some fishermen said they had killed about 100 seals, where they had in fact killed twice that number. That's what caused problems. This year, our objective is to improve the situation.

The hunters from the Magdalen Islands overfished by only 10%, but the others definitely took too many seals. For example, the hunters from the Lower North Shore tripled their quota.

Mr. Raynald Blais: In view of what happened in 2006, do you understand how that sends wrong messages to the wrong people?

Mr. David Bevan: Yes. We made sure we didn't overfish too much. In total, we took approximately 336,000 seals. So, overall, there was a little overfishing, but —

Mr. Raynald Blais: But region by region, it was something else.

Mr. David Bevan: There are situations where there are more problems —

Mr. Raynald Blais: Doesn't that shock you?

Mr. David Bevan: Yes. That causes some concerns. We don't want any situations of that kind. It will be necessary to improve the situation for next year. We let the Lower North Shore hunters hunt seals for three days. That may have been a bit too long. We underestimated the number of seals they'd catch each day.

So next year, it will be necessary —

Mr. Raynald Blais: I'll go further into that question on my second round.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci, M. Blais.*

Mr. Kamp, 10 minutes.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I may not use all my time.

Thank you, gentlemen.

I'd like to follow up a little bit on the fact that, as you say, some of the boats have observers but not all of them. What percentage does? Is it just the big ships?

• (0935)

Mr. Ken Jones: Just longliners.

Mr. Randy Kamp: What percentage of the sealing effort has observers?

Mr. Ken Jones: We've had very few observers. One year we had eight, for example. We're trying to increase that.

The trouble is that it's impractical when you have two or three people on a small boat. Longliners have crews of six to twelve people, and every spot they give up is a hunter. So we've worked things out with, for example, the union and the membership in various areas to have a certain number. We'll draw, and put them on board, but it's still a relatively small number.

Mr. Randy Kamp: The ones who don't have observers have some obligation to report their catches, I guess.

Mr. Ken Jones: That's what we're trying to correct now, particularly with the small boats. We're trying to bring in perhaps a vessel registration system—that's what we're looking at with the industry now—so that we can make one person responsible for reporting. Right now we have a loophole where on a small boat...it's not registered to anyone, so you can't make any one person report.

We want to close that loophole and have everyone report daily. We've set up centres where they can do that, and then we can check with the buyer receipts later. Right now we get the data too late. By the time we know what's happened, boom, we're over quota. That's our problem, and that's what's happened, particularly in the gulf. The last two years it's been a race for seals as they've become more valuable. We've gone from a fully competitive fishery there to one where we've done area allocations. We may have to do more—that's what we're going to be discussing with industry—to reduce the race so that people aren't racing out there, fast and furious, to take them.

Never before have we seen the hunting done in two or three days, and the quota fully taken, the way we have in the last two years. It's just that they're so valuable, so quick, and the circumstances, in the northern gulf particularly, have been so good for sealing, in fact phenomenally good. People who used to be frozen in ports are not frozen in any more. Everyone and his brother are sailing out there.

Mr. Randy Kamp: But it's a fairly small percentage of boats that actually report, correct?

Mr. David Bevan: All of them are supposed to report, but we don't have a process for holding individuals accountable for the quality of the information we're getting. That's what we're going to change for 2007.

Mr. Randy Kamp: The quality is poor.

Mr. David Bevan: The quality of the information has been poor coming from the vessels.

We have had a tendency in the past to open for a period of time, shut it down, and then wait to count the seals coming through the distribution chain. We've done that in the past, and we did that this year in the front. But we left it open too long in the gulf, based on the accelerated pace of hunting this year, and we underestimated the amount of animals that could be taken in a short time. That's what we're going to have to deal with in changing the rules for the 2007 hunt.

In total, we haven't exceeded the TAC by any great amount, and we have not jeopardized the population or the future, but it will be something we have to consider when we set the TAC for 2007.

Mr. Randy Kamp: If 325,000, for example, is the target figure, and people aren't actually reporting, how do you know that you haven't done 400,000?

Mr. David Bevan: There are bottlenecks in the distribution chain. There are not that many processors, etc., and they all go through those facilities. We have an opportunity to get a very good count from them of what was taken in total. That gives us a high degree of confidence that we know the number taken. There are some that may go to personal use and other areas, but certainly there's no big distribution. People are not taking these for their own use, generally; they're taking them for the more than \$100 they get per pelt, and for the oil. That means they have to send it through processing operations.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Right.

How many are shot and how many are clubbed?

Mr. David Bevan: The vast majority this year were shot.

Do you have an estimate, Ken?

Mr. Ken Jones: We don't really have estimates. We know that 70% of the seals are taken on the front, and almost all of those are shot. The clubbing generally occurs in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, around the Magdalen Islands, and in the Prince Edward Island area.

It's just a rough guess, but maybe 5% or less of seals are actually clubbed.

● (0940)

Mr. Randy Kamp: Do sealers have a choice everywhere?

Mr. Ken Jones: They have a choice everywhere, but the regulations stipulate what a club has to be, its minimum dimensions and size, and what a hakapik has to be, and also what firearms they have to use. A lot of our charges do stem from improper firearms—for example, using birdshot in a shotgun as opposed to rifle slug, that kind of thing.

Mr. Randy Kamp: So on the front and in the gulf, the same rules apply. There's no difference in technique.

This may be a better question for the next panel, but what progress is being made in marketing, I guess, the whole animal?

Mr. Ken Jones: The weakness in marketing the whole animal is the meat. We did a meat subsidy that began in about 1995 and finished off in 1999. We found that they were taking mainly big adult seals. The pelt was actually getting wasted because it has less value. We were propping up markets that didn't exist. Meat did end up being destroyed anyway, and it was very costly. Those were years when a lot of hooded seals were taken because they don't have good pelts, which are all bitten and ravaged by fighting. We ended up scaling back the meat subsidy and going back to what was primarily a fur hunt.

One of the things people think is that there's a lot of meat wasted. We learned from the meat subsidy that the beater seal—the stage where most of the pelts come from, and when animals are taken in Canada—has about 12 pounds of marketable meat on it. That's hard to fish off. It's not worth their while, and it takes up room in the boat. So all we could do was encourage them to land it.

