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Chair

Mr. Gerald Keddy

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• (1120)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Our witnesses are not quite ready yet, so I'll give them a few seconds. I know that Mr. Stoffer and Mr. Cummins had interventions. Maybe we can deal with them while the witnesses are preparing themselves.

Before we do, I welcome our witnesses, Dr. Alice Crook and Dr. Charles Caraguel.

Now you can finish your business. Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Yes, Mr. Chair. I'd like to advise the committee of a notice of motion, so that at the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, we can have a vote and debate it. The motion will deal with coast guard fees north of 60, the marine service fees. I have a copy of the motion in French and English at the clerk's desk, and he will be sending it out to you for your perusal and consideration. At the next committee meeting, we can move, debate, or discuss and vote on that motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer. I will remind you that the next meeting is after we return from the week at home. The minister was to appear at committee, so we may want to move the notice of motion to a different meeting.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cummins.

Mr. John Cummins: Mr. Chairman, we had requested a couple of reports to be done by the Library of Parliament. I was wondering about the status of the spawn on kelp report, and if there was going to be some timeframe in which we could expect that report.

The Chair: I'm going to ask François. I'm not sure of the status of the report.

Mr. François Côté (Committee Researcher): I will be doing it for the library. In the past couple weeks, I have been busy with the briefing material for the current meeting and the seal hunt trip. I'll try to do my best to start on these next week during recess week. We can discuss a timeline or a deadline later on.

Mr. John Cummins: Thank you.

Mr. François Côté: That would also include the CAP decision.

Mr. John Cummins: That's correct.

The Chair: Monsieur Asselin.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Chairman, at the last meeting, I undertook to table some documents. You will recall that some hunters in my riding, on the North Shore, wanted a hunting licence for recreational seal hunting. They took the firearms handling and seal hunting courses, but the department unfortunately does not want to give them the licence because of a moratorium. They want the department to give them a recreational seal hunting licence and a contract for two or three seals per year. I told you I had written to the minister and received a reply.

For the benefit of all committee members, given that fact that seals are part of our work, allow me to table with the clerk the letter I wrote to the minister and his reply. I took the trouble of having my letter translated into English.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Asselin.

If we could proceed, I think our witnesses are ready.

Dr. Alice Crook (Coordinator, Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre, Atlantic Veterinary College, University of Prince Edward Island and member of the Animal Welfare Committee of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, Independent Veterinarians' Working Group): Good morning, and thank you for inviting us to speak to you. We're both members of the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group. I'm also a member of the animal welfare committee of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association.

I'm going to start the presentation by giving you a bit of background on the seal hunt. Some of it will be more or less familiar to some of you, but I'll give you a bit of background on some of the framework for the questions that we've asked in assessing the seal hunt and veterinarian involvement in it, and the composition of the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group. Then Dr. Caraguel will talk about the specific recommendations of the report.

Many of the pictures here were provided by our colleague, Dr. Pierre-Yves Daoust, who is currently in Rotterdam. In regard to these pictures before you, the one on the left was taken in the gulf and the one on the right is at the front in 2002.

The harp seal, which is the one we're talking about, is also called the Greenland seal or saddleback seal, and you can see the adult has that typical saddleback pattern. There are two extensive whelping areas in Canada. One is called the gulf, which is in the Magdalen Islands area, and the other is called the front, off the coast of Newfoundland. The arrows show the migration patterns. The big red plotches are the whelping areas where the seal hunt takes place.

The annual population estimations are done by quite precise transect surveys on pup production. We won't get into that here, but here is a lot of very good detailed information on the population.

This shows the development of the seal pups from very young, just a few hours old, to the whitecoats that are just a few days old—they are, of course, no longer hunted—to the ragged jackets at the age of a few weeks. Then by the age of about a month, they are called beaters. It is the beaters that now represent 90% of the commercial hunt. They're called beaters by the time they're about three or four weeks old. By that time, they will have been weaned for a week or more. This particular seal was probably eight months old or so, and that picture was taken on the north shore of P.E.I.

The picture on the right shows the gulf in 2001.

There's extensive regulation of the seal hunt. As you know, the hunting of whitecoats has been banned since about the late seventies. In 2006 there was a quota of 325,000 total, including 10,000 for natives, and 92,000, plus or minus a certain number, were taken in the gulf and 232,000 at the front, plus a little bit extra beyond that. According to the population surveys, the replacement yield is about 255,000 per year, so we are actually taking more than the replacement yield.

The Canadian harp seal population is arguably among the best-managed populations of wild animals in the world. It's surveyed every five years based on pup production by those grid methods. The methods of killing are the hakapik and rifles. The main point of contention is the humaneness of the hunt. That's what the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group was formed to look at.

The picture on the lower right—I'm sure you all recognize it—is Sir Paul McCartney and his wife, Heather, who spent several days on P.E.I. this spring.

It is the largest seal hunt in the world, and it's competitive and very quick. It takes place over only a few days. That shows numbers that were landed from 1951 to 2002. There was a dip, as you can see, and that was when there was an EU ban on whitecoats. But in recent years, it has rebounded with an increase in prices for the pelts.

• (1125)

I have a few slides about why veterinarians are involved in looking at this.

Most people accept that animals will be used by people for medical research, for food, as pets, in farming, and in hunting. The goal for all animals that we use is for them to have a good life and a gentle death. The big question is whether this is compatible with the seal hunt. We look at specific questions: can seals be killed humanely by the methods that are used? If so, are the sealers using these methods correctly to achieve this—always, most of the time, or seldom? Because we're concerned not only about the individual seals

but also about the health of the population, what is the effect of the hunt on the seal population?

Veterinary involvement in looking at welfare issues of the hunt goes back a long way. There were veterinarians involved in observations in the mid-sixties and early seventies. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association undertook observations in 1979 to 1984 and now since 1998. Dr. Daoust, whom I mentioned, has been involved in most of those recent observations. Dr. Caraguel has been involved for the last two years in observations.