That's where we're at now. We encourage people to land it, but is it worthwhile? Is it a lot of waste, or is it better to let the scavengers have it? We've been leaving that for the boat captains, primarily, hoping that markets for meat would come along. But there really aren't a lot of markets—just local domestic stuff for flippers, or choice steaks occasionally, and bits of meat.

Mr. David Bevan: I think it's important to recognize that the skin and the fat that are taken make up a pretty substantial portion of the animal, about 30% of the animal.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Chair, could you give me an indication of the time left?

The Chair: You have a couple of minutes, Mr. Lunney. Go ahead.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you.

I just want to pick up on the comments made at the beginning about reducing the population, that we don't do that for ecological purposes in terms of the effect on cod stocks and so on. I'm thinking back to a few years ago when I was on the committee, when we heard some testimony....

We're talking about the harvest of these young seals now, but adult seals roam throughout the Atlantic area. I think there were concerns expressed by those who are farming...or not farming, but for wild Atlantic stocks, the seals were being found way up the river where they had not habitually been seen; some of my colleagues might remember which rivers we're talking about in the Atlantic provinces. At that time, I think we heard of seal populations of over 7 million.

I'm wondering if that isn't evidence that the seal population is certainly damaging Atlantic salmon. There were allegations at that time they may become endangered because of the over-predation by seals.

I wonder if you would care to comment on that.

Mr. David Bevan: Just generally, as noted before, the role that seals play in the population of fish is very complex. For example, cod can lay 1 million or 5 million eggs, depending on the size of the female. Obviously there's a high mortality on those individuals at some stage—for instance, they're killed by filter feeders that are in turn eaten by seals. As to how a seal would play a role in that, when we asked an eminent panel of scientists to look at it, they could not come up with advice.

Having said that, they did suggest that there might be something to look at in terms of seal exclusion zones where you have spawning concentrations. We looked at how seal exclusion zones in those areas could be contributing to the rebuilding of stocks. There weren't that many seals in those locations, so it wasn't a big factor.

We do have programs in the case of nuisance seals, or seals that have been targeting particular runs. For example, in the river systems, where seals have been a big factor in mortality, we have in the past taken action in those areas.

Mr. James Lunney: People were concerned that seals were gathering in the mouths of rivers at migration time and literally cleaning up on the young salmon going out to...or the salmon coming back to the river systems, I guess.

• (0945)

Mr. David Bevan: There was both. On the west coast, we have taken action to deal with the nuisance populations that were having a devastating impact on certain populations.

Mr. Ken Jones: We have created a permit system now for all of Atlantic Canada. If there is a nuisance seal established, you can hunt it. What you do is you go and apply for a licence and establish that it is there.

We found, I think, in looking at this situation, that it's not so much harp seals that you'll catch in a river but more likely grey or harbour seals. Harbour seals we have to be bit more careful of; in some areas they're not very numerous.

So that's what we've done; we've created a permit system. If people can establish that it is a problem in a particular river, it can be dealt with.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lunney.

Mr. MacAulay, five minutes.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to our witnesses.

What you would view as nuisance seals and what fishermen in my area would view as nuisance seals would be two different things. They are viewed as very damaging to a lot of stocks. I know you indicated that it's a complex issue, but I think it's fair to say that they eat a lot of cod and they eat a lot of lobster. It's a good diet, but....

You mentioned sustainability. What number do you want to keep the stock at? Is it 5.5 million?

Mr. David Bevan: We don't have a target, as noted in the documents. Having said that, we want to keep it above the 70%. Somewhere above 4 million is what we're suggesting. That would be done not because of their role in the ecosystem. We just don't...or can't get a handle on what the population.... We can't say, "If you reduce the population to 2 million, there will be a reaction in terms of cod or any other species." That's not possible. We do know that they eat fish that can be predators on larval cod, for example. Mackerel, herring—they're all filter feeders, and they will filter out juvenile fish as well as other products. They're subject to predation by seals as well.

How does that all work out? We don't know, but we are suggesting in the plan that we would keep the population above 4 million. That would provide a population that would give the hunters a healthy harvest. That in itself is a good economic opportunity now.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: But it's fair to say that the stock is probably close to 50% larger than that at this time.

Mr. David Bevan: We estimate it's around 5.8 million, so there's a good buffer there.

Having said that, as it's noted, we are harvesting aggressively. When the markets are there, there's an opportunity for the hunters to take more than what's called the "replacement yield". The number of new pups that are produced minus the natural mortality will give you a replacement yield that you can take in a hunt and have no impact on the population.

Well, we're above that. If we were to keep the level of hunt going, we might within a few years come down to that 4 million. Then we'd have to switch our strategies. But we are taking now at a level that should prevent further growth in the population and could have some modest impact on the overall stock over time.

Mr. Ken Jones: Just to add to that, we did have more aggressive options that we presented at the forum. There were lots of fishing groups there as well as seal harvesters, and it was amazing that the majority didn't want us to do that, to pursue aggressively.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Well, that would be the sealers, of course.

Mr. Ken Jones: No, there were fishing industry people—FFAW, all kinds of people—there as well.

You have to remember that there are different culprits the fishing industry may see; in some areas, it's grey seals. We do know from previous surveys that Atlantic cod made up 3% of harp seals' diet. They're in these waters for a limited time. We did try the seal exclusion zone without much success, as recommended by FRCC. We know from the eminent panel that we would have to take an enormous number of harp seals to have even a marginal impact on that consumption level. I think the eminent panel estimated that we have to take 750,000 extra seals in a year just to have a marginal impact. That would be enormous, and have enormous consequences for Canada, if we did.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: All right.

When you go to the Hague or the parliamentary assembly of whatever, the people you talk to there are more or less convinced that, as Mr. Simms was indicating, we just harvest all over the Atlantic region like a wild bunch of people who don't care about

anything. But is it fair to say that the seal fishery off the east coast is close to being one of the most monitored fisheries in the world?

● (0950)

Mr. David Bevan: It's very highly monitored relative to our other domestic fisheries. We monitor the nose and tail of the Grand Banks extremely carefully and very heavily. That probably has more monitoring than anything else. But we do monitor the seal fishery more than most of the other fisheries in the domestic waters. There are some exceptions; with crab we have 30% observers—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Yes, but it's very heavily monitored, and it's fair to say that the problem we have as an area, as a region, is the way we present the issue worldwide.

I flew over with McCartney to Prince Edward Island from Halifax. You'd think there was a lord on the plane. Well, I don't dislike McCartney—he's a great musician—but I had no desire to touch him, because what he was doing....

It's comical, but the truth is that these people were coming to take a livelihood away from people who need it. I don't like that, and I told him so. I don't dislike him as a person, but if you make a billion dollars some way in this world and then decide you're going to use it to destroy the livelihood of hard-working people, I don't like it.

A voice: Hear, hear!

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: That's what we have to fight against. I believe that is one of the biggest problems. We've got celebrities in the world.... This is a big issue. The picture they had in newspapers around the world—it was great, funny, cuddly, cute. But all it did was indicate to all the people who have a few dollars to donate that we're people who are barbarians, who don't care, who kill just at will. That is one of the biggest problems we have.

On page 10, you talk about how this is monitored. You talk about the small boats and how they're monitored. I think we have to be awfully careful about how we give our information, and make sure that when we talk about the small boats, the figures are kept well, and you know how many seals are taken.

The fact is that the population has not decreased, it has increased. But when you listen to the world media, you would feel.... I don't know whose fault it is, but we're not presenting the issue properly.

Mr. David Bevan: It's clear that the message in Europe has generally been the message presented by the Humane Society of the United States, in the past IFAW, and other organizations. They have a point of view that is...you know, "skinning alive" and all those kinds of accusations. If people think critically about it, it's kind of silly. Who's going to try to make a living selling products where you're skinning an animal alive? It's just silly.

What we've done now is we have focused on Europe. When parliamentary committees like this have met in the Hague or in Berlin, we've sent people. For instance, we sent the director general of resource management there to present our case, our data.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: When those people do go to those places, do they indicate that the seal population has little or no effect—or we're not sure what effect it does have—on the overall fishery, if it does harm or doesn't harm?

And I don't know that that's the biggest issue. We have to be careful that we....

The world should know what's on page 10 of your deck. They don't know that.

Mr. David Bevan: Yes, and we make sure they understand it—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. MacAulay, you're two minutes over, and we have two speakers—Monsieur Blais and Mr. Manning—who want to try to get a couple of questions in. Plus we have more witnesses.

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to talk about what you call "possible changes to hunting methods/requirements" on page 9 of the English version of your document.

What is the extent of the possible changes? What does that mean in detail?

Mr. Ken Jones: This is a report presented by the Independent Veterinarians Working Group, which is made up of experts. At the committee's last meeting in Newfoundland, in November, the group made a presentation on the way to improve hunting practices. That presentation was well received by seal hunters.

There are some technical changes that include, for example, different ways to determine whether each animal is dead. Instead of checking the eye blinking reflex, they check [*Inaudible: Editor*]. They're also studying a new system for rendering each animal unconscious and for removing the blood quickly rather than checking to see whether the animal is dead.

● (0955)

Mr. Raynald Blais: What's being done on the Magdalen Islands regarding hunter training? That's fine, in my opinion, because an effort is being made in that direction. Do you intend to ensure it is done that way everywhere?

Mr. Ken Jones: All the groups plan the way to do it together. The Magdalen Islands hunters conduct a good hunt everywhere. Most of them use hooks or pick axes. According to the experts, there's no problem in using those tools.

Mr. David Bevan: There is a problem with the number of teams that are not always available for the hunters. They need more people. We're having talks with the hunters to find a way to get boats, captains and support teams for next year. So we have to ensure that the hunters have the required qualifications to take part in the hunt.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Ultimately, with regard to derivative products, mention was made of skins, which are sold at high prices, and oil. Is any research being done? If so, are you assisting it in some way? Is the Department of Fisheries and Oceans making efforts in that area?

Mr. David Bevan: I don't think so, since we don't have the necessary resources for that. Our responsibility is to ensure that the hunt is sustainable.

Mr. Raynald Blais: That slightly contradicts one of your objectives. Your fourth objective is to "encourage fullest possible use of hunted seals." So if that's an objective and you don't put the necessary resources into it, that's a contradiction.

Mr. David Bevan: We previously had to eliminate subsidies for seal meat. So we left it up to the market and the industry to find better ways to use seal products. We don't have the opportunity to do this kind of research. In fact, our responsibility is to ensure the hunt's sustainability and that it is carried out without cruelty. We want to find a way to increase the use of seal products, but we don't have the necessary resources to intervene directly in that regard.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Are you meeting with people from the Department of Foreign Affairs on the subject, continuously or from time to time?

Mr. Ken Jones: Yes, we have a committee that meets with them every two weeks or every month.

Mr. David Bevan: Next year we want to increase our activities in Europe.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Manning, we're just coming to the end of our time, so if you could wrap it up we'd appreciate it.

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): I'll ask just a couple of quick questions.

First, on your new licensing criteria, perhaps you would take the opportunity to elaborate on that somewhat—what your plans are in relation to competitive versus individual quotas, and whether you're giving some consideration to an IQ system versus competitive.

Also, in the marketing of our seal products, what role do you play in marketing seal products in other parts of the world?

Third, in relation to the quota that's caught now, when you say you follow through on the processing, where does most of the product end up with regard to our markets?

•(1000)

Mr. David Bevan: We're considering ways to perhaps go to individual vessel quotas or some other licensing regime to try to eliminate this race to the animals that has caused the quotas to be exceeded in the past number of years. But we're not saying that's how we're going to end up. We have to talk to the industry. We have to consult with them to find out what methods they might consider would be the best to deal with this problem of hails, and being too low or too late, and not having the information at our fingertips on a real-time basis to ensure that we can go to the limit of the quota. Those are things that we haven't come to ground on. We have to consult with the industry, and we are considering a number of those possibilities.