The third group listed is the International Fund for Animal Welfare veterinarians, whose observations were made in 2001. This group was brought together by IFAW. Then there's the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group, which was brought together in 2005 and is still functional.

What are the outcomes of the years of observation? We've regularly provided input into a review of the marine mammal regulations by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. An article called "Animal Welfare and the Harp Seal Hunt in Atlantic Canada" was written; Pierre-Yves Daoust is the primary author, and I'm the second author. You have a copy of that article; there are some in French and some in English.

The importance of this article is that it sums up all the observations that preceded it. That's important because many of these were in the form of internal reports, so it provides public access to this information. It also talks about the findings from the recent observations. Dr. Daoust and I reviewed a lot of the videotapes from IFAW with which we were provided. The information on our review of those tapes is included as well.

We're mostly here to talk about the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group report, but I also brought copies of the position statement of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association on the hunt. It is really quite similar to the report in that it calls for sealers to check by palpation that the skull is crushed, and it also states that if done properly, killing the seal with a hakapik is a humane and efficient method of killing them. As I said, it reinforces what is in the IVWG report.

I want to spend a minute or two talking about these two reports, because the figures from them are commonly quoted. The first one, by Daoust et al., from the *Canadian Veterinary Journal*, concluded that 98% of seals are killed in an acceptably humane manner and that the killing methods are appropriate for the species and age groups harvested when properly used, but that if even 2% of 325,000 seals are not killed properly, it's still a significant number, so there's room for improvement.

The veterinarians' report put out by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, which is on their website and is very widely quoted, most recently in the European Union declaration, says that up to 42% of seals whose skin carcasses were examined were likely conscious when skinned. They conclude that there are many instances of violations on the videotapes, and they say that the hunt is unacceptably inhumane.

So there's obviously conflicting information in those two reports. I think there are a couple of reasons for that. The first report is based on years of observations, and that includes both direct observations on the ice and also a review of the videotapes provided by the International Fund for Animal Welfare. The second one was created by this group of five veterinarians who came together only very briefly and were on the ice for two days. They produced the report as a result of those two days, plus the viewing of videotapes—many of which were the same ones we viewed.

● (1130)

Another difference is that no one in their group was a veterinary pathologist, whereas the other group included at least two, and I think three, veterinary pathologists. When they examined skulls, they didn't have the facilities to take them back to a lab, take them apart, and look for brain injuries.

The first report was based on very thorough post-mortem examinations, including looking for hemorrhage within the brain, even if there weren't growths, and obvious crushing injuries to the skull. So I believe that's a big part of the reason for the difference in the conclusions.

The other thing is that the first one was a peer-reviewed study, published in the *Canadian Veterinary Journal*, and the second one was not peer-reviewed and published only on a website. So there's a lot of difference between the studies, but they're both quoted.

This is a sealer with a hakapik and a seal in the gulf—he's a seal killer, yes. While there's no doubt that striking a seal on the head with a hakapik to kill it appears brutal—it's a brutal act—if it achieves irreversible unconsciousness and rapid death, then it is a humane method of killing the animals.

There are two very important concepts to the discussion of the humaneness of the hunt. I'm going to talk about them both briefly. The first is that the skull of young seals is very thin. On the left, you have the skull of a dog and on the right of a harp seal. You can see that the dog has a sagittal crest, and a lot of mammals do—more land-living mammals—but the seal skull is quite thin. In fact it is crushed very easily.

The next slide shows pictures of two skulls with damage done by the hakapik. The first one shows the top of the skull, and you can see

that there's a lot of fractures. Where the bone's fractured, it isn't actually crushed, but there's still a lot of damage.

The second one shows the floor, the lower part of the brain, and the arrows point to some of the fractures. Again, there's a lot of damage there.

One thing that's very important about this is that it's very easy for the sealer to feel if the skull is crushed, just by reaching down with a gloved hand and feeling if the skull has been crushed. In both the IVWG report and the CVMA position statement, that's why they both say this is how it should be monitored: that the sealer checks for a crushed skull. The other thing about this is that it's easy to see. If you're observing from a bit of a distance, you can see if the sealer has reached down to check with his hand or not. So it's easy to monitor.

The other important concept is the swimming reflex, which is involuntary movement, equivalent to the paddling movements of livestock that would be seen in an abattoir when the animal's been hit with a stun gun. In the case of the seal, it's vigorous lateral movements of the hind end of the animal. It can last longer than in terrestrial animals, because they have much longer oxygen stores in their muscles than diving mammals.

But it is difficult to tell at a distance, especially with an untrained eye, what that movement means. Certainly for anyone who doesn't have a lot of knowledge in this area, any movement looks like a result of the animal being conscious and alive. So obviously that's very important in this whole discussion.

● (1135)

The next thing I'm going to talk a little bit about is the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group. It was formed partly in response to the international scrutiny and criticism of Canada's seal hunt, which has, as you all know, increased a lot in the last couple of years, and because of very strong criticism by animal rights groups, IFAW, and the Humane Society of the United States. The goal was to assess the hunting practices—do current practices minimize or eliminate animal suffering, is the available knowledge sufficient?—and to provide recommendations for changes in practice and/or for additional research, if necessary.

The funding for this meeting and for bringing together the group came from the World Wildlife Fund in the Netherlands, which is interesting in itself. It was very expensive to arrange to have these people come together for three or four days and to pay for the resources that were all brought together in Halifax, and it was all funded by the World Wildlife Fund in the Netherlands.

It started when Pierre-Yves Daoust and I were asked by the World Wildlife Fund to convene a panel of veterinarians, with relevant expertise, who were not related to industry or non-governmental organizations or anything. The group has nine members—four from Canada, two from the U.S., and one each from the Netherlands, France, and Great Britain. I'm just going to tell you who they are so you'll have a sense of the cumulative expertise of this group.