On the issue of marketing, we don't have the marketing capacity we used to have. That capacity was eliminated back in program review days, in the mid-1990s. We don't have it, therefore, for seals, or for fish in general. That rests with Agriculture Canada at this point. There's an individual over there with that responsibility. We don't have that at this point.

And our primary markets, I think, are Russia and China.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Manning.

Perhaps I can ask our witnesses one final question before we suspend and bring on our next witnesses.

I'm not trying to belabour this, but there's been a fair amount of discussion about enforcement and about the accessibility of the front to lobby groups—the American society for the humane treatment of animals, the old offshoots of Greenpeace, and so on. Sea Shepherd is the group I'm primarily thinking of, and Mr. Watson.

What have we done to combat the misinformation that these groups put forth, that we're still harvesting whitecoats, that all seals are clubbed, that seals are being skinned alive? There's some serious misinformation here, and this is damaging to our reputation abroad. It's damaging to the industry. It's damaging to our fishery. It hurts us on just about every front on the international scene.

What is DFO's strategy to deal with obvious lies and a deliberate policy of misinformation by individual groups?

Mr. David Bevan: We had a pretty successful communications campaign in Canada. We can't convince about 30% of people that this is an acceptable activity, but we have good support in the Canadian context, based on our polling. Where we need to step it up is in the markets in Europe and to some extent in the United States. There we need to look at strategies.

We've worked with Foreign Affairs cooperatively in the last number of years and provided them with packages, etc., but I think we're going to have to consider more action on that front. It's clear, based on our discussions in European parliaments, that our message is not getting through and that the message of the Humane Society of the U.S. *is* getting through. We have some tremendous misinformation out there regarding the hunt, and we have to consider how to take that on in the international arena at this point.

I think we're doing all right in the Canadian context. Our problem is in Europe in particular, and in some of the other areas, and we're going to have to consider how to fix that.

The Chair: Respectfully, Mr. Bevan, many of our committee members might disagree with that assessment. All of us get a fair amount of mail from anti-sealing groups around the world. Some of it is not just misinformed, it's threatening. I've been on the receiving end of that myself, and it's certainly not any fun. I'm sure you gentlemen have as well.

Again, respectfully, our message is not getting out. Somehow we have to do a better job. We have to take a more deliberate stand to deal with this campaign of misinformation. It's biased, and it probably verges on the side of illegal in some instances.

But I'm just making that as a comment.

I would like to thank our witnesses. This is a very ongoing issue with the committee, and it's one that we've looked at to do further study on. I very much appreciate your coming here and the forthrightness of your answers. We know we have a lot of work to do in several areas, and we're certainly prepared to engage on it.

I will suspend for a few minutes while our next witnesses come to the table.

•(1005)

(Pause)

•(1005)

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, we'll resume.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we'll reconvene for our study of the Canadian seal hunt.

We have as witnesses, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Norbert Kalisch, Director General, European Union, North and West Bureau—you can explain “North and West Bureau”—and Robert Clark, director of the European Union division.

Welcome.

Just before we hear from our witnesses, I would ask our members to put away their BlackBerrys. We all carry them with us, but when we use them in the room...and all of us, including me, are guilty of it sometimes; I see Mr. Cuzner has one in his hand right now. The BlackBerry makes it very difficult for translation services. It causes a constant buzzing in their ears, and a nasty clicking noise. And I know that we all want to stay on the good side of translation so that everything we say is reported accurately.

Norbert and Robert, you have a technical briefing for us. Go ahead, gentlemen.

•(1010)

Mr. Norbert Kalisch (Director General, European Union, North and West Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs): Thank you very much.

I'd like to start by thanking the committee for this opportunity to make a short presentation on the latest developments in Europe with regard to the seal hunt.

As you know, the annual seal hunt season in Atlantic Canada continues to attract a lot of media attention and to trigger protests and negative political reactions in Europe. While Canadian authorities explain that the seal hunt is sustainable, humane, strictly enforced, and an important economic and cultural mainstay for coastal communities, many myths continue to circulate.

Dramatic photos of the hunt provoke intense emotional reactions that are circulated by influential NGOs such as the International Fund for Animal Welfare and the Humane Society of the United States. These and other local European NGOs accuse the Canadian government of protecting an unnecessary and cruel practice that's out of step with the caring and respectful image normally projected by Canada.

Increased quotas announced in the three-year management plan in 2003 for the Canadian seal hunt sparked renewed media coverage and protests in the last two years. Public declarations by such personalities as Paul McCartney, Brigitte Bardot, and Pamela Anderson against the seal hunt generated media interest in many European countries.

Despite Canadian efforts to provide and explain the facts, negative and sometimes misleading media coverage continues. Canadian missions in Europe—that is, embassies, consulates, and consulates general—receive tens of thousands of protest letters each year, and are sometimes subjected to various forms of intimidation by local animal rights groups, including threats and damage to embassy properties. This year and last, street protests were fewer and more peaceful than in 2004.

Working in very close support and with direction from Ottawa, particularly from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, our missions in Europe have been both proactive and responsive, as circumstances permit, to explain the facts about the seal hunt to the media, the public, and local government officials, who often are in possession of incomplete or outdated information. To assist in these efforts, early in 2005 the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade began organizing advocacy training and briefing workshops for both Canadian and locally engaged embassy personnel responsible for communicating the facts on the seal hunt. Throughout the year, we maintained an efficient virtual network with missions and ensured that consistent messaging was being provided across Europe.

We work in very close collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on the production of information and communications tools suitable for European audiences. We have copies here of our brochure, *Six facts about Canada's seal hunt*.

In consultation with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we provide advice and support to missions in dealing with protests, media, and government officials. For example, since the fall of 2004, senior officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, sometimes accompanied by academic specialists, have visited France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands,

and the U.K. at our request to make expert presentations on the seal hunt and to respond to questions. These visits are intended to lay down the factual and scientific groundwork in an attempt to encourage a rational discourse to the extent possible.

To complement the experts' visits initiative, in March of this year the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade organized, on a trial basis, a visit to Newfoundland by print journalists writing for newspapers based in the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and Luxembourg. The opportunity to expose European journalists to the Canadian reality and perspective resulted in reasonably balanced articles.

● (1015)

Concerns regarding the hunt have provoked debates, parliamentary resolutions, special hearings, reports, and draft legislation in national parliaments in Belgium, Austria, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Italy, and at the Council of Europe. Import bans have so far been proposed in Belgium and the Netherlands. Canada has made its view known that the proposed import bans on Canadian seal products are inconsistent with the Belgian, Dutch, and European Community's obligations under the World Trade Organization agreement.

In commercial terms, imported seal products would compete with the "like" non-seal products that are produced domestically. These trade bans would modify the conditions of competition in the domestic market, since non-seal products could be sold while seal products could not. This would violate the national treatment obligations under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade and under the GATT.

In our view, these trade bans would also be more trade-restrictive than necessary to fulfill the legitimate policy objectives. On this basis, the measure is inconsistent with the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade. The trade bans are inconsistent with the national treatment obligations under the GATT. The general exceptions found in article XX of the GATT would not justify the bans.

For western Europe as a whole, Canadian exports of seal products have grown steadily over the last several years, rising from \$550,000 in 2001 to \$12.9 million in 2005. The largest single importer is Norway, which imported \$6.8 million of seal pelts in 2005. The commercial impact of proposed import measures seems modest at present, but the impact on future exports of Canadian seal pelts to Europe remains difficult to estimate. So far in Europe, there have not been any successful moves to boycott Canadian products in general.

I understand that this committee has decided to undertake a mission to Europe in the fall of this year. I am here to assure you of my department's fullest support toward the success of your mission. We should be realistic, however, in terms of what we can expect to be able to achieve. European parliaments take action because sectors of public opinion in these countries are very strongly against the seal hunt, and parliamentarians believe they would be representing their constituents' interests in banning seal products. Public opinion is not necessarily well informed, and this could be at the core of the message you could convey to your European counterparts.

This is not a battle that we are likely to win in the court of public opinion or on the front pages of newspapers. Our goal is to set the record straight and limit misinformation. Since there are many misconceptions around Canada's seal hunt, we would also recommend that your visit, your mission, include an expert who could respond with a high degree of credibility to the technical side of the humaneness and sustainability of the seal hunt.

In summary, I believe a carefully conceived and well-informed parliamentary mission to specific European countries would be constructive in conveying a reasoned Canadian message on the seal hunt and in helping European legislators gain a balanced perspective.

I'd be happy to take any questions.

•(1020)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was an excellent presentation.

Mr. Simms, 10 minutes.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for giving me the honour to be here today as, I suppose, a last-minute replacement.

The Chair: Never last-minute.

Mr. Scott Simms: Obviously we've never been married.

When I went to Europe, I spoke to the European Council, and one of the things I've noticed in the past little while...

This document, which wasn't prepared by you, says the following:

A preliminary draft recommendation...prepared by the secretariat of the Committee on the Environment...is surprisingly balanced, and does not call for an outright ban of the Canadian seal hunt and the importation of all seal products.

This particular draft recommendation is what they're now concerned with.

Now, that's not really what I got from that, because I think we are dangerously close to many of these assemblies of individual nations having an outright ban on seal imports. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I'm seeing a lot of grassroots support for the outright ban of seal hunting, and with no information whatsoever; that we all know.

What scares me is when I see nations like Norway—correct me if I'm wrong—subsidize, at certain levels, discarding seal products in order to get out of the industry. Call it rumour, call it conjecture, call it what you wish, but what I see, from this draft report, is not particularly balanced, or not the way we like to think it is.

Are you familiar with this draft recommendation? I'm assuming you are.

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Is that the Council of Europe?

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes, it is. It's the council's draft recommendation.

Mr. Robert Clark (Director, European Union Division, Department of Foreign Affairs): Senator Milne and her parliamentary association members have engaged the Council of Europe several times on that very document. As a result of their interventions, there is a more balanced presentation.

But that is just the beginning of the process. That document, if it's ever voted on, would have to eventually get to the European Union authorities. They would look at any requests—

Mr. Scott Simms: Sorry, but can I interrupt you right there? You just mentioned the European Union. Now, from what I understand, both organizations are mutually exclusive, meaning that...

What bugs me or what concerns me about the Council of Europe is that these are member states. Two of those members, incidentally, are Norway and Russia, which have far more inhumane practices of seal hunting than we do, and yet we seem to be the victims.

Mr. Robert Clark: Norway and Russia are not part of the European Union—

Mr. Scott Simms: No.

Mr. Robert Clark: —but the European Union, in discussions with members of the Council of Europe, and, if it came to that, in discussions with Canadian authorities, and also in discussions with their own European Union trade experts, would then be moving out of the emotional side of this into the international trade role side of it. For any member state of the European Union to be considering a ban, that member state would notify those intentions to the European Union in the first instance, and the European Union would respond.

The European Union, as is Canada, is very interested in a rules-based, multilateral trade system in which the specifications of GATT, article XX, the specifications of the technical barriers to trade agreement, are respected.

Mr. Scott Simms: By whom, the European Union?

Mr. Robert Clark: By the member states.

Mr. Scott Simms: It's my impression that many of these member states are circumventing anything like GATT, article XX, or whatever it may be. They're getting around it, and they're doing their own ban on imports.

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Some of them are trying to. What we've noticed is that these initiatives invariably stall. They get to a particular stage, the statements are made, and there are attempts, but recently they haven't gone very far. We haven't seen anything concrete out of Germany. We haven't seen anything concrete out of Belgium in terms of regulations and actual bans. We have seen something concrete out of Italy, but that is not a law yet either; it's just kind of an intention.

•(1025)

Mr. Scott Simms: That's also worrisome. From what I understand, Italy is the largest importer of seal oil.

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Of seal oil, yes, but not of seal products.

Just to reinforce what Bob Clark has said, it's a matter for the European Union to enforce trade rules on the member states. The European Union has sole authority on trade issues, and member states do not. The European Union itself could sue and could insist to its member states that they remove those kinds of bans.