The first is Dr. Caraguel, who is originally from France but is now a graduate student at the Atlantic Veterinary College. He is doing his work in the area of aquatic animals, and he's been an observer at the seal hunt for the last two years.

I have been involved with assessing the seal hunt, because of my association with the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, since 1997, and I'm also with the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at the Atlantic Veterinary College.

Pierre-Yves Daoust has been observing the seal hunt for many years now. He's a wildlife pathologist at the Atlantic Veterinary College.

Larry Dunn is the next one. He's the director of animal health research and veterinary services at the Mystic Aquarium and Institute for Exploration in Connecticut. He's the author of dozens of papers on marine mammal health issues, and he is past-president of the International Association of Aquatic Animal Medicine.

Stéphane Lair is also from Canada. He's the assistant professor of zoological medicine at the Faculté de médecine vétérinaire, Université de Montréal.

Al Longair is also from Canada. He's a small-animal practitioner, but he was one of the members of the 2001 IFAW veterinary panel. That's kind of interesting, because he brings both perspectives. I think he's been drummed out of that group by now, actually.

Joost Philippa is from the Netherlands. He is a veterinarian with clinical experience doing post mortems on seals and rehabilitation projects with marine mammals.

The next one is Andrew Routh, who is from the U.K. He's a senior veterinary officer with the Zoological Society of London, with more than 10 years of experience working with zoos and wildlife and doing seal medicine, rehabilitation, and release in the U.K. and in the U.S.

The last one is Allison Tuttle, who has practised aquatic animal medicine with a focus on marine mammals. She is also at the Mystic Aquarium in Connecticut.

I'll talk a bit about the process. The group was brought together. On the first day, we met with a number of people representing different aspects of the Canadian harp seal hunt to get a better understanding of some of the perspectives of the different individuals and groups. We had presentations on population biology; the industry, past, present, and future; hunting methods; management; and enforcement. They involved sealers, scientists, and DFO managers.

I just have a comment. For me it was very interesting, because even though I've been involved with the seal hunt for years, I've not actually spoken to sealers before. There were three sealers, one from

the Magdalen Islands and two from Newfoundland, and it was really very interesting to hear their perspectives.

• (1140)

Sealing is hard and dangerous work, and it represents a significant source of their annual income. They are genuinely perplexed by the amount of international scrutiny that descends on them for a very brief period in the spring, so they told the group they would welcome any assistance in making the hunt more humane.

For the next two days we met in camera with a facilitator and discussed the hunt, looked at videotapes, and developed recommendations. Then over the summer we prepared the report. Dr. Caraguel will now talk about the specific recommendations in it.

[Translation]

Dr. Charles Caraguel (Department of Health Management and Centre for Aquatic Health Sciences, Atlantic Veterinary College, University of Prince Edward Island, Independent Veterinarians' Working Group):):

Mr. Chairman, members, good morning.

[English]

I'm going to switch my speech from English to French to apologize for the fact that although we do have a French version, but we don't have it here on the laptop. So I'll switch to French.

[Translation]

The Independent Veterinarians Working Group on the Greenland seal hunt has reported a total of 11 recommendations, four specific and seven general.

The first specific recommendation refers to a three-step seal killing process to be carried out in sequence as rapidly as possible. The three steps are stunning, checking and bleeding the animal. The purpose of the first step, stunning, is to cause an irreversible loss of consciousness and death. The two methods used are rifle and hakapik or club. All of the specifications on the use of both weapons are found in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans marine mammal regulations.

One of the first problems, as Dr. Crook mentioned, is the conflict between IFAW veterinarians and the article published by veterinarians in the *Canadian Veterinary Journal* in 2002. Watching the same events and videos, the IFAW found 55 violations out of a total of 116 observations, whereas Pierre-Yves D'Aoust and Alice Crook, together, agreed on only 27 of those 55 violations. That difference of opinion over the same images stems from the problem of interpretation of the swimming reflex.

Is the swimming reflex fact or fiction? It is defined as a stereotyped, disordered and lateral movement of the seal's hind end. It is an involuntary movement. It is often compared to the paddling movements of livestock killed in laboratories with a stun gun.

The video was shot by IFAW members during the 2001 Gulf hunt. It shows a young beacher trying to escape and being fired on by a hunting boat. After 10 seconds of immobility, the seal begins to display completely irregular and involuntary lateral movements. That is the swimming reflex, and the animal feels nothing and does not suffer at all. The swimming reflex lasts over 15 seconds, and certainly far longer. That is what it's all about.

This swimming reflex is supposed to be a medullary reflex, not a cerebral reflex, i.e., it does not go through the spinal cord. Given that this was merely a hypothesis, we wanted to put the theory to the test in the field, expecting to find that the duration and amplitude of the swimming reflex were independent of brain integrity. So there was no connection between the medullary reflex and brain integrity. The methods used were observational and qualitative methods.

In 2005, Dr. D'Aoust and myself took a helicopter to the area of the hunt. We boarded a hunting boat. We observed how many hakapik blows the animal received and whether or not there was any swimming reflex and how long it lasted. Finally, once the animal was brought on board, we were able to observe skull and brain integrity.

• (1145)

The results showed that out of 63 detailed observations, 36 of the seals, or over 57 per cent, displayed a swimming reflex. The duration of the swimming reflex was on average nine seconds, ranging from two to 35 seconds. In addition, of the 63 skulls examined, 51 showed severe injury, 11 showed partial injury and one showed minimum injury.

The case of skull no. 28, which presented minimum injury, involved left jaw and muzzle fractures. In addition, a small piece of the frontal bone was detached from the right orbit. One might think that the hakapik blow connected only with the muzzle and that the brain case was perfectly intact. However, closer inspection of the brain revealed a diffuse sub-durable hemorrhage in the left hemisphere and ventral surface of the brain, which means the animal was certainly in a state of irreversible unconsciousness or perhaps even death.

Let's come back to the discussion of our findings. So you can see that the swimming reflex is a common phenomenon during the hunt and is unrelated to brain integrity—it is definitely a medullary reflex—but also that the hakapik appears to be an effective method for killing or, at the very least, producing irreversible unconsciousness of the seal.

Another problem, which is part of the discussion around stunning the animals, is the calibre of rifle used. In 2004, Pierre-Yves D'Aoust and Marc Cattet did a ballistics report comparing use of the 22 magnum and 22-250 calibre.

I have that report here. Perhaps someone might like to take down the information and distribute it among committee members.

The report first describes the case of an animal being hit directly in the brain. So two seal heads with direct hits to the brain are compared. Both calibres hit the mark by causing severe injury to the brain.

However, if you take the case of a muzzle hit, the 22 magnum does not cause enough injury to debilitate the seal brain, except perhaps for a minimum fracture of the frontal bone, whereas the 22-250 calibre completely damages a whole part of the muzzle, in addition to causing fractures and severe injury to the brain.

This study was done at the request of hunters who wanted to reconsider using the 22 magnum during the hunt. Following the report, the Department of Fisheries and Ocean disallowed the use of this calibre and continued to allow more powerful calibres.

During the observations in 2006 at the front, off the shores of Labrador, I had the opportunity to take part in an observation session aboard one of the Coast Guard icebreakers, the Henry Larsen, and I followed officers from Fisheries and Ocean Canada who were monitoring the hunt. The hakapik is not used much at the front; they use rifles instead. As you can see from this image, the hunters are quite happy to be monitored.

During the first inspection where I was present, we had—fortunately or unfortunately—a case of an animal that was still alive and suffering on the boat. The officer asked the hunters to finish the animal off with a regulated weapon. Unfortunately, there was no hakapik on board; there was just this piece of wood that had apparently been used in the past to finish an animal off and that was not included in the regulations.

• (1150)

The two officers present began an investigation. They discovered that the hunters on this boat were not using the right calibre, they were using 22 Magnums, which are not included in the marine mammal regulations.

So we took samples of seal skulls from this case of violation. We took dorsal and ventral, right and left photos. Here, this is just one case. You can see that this skull is perfectly intact and that there are only two small injuries to the upper jaw. That means that the trajectory of the bullet clearly went through the muzzle.

We tried to find out whether this mussel had been hit by a 22 Magnum calibre bullet. By doing an X-ray, we found no bullet in the skull. In this case, we therefore cannot ascertain whether the animal was hit by a 22 Magnum or another calibre authorized by the regulations, such as a 222 calibre. That is why, as an independent veterinarian group, we want to go further and are calling for a ballistic field study of the 22 Magnum.

The second specific recommendation has to do with checking. The purpose of checking is to confirm irreversible loss of consciousness or death. Previously, what was checked for was the absence of a corneal reflex, which is a very difficult reflex to apply and interpret. Our group asked that this check be replaced by palpation of the skull, which anyone can do. Right through the animal's skin, it is easy to feel whether the skull is damaged or not.

The third step of the process is bleeding. When an animal is in a state of irreversible unconsciousness, bleeding will cause it to die. This is a very important step in our killing process. We have called for the marine mammal regulations to stipulate that bleeding should occur after irreversible unconsciousness rather than after death, because bleeding causes death.

The last specific recommendation has to do with shooting animals in the water. A lot of animals are shot in the water. According to the report of one of the scientists from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the carcasses are often lost in a region that is not of concern to Canada, but is of concern to the island of Greenland.

Through my observations in 2006, I have found that animals very rarely sink and can often be recovered, even after being shot in the water. This recommendation will definitely be revisited in the next report.

Let's move on to the general recommendations, of which there are seven. The first general recommendation has to do with managing the hunt so as to reduce competition and haste.

We are also calling on the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to improve supervision, monitoring and enforcement of the hunt.

We would also like the industry to seriously consider striving for full utilization of each seal killed.

• (1155)

We would like hunters to join together and form a professional organization to promote appropriate treatment of the animals.

We hope that observers and researchers will cooperate with hunters with a view to fully understanding the impact and importance of the hunt in coastal communities.

We recommend training and education for sealers, as well as regularly updated information. That should be available and required for a hunting licence. The training could use video footage to illustrate the right ways and the wrong ways of doing things.

Finally, we would like research and observations to be updated regularly, for example, to better understand the swimming reflex.

As part of this work and the discussion, in the near future, the group would like to set up a ballistic study of the use of 223 and 222 calibre rifles in the field, and promote training and education for sealers. For example, during the hunt, the three essential steps to killing an animal could be printed on a laminated poster that sealers would have on their boats.

We also want to revisit the issue of area 4, where use of the hakapik is not required for reasons having to do with Aboriginal people. We want the use of the hakapik to be mandatory in this area.

We want to organize a new task force workshop in order to make a new report.

Finally, we wish to remain open to any opportunity to observe, improve or alter the appropriate treatment of animals during the seal hunt.

I indicated here our group's Internet link. You can access our report in English or in French.

If you have any questions, Dr. Crook and myself would be more than delighted to answer them.

• (1200)

[English]

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup*, Monsieur Caraguel and Dr. Crook. It was a very good presentation. I'm sure our members have lots of questions.

Just before we go to questions, I want to thank you for the presentation—the thoroughness and breadth of it. You covered, I think, all the issues we've been discussing at this committee for some time.

We'll move on to questions. We'll have Mr. MacAulay.

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

Thank you, Dr. Caraguel and Dr. Crook, for coming.