Mr. Scott Simms: Is it not the case that there is a petition being circulated within the European Union compelling all members to ban seal imports? And does it require only 50% of the signatures of the members of the European Union?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: No, because the European Union, the EU, the European Commission, has a responsibility for trade, and I've heard of no such Europe-wide petition. I can't see the European Union countenancing that at all.

As a matter of fact, some of the countries, such as Denmark, on behalf of Greenland, which is not in the EU, and also Norway are making representations to the European Commission to fight these bans. So these issues are matters of debate and also struggle among member states in the European Commission itself.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay.

I want to commend you on some of the initiatives you've taken here, with the brochures and whatnot. In the past, we've seen images, the images we all know, splattered around the world in places like the Middle East and Asia—not so much Asia, but certainly in western Europe. The problem is that we have an abattoir, or a slaughterhouse, exposed to the open, exposed to the public. One English MP said to me, “You know, we have a park in my home riding in England where basically we slaughter deer. But if we walked in with clubs and killed them by beating them to death, there would be an international uproar.”

I understand what you're saying by arguing the technical aspects of a seal pup that is...you know, the hemorrhaging has stopped, as opposed to blinking, as the way to find out whether it's dead or not. But we should fight back with the “slaughterhouses of Europe”, as I call them, and say, “Okay, you don't like the fact that we utilize only 30% of the seal, but how much of the muskrat was utilized when you killed it because you wanted to save the dams in Holland?”

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: That's why, in our opinion, these issues are best attacked on the basis of rational arguments and also in terms of rules-based systems. That's why we're attacking this in the WTO, where it's incontrovertible that you can't....

If these bans are put in place and Canada takes action against that, obviously they will argue that they have good reason for imposing a ban, but in terms of the trade lawyers it will not stand up. That's why we want to go that route, because the emotional route, especially in Europe, in our eyes is very difficult to counter. They have a different perception of the environment and nature.

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm not sure I agree, because I think we can. The emotional issue for us is one of preservation, conservation, and environment. If the Brigitte Bardots of the world don't want to kill one seal, understood; the emotional argument will not work. But if they are conservationists like the World Wildlife Fund, who say it's an issue of conservation, we can say, look, someone has real seal fur and another person has fake fur. The one wearing real seal fur is from

an animal harvested, a renewable resource; fake fur is made from a petrochemical, meaning it's a non-renewable resource.

There is an emotional argument in that. Yes, it may be technical, but it's saying that we, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and Quebeckers along the gulf, are in sync with the environment. We won't obliterate this herd just because it's at \$110 a pelt. When we use our ancestry, which I used last time, and it was somewhat successful, I would assume, there was a certain level of understanding. I told them, look, I'm not a sealer, but I certainly do understand that we are in sync with our environment, and conservation is of the utmost importance.

So I think there is an emotional aspect to this.

• (1030)

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Well, I would hope you're right, and consequently all of our efforts in Europe—we put a lot into this throughout the year—should work. But certainly the opinion of all of our posts and all of our missions, who we've canvassed, seems to go the other way. They feel that the emotional argument would not be easy to win, or would be practically impossible to win.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

Monsieur Blais.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, gentlemen.

The seal hunt issue has been around for about 30 years in Europe, if I'm not mistaken. Could you explain a little how it has evolved and where we stand today, so that we can understand this dynamic. We're part of a dynamic that has gone on for a number of decades. I don't believe the attitude of the people who oppose the seal hunt will change a great deal overnight, but I'd like to understand it more clearly, because, if I understand my opponents, I can fight them more effectively.

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: It's true that it's been going on for about 20 years, but I believe there have been two phases. In the first, people opposed the hunt for baby seals, the whitecoats. After that hunt was prohibited in Canada, protests declined in Europe. However, in the past four years, there's been an increase in protests; I don't know exactly why. Perhaps it's because the hunt is more extensive. In any case, protests are quite strong today, but not as strong as they used to be.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Could it also be related to fund-raising by organizations like the Humane Society? From what I know, that organization collects a lot of money; we're talking about \$80 to \$100 million. Those amounts of money have been collected just in the past few years. Is the resumption in protests related to that?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: That's quite possible. We also have other problems of that kind in Europe, with regard to logging practices in Canada, for example. The NGOs definitely project the worst possible images of Canada in order to get more money in Europe; that's quite true. Even today, they are still using pictures of the baby seals we used to hunt, whereas that's no longer done. It's true that they're trying by any means to get money.

• (1035)

Mr. Raynald Blais: As you probably know, we're planning to send a mission to Europe. We've had talks to determine what countries we should visit. You're an expert on the subject. If you had the choice to take a one-week trip, apart from going to the Council of Europe, what countries should be visited on a priority basis?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: I wouldn't go to Italy.

Mr. Raynald Blais: You're saying not to go to Italy.

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Yes, because that's where—

Mr. Raynald Blais: —it's happening most!

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: It won't be happening there, because the greens are there. A number of them belong to the government that's just been re-elected to replace that of Mr. Berlusconi.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Is Mr. Nessa one of them?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Mr. Berlusconi lost, and the new government has a lot of greens and anti-vivisectionists. I think it would be virtually impossible to make them change their minds.

In Germany, an agriculture commission has studied the issue. We sent an expert there from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and that went very well.

In my opinion, the strongest protests against the seal hunt took place in England. It was in England that the largest number of popular actions against Canadian products were organized.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Would Belgium be a good choice?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Yes, because the Belgians are talking about a law that would affect Canadian products. We also sent an expert to the Netherlands to talk and explain the situation in Canada.

Mr. Raynald Blais: You didn't mention certain countries like Norway. Don't you think that would be helpful?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Those people are on our side.

Mr. Raynald Blais: That's correct.

I'd like to get a better understanding of what's going on in Belgium's Parliament. Is that a private member's bill? What exactly is going on?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: I don't think it's a private member's bill, but rather a bill presented by the Minister of Trade.

Mr. Raynald Blais: It's from the Minister of Trade! What are his arguments?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Generally, he says that it's a matter of public morality.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Mr. Stoffer, five minutes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Do you get to interact with your American counterparts from time to time?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: No, I don't. On this issue, no, not at all.