The biggest problem we seem to have with the seal hunt is the perception of cruelty. Part of what you explained here was that there were, I believe, 61 cases in one area, and there was one that wasn't properly hit with the hakapik. You indicated, Doctor, that the animal was unconscious and could not regain life. But the problem we have as a group and as a committee is that the people watching are horrified. And mostly what you've explained to us is that it's totally humane and done in a proper manner.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe wants the hakapik eliminated. What we are trying to do as a committee is explain to the world that in fact we have one of the most humane and necessary hunts. I believe you're involved in health research. What would happen if we did not have a seal hunt? What would happen to the seal population? Perhaps either one of you could answer that.

It's a problem. We're going to travel. We're going to meet people in the European Union. The problem we have, as a parliamentary committee, is what is shown here or what the International Fund for Animal Welfare and other groups put up and what people see. I wonder what difference it would make if you took them into a slaughterhouse where a young steer was being taken in and the same thing was done.

We have a big job to do, but if we don't accomplish some of what we're trying to do, this hunt could be in jeopardy, and that would be serious, I believe.

Would you like to respond to that?

• (1205)

Dr. Alice Crook: I have a couple of comments. One of the things that happens.... As you know, the IFAW and the HSUS take a lot of video footage. They definitely capture footage of infractions. A lot of it is in question, but there is some that isn't.

If you invite representatives of those groups, you'll probably see the one that was taken last year, which we have not actually seen—we requested a copy but haven't received one. Pierre-Yves Daoust was shown it when he was in Europe, and he said that it definitely shows infractions.

There are some problems, for sure. But we feel that if this procedure of stunning and checking of the skulls by palpation was adopted, and it was seen that it was being monitored, and if on these videotapes that IFAW was showing you could see that the sealer was palpating the skull, then it could be defended that, yes, they're following the steps they're supposed to. But currently they're not doing that.

That's one way, we think, of helping to improve the perception of the hunt, that they're following all the steps that are laid out in the marine mammal regulations.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: But what you've explained, if I interpreted it properly, is that most of what takes place is done in a humane manner.

Dr. Alice Crook: It is, but—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: We have part of the European Union asking us not to use what you're telling us we should use. So how do we explain it to the world community? As doctors and people who are involved in explaining how those things happen.... We're just commoners who serve the people. The fact is that we need to be able to explain to the world the necessity of what we're doing and how humane it is.

Now, there can be things that need to be done, but what you are suggesting is that we ask not to have them done in certain areas.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: It's funny. I came to Canada two years ago, and before arriving here, I was watching TV and I saw this show showing Canadian sealers using hakapiks. I was shocked. I was thinking: I'm going to a civilized country; why do they still use a big stick of wood to kill animals? I really felt that it was gross and brutal.

But now, if you take the rationale apart and you really go through comparative studies, based on scientific facts.... We were just discussing this, and we figured out that if you look at all the anatomical features of the seal, combined with different scientific studies, you understand, finally, that the hakapik is probably the most efficient and humane way of killing a seal. But it's totally unesthetic. That's true. But once again, we discussed in our group using another way. For me, if I had to compare the hakapik to the rifle, I would much prefer the hakapik. That's my personal opinion. I went to the gulf in 2005 where they used the hakapik. I didn't see any animals suffering. I went to the front in 2006 where they used the rifle, and I saw dirty stuff.

So I'm here not to judge or to show something, I'm here to say that the system can be improved. We can have an evolution of the system. It's a commercial hunt and it should be done by professionals in a professional way.

• (1210)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: But you're the expert. You tell us to use the hakapik, and the people in Europe tell us that if we use the hakapik, we're cruel. That's where we are.

Also, most of what you see in the media is the swimming motion after the hakapik is used. That's done for a reason, and it's done very successfully, but the fact is, it is a humane way of killing a seal. In some way we have groups that are working against what you say and against the seal hunt.

Where can we go? You're the professionals. You're the experts.

Dr. Alice Crook: Yes, but we're not experts in public relations.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Well, I don't know what we need, but we need something here. In fact, we're doing it mostly right, but we can't convince the world that it's mostly right.

Dr. Alice Crook: There are another couple of points that are relevant, but I don't know if they're any good in trying to explain things.

The method we're talking about, which is the stunning and then chucking and then bleeding, are consistent with abattoir practices that are used worldwide. They use stun guns to cause irreversible unconsciousness, followed by death. So that's consistent with abattoir practices.

As well, one of the references we referred to in our report is the 2000 panel on euthanasia, which was created by the American Veterinary Medical Association. It's the standard that's used worldwide for methods of euthanasia in all different species of animals. It says that physical methods such as a blow to the head can be humane in an animal with a thin cranium, like a young pig, which is the example they use.

So these are consistent with scientific standards, but there's still the whole matter of, as you say, public perception.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Matthews, do you have a short question? We have a bit of time here.

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Yes, I have just a short question, Mr. Chairman. I realize we're pushing the time allowed.

I want to thank our witnesses for coming.

Dr. Caraguel, on the recommendations, I noticed that one you are recommending is a reduction, I guess, in the speed and competitiveness of the hunt through management. My impression is that there's a limited window of opportunity for sealers to get out and get their allocation. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's at least what I think.

So how do you suggest we slow down the speed and the competitiveness through management? Do we spread the hunt out over a longer period of time? How do we deal with it?

Dr. Charles Caraguel: I'm a young guy, and I don't have so much experience, but one of the things that surprised me is this idea of a general quota or a collective quota. I was thinking about the fact that if we have an individual quota per boat, each boat is going to take more time to kill the animals. Let's say that there are 1,000 seals per boat to kill, so it is going to take several days to pick up the good animals and take the time to do the proper job in the proper manner. But if you are in competition with your neighbour or your brother on another boat, you know that if you don't kill as many seals as he does in a short period of time, you're not going to make as much money as your neighbour.

So all these guys are always rushing. And at the front, sometimes the seal season is just one day long. I don't know why we call it a season, because it's a seal day. Really, it's just a rush, and when I'm doing something in a rush, I always make mistakes. I think that probably if people had less stress on their shoulders and less pressure on their shoulders to kill as many seals as possible—that's the idea of the competition—we would reduce the mistakes.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Just so I understand again, you're saying that the mad rush is to get the quota.

Dr. Alice Crook: It is to get as much of their share of the quota as they can.

•(1215)

Mr. Bill Matthews: I thought, as well, that there was probably some consideration that the seals weren't going to be around on the ice for a sustained period of time. But maybe I'm wrong about that. Do you know what I'm saying? What you're saying makes perfect sense if indeed sealers could take more time and still get their quota. That's what it's about. It's about making money. So they're in this mad rush for everybody to get out and fill the boats up and get in and out. But if there is room and time to hunt over a longer period of time, it would seem to make perfect sense. So that's where the management aspect of it comes in.

Have you had any response at all from the department on that, or has anyone indicated that they'd like to stretch it out a bit longer?

Dr. Charles Caraguel: They say that the sealers are never going to accept this offer, because what they like, like playing poker or going to the casino, is being ready to win the jackpot. Sometimes they have good seasons, sometimes they don't have good seasons, but most of them know where to get the seals. So if they can get more seals, it's just a rush to a goal.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Good afternoon. I really appreciated your presentation. There are some points I would like to understand better, especially those made by Dr. Caraguel.

You mentioned earlier that as a European, from France, you had roughly the same initial reaction as many people seeing a video, image or anti-sealing propaganda for the first time. You also said that you had changed your mind to some extent after seeing a more rational analysis.

I come up against people in Europe and elsewhere, and in Canada too, to some extent, who need convincing. I would like to understand the details of your personal journey a bit better. That might help me in dealing with other people who do not agree with me on the seal hunt. What was the turning point for you?

Dr. Charles Caraguel: It's quite simple. The main consideration, which is very important, is the anatomical data on the thickness of seal skulls.

I looked at dozens of young seal skulls in which the bones are so thin that I could break them with my bare hands. In contrast, I would have a much harder time breaking the skull bones of another animal,

another carnivorous land animal like a dog or any other animal of approximately the same size. Using a hakapik is truly very effective; it does the job quickly and directly.

Another aspect of the seal hunt that is truly very important and has to be considered, is the extreme and dangerous conditions in which sealers hunt. I was blown away by the skill of the sealers, who hopped from one small ice floe to the next with only a few seconds to spare before the pieces threatened to overturn and throw them into the water where they would ultimately have died within a couple of minutes.

I thought they could use a pistol to skill the animal, which would be far less violent. You would not see any video of big and totally ungainly arm movements. But the danger in carrying a firearm on your belt or in your hand while hopping from one small ice floe to the next would be yet another obstacle for the sealer, who already works in a very hostile environment. What more, the hakapik can help a sealer catch a piece of ice and in the process, get out of fairly dangerous situations.

I think it's a good compromise. You also have to consider the cost of killing. It's a commercial hunt, so if the cost of killing is high, the sealer will not make any profit. In my view, the cost effectiveness ratio of the method employed is truly optimized under such extreme conditions

•(1220)

Mr. Raynald Blais: But what brought your thinking to this point today, unlike your first impression? What was the turning point? What brought that about?

Dr. Charles Caraguel: I think the turning point was when I saw a study that was done — and that seems shocking — on an anesthetized seal on which an electroencephalogram was done. Brain activity was being monitored. They struck the seal with a hakapik and found that after the first blow, the EEG reading was zero, meaning that the skull was completely damaged and brain activity had ceased.

Mr. Raynald Blais: All right.

Now then, are there any alternatives to the hakapik? You and Dr. Crook mentioned that a public relations campaign was being conducted, in some fashion. I have been hearing about air rifles and all kind of things, but is there an alternative?

[*English*]

Dr. Alice Crook: I can understand your question, but I need to answer in English.

It's not possible, as far as we are aware, for the same reasons Charles just gave about the safety of using any kind of handgun with the conditions of the ice. But the other thing is that even in using the rifle, we feel—and this reflects current marine mammal regulations—that the sealers should all have a hakapik on the boat in case there is a shot that leaves a seal wounded but not dead, and they therefore need to have a hakapik available to complete the killing. It is the most efficient and humane method, and it seems kind of crazy to try to find something else when it works very well.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Charles Caraguel: I think that is an issue that should clearly be considered and certainly be assigned to a group of engineering specialists. Once again, how are sealers going to react? Obviously, if it is a requirement, sealers will accept it.

The seal hunt has been around for some time. I think it's in people's nature to give enough thought to ways of improving and perfecting a method. I believe the air rifle idea has already been suggested and certainly tested, and hunters reverted to a different method.

Mr. Raynald Blais: You and I both know what is going on currently in Europe; there is a renewed debate in the European Union over old videos, etc.

I get the feeling that regardless of whether the hakapik is allowed or not, for purely esthetic reasons, ultimately, opponents of the hunt are going to keep trying and won't stop until the seal hunt is no more. The anti-sealing propaganda campaign still uses images of the whitecoat. And yet we stopped hunting whitecoats a very long time ago.

Do you feel the same about this as I do?

Dr. Charles Caraguel: For animal welfare associations, the seal hunt is pretty much a perfect opportunity because it lasts only a few days a year. So it is something they can see coming well in advance. They can set up their itinerary, plan their travel, buy their plane tickets, etc. The hunt also takes place in areas accessible by helicopter from Prince Edward Island. You can reach the area in 15 or 20 minutes to observe the seal hunt.