• (1040)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: If I'm not mistaken, the United States invoked the Marine Mammal Protection Act a while ago—

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: In 1972.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: —and it's still there. It restricts our seal exports from our Inuit in Nunavut, but it allows Alaskan aboriginals to send their seal products into the lower 48. Our governments, previous Liberal and previous Conservative, haven't been successful in any way in putting a stop to that.

If we can't even do it with our closest trading partner, how successful do you think we can be in Europe?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: I think we can be successful. To my mind, in Europe there are two issues. One is the battle of public opinion that results in the protests every year of hunting season and that goes up and down. Sometimes it results in things like the year before last, when our embassy in the Hague was spray-painted red by Greenpeace, who had somehow managed to get a firetruck and make the water red. The embassy had received other threats, such as radio announcers saying that anybody walking past our embassy might consider throwing stones through the windows.

Things like that happen all the time. It's much worse in Italy this year. The details of these things are actually gruesome. That's one of the reasons we have put all of this effort, certainly in the four years I've been here, to help our missions counter and deal with these kinds of protests.

The other aspect is strictly a trade one. I could be wrong—I often am—but according to our trade lawyers and our judgments, the European Commission would not allow their member states to get away with the bans without actually launching legal proceedings against their own member states. So that's a situation that's completely different from that of the United States. There's nobody in the United States suing the Government of the United States for such an import ban, but that would happen in Europe. It would be done by the European Commission. In effect, you could call that a European government. They would sue the member states to get these bans lifted because they're illegal.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I have another question. I haven't heard you mention where countries like Portugal and Spain, the Baltic countries, or the Balkans are on this particular issue. Do we have support in those types of countries? I'm thinking Spain and Portugal because they're quite avid fishermen, I guess, for lack of a better term, and the Balkans.

Do we have support from those countries, or are they in the same pool as Belgium, Holland, and the others?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: No, the Baltics and the Nordic countries, such as Finland, produce fur. They produce a lot of mink. They produce fox fur. So those countries are not concerned. You wouldn't need to win them over, nor would you get any particularly good advice from them as to how to win over the rest of Europe. In my opinion, if you visited it might be interesting, but it wouldn't be particularly useful or effective.

With regard to Portugal and Spain, certainly in Portugal they haven't yet sufficiently evolved on these environmental issues as much as continental Europe and the U.K. have. They just don't have the same kinds of concerns.

I mean, if you look really deeply at where all this stuff is coming from, other than the aspects of perceived cruelty to animals, Europeans have a tendency to think of a country like Canada possessing what the Europeans got rid of a long time ago—that is, wild animals and big forests. So to some extent they see Canada as a repository of the environment that also belongs to them. In other words, they think it's theirs because it's global. They no longer have it in Europe. You need only go through northern Italy to see people lining up in long rows to go hunting very small birds in Tuscany.

So it's a completely different scene, and not all countries have the same concerns.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

• (1045)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll just confine my remarks to a comment and then I'll pass it over to my colleague in a moment.

I want to applaud the department for engaging in communications and for preparing our embassies and our officials to deal with what really is a communications war. I think maybe we've been a little slow as Canadians to understand that when we're dealing with the American humane society, which really fuels off the emotion thing for fundraising, and we're dealing with Europeans, who are very much emotionally tied up in these things, we face a very intensive communications challenge.

As Canadians, we've been a little bit naive on this, perhaps, that if we're nice, and if we just make our case, it'll be all right. But we're dealing with a very emotional issue, and we've been badly beaten up. I'm glad to see we're ramping up or muscling up on the communications side to actually engage.

My own take is that the only thing more powerful than misinformation—or lies—is the truth. It has to be played skilfully, and I applaud you for ramping up the efforts to get the message out. Ultimately we certainly can do that. It's not something that Newfoundland can fight alone, and it's time that all of Canada stood behind this. Of course there are Atlantic and Quebec interests as well; we all need to work together.

We're hoping that as a committee we can make a difference by going over there. I personally believe we can communicate to the members of Parliament over there that there are some communications challenges there, and perhaps they will understand that there is a realistic approach to this but Canada's not backing down. We're hopeful that we can contribute to raising the awareness that Canada is not going to back down. We're going to defend our interests.

I applaud you for the efforts you're making in that department.

Thank you.

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Thank you very much.

On your comment, I'll say two things. We've had comments from ministers and political figures in Europe to our heads of missions that, "You know, I kind of agree with you, but you'll never see me admit it; you can fully expect me to be out there in the ramparts to fight and speak for a ban." That's just the way it is. It's that kind of political situation.

As I said, one needs to be realistic in terms of trying to change public opinion. It's good to inform ministers and technocrats and officials in Europe, but as long as public opinion is against this...and it's a freebie for them. These people, these countries who are threatening the ban, import practically nothing in terms of seal products. It's a very easy way to garner votes and to appear to be on the right side.

So you know, your battle, our battle—we're kind of fighting hard to stay in the same place; I wouldn't say we're making particular progress. That's why you need to attack them on the trade aspects. Or Mr. Simms talked about an open abattoir. Well, there are standards for abattoirs. Perhaps we could get the Europeans possibly to talk about standards, as we had done very successfully with leghold traps. We won that one.

That kind of approach would look at standards, at acceptable standards. If they sign off on standards, and we sign off on some, then something could possibly be done.

• (1050)

The Chair: Mr. Manning.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Thank you. I know our time is limited, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'm pleased to see that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade certainly seems to be supporting the Canadian seal hunt. It's important to our province, because a lot of times we feel that one of the barriers we have had over the years was in relation to promotion of our seal hunt.

One question I have to ask is that there is some consideration being given, I know in our own province, of banning the likes of Paul McCartney and company from protesting, appearing at, showing up on—whatever way you want to word it—the ice floes during the seal hunt.

I'm just wondering, from an international perspective, if the government or the minister took that action and did not allow it.... I mean, there are so many hunts that go on in the world, from my understanding, where protesters are not allowed. There's danger in being on the ice floes, interfering with the work—not just the livelihood, but the work—of the seal hunters themselves.