Having participated in a number of animal documentaries, I realize that the seal hunt is visually a perfect event for video, because you see red on white, blood on ice. In any event, I would be very surprised, even if we were to prove it to them logically that the hunt is respectable, that it is done in an appropriate manner, to see opponents ever accept that idea. Also, given that they make a great deal of money from the hunt, I wonder who would suffer the most if it came to an end.

•(1225)

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Dr. Alice Crook: Can I answer that?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Dr. Alice Crook: We're talking about the perception, of course, and as I already mentioned, the IFAW continues to take videos every year, and they do show infractions. In some areas the practices seem to be worse than in others. One of our recommendations is for

training and licensing of the sealers. If there were a combination of enforcing the checking for the crushed skulls, the training of sealers so they all knew what they were supposed to do, and the managing of the quota to reduce the competitiveness, then there would be less of that kind of video footage that's so damaging.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: I want to go back to this point. To clarify, we don't say that in the field the hunt is actually 100% humane. It could be humane if it were done properly, but once again this year I've seen animals suffering during the hunt.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just before we go on to our next questioner, I'd like to say that in Norway they duplicate or triplicate everything we do. The seals that are shot are still hit with the hakapik. They palpate the skull to make sure it's crushed. They do all three. It might be a little excessive, and it may slow down the work of the sealers, but it might go a ways towards diminishing somewhat at least some of the rougher edge of IFAW and some of those groups.

Do you have a comment on that?

Dr. Alice Crook: I didn't know that. So they are palpating the skulls now?

The Chair: Yes.

Dr. Alice Crook: That's good.

The Chair: Even if they shoot the seals, they still use the hakapik on them.

Dr. Alice Crook: I think we could be double and triple sure.

The Chair: It seems to be a little bit of overkill. Pardon a poor pun.

Dr. Alice Crook: Does IFAW criticize them? I think their hunt takes place more in a boat.

The Chair: We're easier.

Dr. Alice Crook: We're easier because we're not so remote. We're easier to get to.

The Chair: Mr. Manning, go ahead, please.

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation, Ms. Crook. There's great information there.

In regard to the comment made—and I guess there's no such thing as making the seal hunt look nice—according to reports, 98% of our seals are killed humanely. In most jurisdictions, that would be a wonderful record. But with the 2% here, and the fact that the visuals we see are disturbing to most human beings, I would think, when they don't understand exactly what we're trying to do, having independent observers like you go out there and take an independent look at it is one thing.

Last year, and certainly in this year's seal hunt and others, there was some concern raised about IFAW, HSUS, and whoever being out there creating what sealers believe is a danger to them. Their comeback is that the sealers are infringing on their rights—whatever those may be—to participate in and go out and observe the hunt. I've seen videos of Zodiacs crossing in the front of the boats, and basically interfering with the seal hunt.

I've talked to the minister on occasion about banning what I would think are people who are infringing. My belief is that if I were going to interfere with a person's job in any other jurisdiction, the authorities would be called in to remove me from that position. I think it's a hindrance too. What do you believe? It also goes back to public relations. What would be the best way to eliminate this situation, which, I believe, is a danger to the sealers, and which also does nothing to give the seal hunt a positive image?

● (1230)

Dr. Charles Caraguel: I don't know if we can answer this question, because we are specialists in animal health, not in management of such events. I haven't organized any rock concerts or stuff like that before, so I don't really know how to answer this question.

Dr. Alice Crook: I agree that's not our area of expertise, but I also agree with your assessment that it poses a danger and that it is an incendiary point that is likely to worsen. There was a lot more Zodiac activity and that kind of thing this year. That interferes with enforcement within the hunt because the officers are trying to monitor the interaction between sealers and protestors and keep the protestors from getting hurt or getting too much in the way, so they have less time for actually monitoring and enforcing regulations within the hunt. It definitely has an impact on the animals' welfare.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Mr. Blais touched earlier on the misinformation campaign. Government spends x number of dollars on the sealing industry trying to show the world that this is a humane function. You're doing your part through the reports you have posted. It seems for some reason or other that we're not getting that message across.

How would you suggest government tell the world that this is humane? We're trying. We're spending dollars doing it, but the fact is that to some extent it doesn't seem to be getting through, especially to the European areas. Do you have any ideas of how we should approach that to try to get our message out there? We've been talking about it for years, but there still seem to be major problems.

Dr. Alice Crook: One thing is that this report is an international report by veterinarians, and if the government can say that they put in place some of the recommendations, that may be an answer to some of the criticisms. I understand there are going to be some changes to the marine mammal regulations, including those concerning palpating for a crushed skull. If there were measures such as requiring training of the sealers or licensing of all the sealers, those might be ways of showing that the government is responding to some of the recommendations that have come from this independent group.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: Transparency is probably the best way to deal with this problem, because if you just invite people and say, "Go to see for yourself and show me", once again you have to be careful. The seal hunt in theory could be humane, but because people

are living more with qualitative rather than quantitative pictures, that means that even if they have the 1% of the 0.5%, they're going to show that. It's just one second on the video.

As veterinarians, we are trying to reduce the probability of people shooting these kinds of pictures with video cameras. If we can promote training and education in the field to reduce this small percentage of the violation of suffering animals as much as we can, all these animal rights associations are going to have a very hard time finding pictures, and probably they're going to use old pictures, as they're doing right now. Because of the ice conditions we had this year, I would be very surprised if they had any video from 2006. They would have had to go too far away in a helicopter to get there.

● (1235)

Mr. Fabian Manning: Most things are a debate, and there now seems to be a debate on the population of the seal hunt. From seeing your slides, I think you've touched on 5.8 million. We have a hunt this year of 325,000 pelts, and a recovery of 255,000—I'm not just sure of my numbers.

A major concern in my province is the impact of the seal population on other fisheries, such as the cod fishery, the salmon fishery, and so on. There seems to be a great belief among fishermen themselves that an overpopulation of seals has contributed to the downturn in our fishery.