If that action were taken by government, how do you think that would be received internationally?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: We're entering into the realm of speculation there.

I think Paul McCartney got divorced because of that, so I don't think *he* is coming back.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Fabian Manning: That's it when you're on ice.

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: I'd like to hearken back to something Mr. Lunney said about the Canadian image, that we are very nice. We get thousands, in fact tens of thousands, of protest letters abroad, and that in fact is what the letters say, "Canada is so nice; why do you do that?" I would speculate that if those kinds of observers and so on were prohibited from observing, you'd make it worse.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Worse?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: Yes, in the sense that then you have something to hide, "But Canada is so nice, and they're making this bad thing worse."

Mr. Fabian Manning: Maybe we're too nice.

When I had asked the earlier panel a question in relation to our end product and the best market, they came back with the answer of Russia and China. But when I hear the discussion here, our efforts seem to be on the European Union and countries such as England and others.

We've seen an increase in the hunt over the past couple of years. Whether it can sustain another increase I guess would be determined by somebody else.

In relation to the market development in Russia and China, do you see that as a growth area in those countries, if we were to look at increasing the seal hunt in the next couple of years?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: I don't know the nature of the market in Russia and China. I don't know what the Russians and Chinese do with the seal products. The Norwegians use the fur and turn them into fur products. I guess the Italians make...or these things end up as purses and other seal products.

As for China, I wouldn't want to speculate on what the main market in China or Korea would be. If you look at the trade statistics, I think you'll see Korea in there. There may well be other products that are parts of the seals.

•(1055)

Mr. Raynald Blais: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...Brigitte Bardot knows.

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: I can't really comment on those markets. You know, a total market of \$10 million would obviously be important to the hunters and so on, but in the large scheme of things it's peanuts. To develop it more would cost a lot of money, and I

doubt very much if, to sell \$14 million of extra product...and I'm an old trade commissioner, so I have some idea about this.

I would think the promotion efforts for seal products in those two countries, especially since in one of them the economy is more or less state-controlled, would not lead to much greater sales, or I wouldn't think they would.

Mr. Fabian Manning: If the minister or the department decides to increase the amount of seals killed next year or in the next couple of years.... As you say, even when we had the three-year management plan put in place there seemed to be some extra protests because of—

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: The greater numbers.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Yes. But if the minister comes out next year and adds another 100,000 pelts, anticipate major protests again.

The whole industry seems to be on a very even keel and very positive at the present time. The increase in the dollars for the pelts themselves is going quite well now as compared with what it was even three or four years ago. There is some pressure being put forward by the local industry in relation to having some increases, but again, you're always dealing with public opinion, especially in Europe.

What would you anticipate if the minister did slightly increase the total allowable catch?

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: It's very difficult to tell. The latest wave was perceived to have...or whatever increase we've had in protests resulted from an increase in the allowable catch or take. That would lead me to think that the protests would continue, not necessarily increase. They would continue and use that fact.

On the other hand, who knows? If you look at what happened in the United States with the humane society, apparently they were giving indications of consumer and restaurant boycotts that were completely untrue. That hit the press. What does that do for their credibility in terms of next year?

Mr. Fabian Manning: Good point.

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: What does Paul McCartney's situation do for next year? I don't know. We certainly would be ready in Europe, and would expect the same level of protest, with the same intensity and the same aggressiveness, as this year and last.

Mr. Fabian Manning: You may not see very many couples on the ice floes any more. They'll be mostly individuals, I would think.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Manning.

A final question to Monsieur Roy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You work for the Department of Foreign Affairs, but I'd like to ask you a question on domestic affairs. This year, I noticed that Canadian environmental groups didn't support the environmental groups that came to testify here. To my knowledge, Greenpeace Canada didn't even raise a finger, nor did the big foundations like the David Suzuki Foundation.

Would it be possible to meet the Canadian environmental groups that are affiliated with the environmental groups that have come from outside the country? Our Canadian groups probably didn't budge because they're better informed. Would it be possible to meet them so they can help us on the international front and explain more to their foreign colleagues about what's going on here in Canada?

• (1100)

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: That might be helpful, but, to my knowledge, Greenpeace is no longer a Canadian organization. Actual control of Greenpeace is now exercised in Europe. The Greenpeace people are much more active in Europe than here. Even though Greenpeace was founded in British Columbia—I was there at that time—I don't believe its leaders will let Greenpeace Canada tell the Europeans that there's no problem in Canada. In fact, I believe that the problem is not as serious in Canada because Canadians understand the Canadian situation, which is not the case of the Europeans.

On the other hand, it might be more useful to send Inuit seal hunters to explain to them that this type of campaign does them a lot of harm, particularly to their ability to earn a living. That worked for leghold traps. I think that could work.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Thank you very much to our witnesses.

Just in closing, we asked DFO this question, and we continually seem to skirt around it: is there any recourse through the courts? We have Greenpeace in Europe, humane societies, the World Wildlife Fund—perhaps the WWF is not the right one to pick on—and some other organizations spreading misinformation, deliberately mislead-

ing individuals for fundraising activities or for whatever purpose they may have.

Is there actually recourse for Canada through the courts? If Paul McCartney's saying that we club whitecoats when obviously we don't, or any individual or any organization is making erroneous statements, do we have recourse to actually challenge them and take them to court, based on damaging the industry and damaging Canada's reputation?

I'm talking a serious court challenge here, not taking someone to court to slap them on the wrist or over the fingers for \$500 or \$1,000, but for real money.

Mr. Norbert Kalisch: I don't know what the situation might be in Canada itself or how that would work, who would be the plaintiff. Internationally, I can't see a way to do that. We are doing the equivalent of this and challenging them legally, under trade rules, but not for defamation of character.

Something like that could possibly be done in Canada. Could an organization that is composed of sealers do this?

The Chair: My suggestion is that you have to make the challenge where their assets are, so you actually have some type of recourse in the courts to reach settlement.

At any rate, I would like to thank both our witnesses today. This was a very informative discussion. I think you brought some good, solid ideas to the table, constructive ideas, some of the first constructive ideas we've heard, quite frankly.

Again, thank you very much.

Adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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