From a scientific point of view, would you care to comment on that in relation to the impact it's having, or that you believe it's having?

Dr. Alice Crook: We're not population biologists, but we've had some excellent presentations on population management. It seems as if the seal population is healthy currently.

There are concerns that as the quota is being raised, it's being raised beyond the replacement level of the seals. There really isn't any evidence to show the seals are responsible for the depletion of the cod stocks, and it would be very hard to do a controlled study on that, somehow to cordon off a body of water, a bay or something, and measure the seals, the cod consumption, and all that sort of thing. It would be really hard to come up with those actual measurements. But there isn't any real evidence that that's the case right now.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: Once again to be clear, as independent working veterinarians, an independent group, we are not population scientists, so we don't have the expertise to say if the seal population is properly managed or not.

Mr. Fabian Manning: From the point of other herds, I remember a caribou herd in my own province. No caribou hunt was allowed. Eventually, some type of brain worm got into the caribou and wiped out the herd. If we've gone from 3 million seals, to 5 million seals, touching 6 million, and continuing, eventually Mother Nature will take care of it. That's the way we look at it. A sustainable hunt is one thing, but the fact that the population of the seals has increased drastically over the past several years, especially with the few years that we had a downturn in the hunt.... I realize you're not population experts, but I'm sure you have received information, as you said.

Is there any point when the scientific community believes the hunt takes care of itself? Is there any information that says at some point we're going to have to deal with the seal population?

Dr. Alice Crook: You mean because it's increasing too much?

Dr. Charles Caraguel: On the colonization of our ecosystem, usually if you have food for no more than 10 animals, the 11th and 12th die. It's a rude competition of Mother Nature. If we have six million seals right now it's because we have food for six million, but maybe there isn't food for seven million. Usually the ecosystem has its own manner of managing the population. That's a general concept of biology, and we aren't very good at that.

Dr. Alice Crook: The other thing this year was that the ice conditions were really different. There was a lot less ice, so there was a lot of speculation as to what that would do to the seals' ability to whelp and reproduce. I haven't heard any real consequences yet that have been noted.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: I haven't heard anything yet.

Mr. Fabian Manning: With any hunt, especially a hunt of this nature, we go back to the use of the gun versus a hakapik. There has to be a loss of animals. If they're shooting the animals, by the time they get to them they've either gone off the ice due to the activity or gone into the water and are lost.

Are there any numbers or any scientific knowledge on how many seals that are either shot or killed with a hakapik are lost and not recovered? I've seen some of your recommendations on recovery of the killed animals.

•(1240)

Dr. Alice Crook: I'm not sure if in the CVJ article there are any numbers on that. I know there's disagreement in what the IFAW group says about the numbers that are struck and lost.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: This whole issue of "struck and lost" was raised this fall in a presentation by Dr. Stenson from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. He was dealing more with Greenland hunting and older animals. From my own experience, when an animal is shot in the water, or shot and then falls into the water, it is probably at the phase of its life when it has a huge amount of fat tissue. So most of the time the animal floats, if he died and was dumped in the water. I would be very surprised if an animal would sink in this condition, except if it was not well fed by its mother and didn't have a good reserve of fat tissue.

One of the sad stories I have on that is that this year we caught a sealing vessel hunting after the hunt ended. Because they didn't want to be caught with the seals, they just dumped them out of the boats into the water. We recovered most of the seals because they were

floating on the surface of the water due to their huge amount of fat tissue.

Once again it needs to be verified and studied, but I really doubt that "struck and lost" is an issue in Canada.

The Chair: Just before we go to Mr. Cuzner, I have a point on taking of the seals in the water. A lot of the aboriginal hunt is conducted on the water, and I fail to understand the logic of not allowing gunners to shoot seals in the water. I've never accepted that they'd be lost. They are a fat animal, and I suspect that every single one of them would float. If they're shot properly, it should be a perfectly humane way to take the animal. They should be recoverable, although it may be more difficult to recover them. In particular, we have a huge grey seal population now in southwestern Nova Scotia, probably exceeding 30,000, that are colonizing on the coastline and the islands. About the only way you could take them would be in the water.

Dr. Alice Crook: The concern with the older animals, the adult animals, is that if they're shot and wounded, they will be lost because they'll swim away wounded. Whereas the beaters, the ones we're talking about, in the front, in the gulf, are so young and fat and they don't like to go in the water, so they aren't really able or likely to swim away. It's a different question when you're talking about adult animals.

When you're talking about the native hunt, I don't know what percentage of that is adult animals.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have a quick question to you. This committee, whenever we're dealing with an issue, always requests a broad spectrum of evidence and balanced testimony. So I'm just wondering if the chair is motivated to invite Pam Anderson to appear before the committee.

The Chair: It hadn't crossed my mind. But if the committee wishes, I am at the will of the committee.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Yes, we're in your hands.

•(1245)

The Chair: I'd sooner not give her a grandstand.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: To both presenters today, I really want to thank you for your presentation. On the fact that the work you do is very non-sexy and you stand before a *cause célèbre* and try to deal with this issue with a science-based, logical approach, you are to be commended. I want to thank you for being here today and for the body of work that you have presented.

I have a couple of questions. You mentioned that the IFAW captured their own video of some infractions, and you've alluded to the fact that when you viewed those videos, really they're.... What were some of the discrepancies? As they analyze a situation on the ice, it's portrayed differently from the way you would portray it.

Could you give us a couple of examples of that?

Dr. Alice Crook: One of the obvious ones, for instance, is outlined in the *Canadian Veterinary Journal* article. In the numbers they had, they talked about seals being shot and left to suffer.

The other thing that happens is that they take many hours of footage and then they put together a half an hour's or an hour's compilation, which they distribute. What they sent to us back in 2001 were all the original videotapes, so we were able to look at the original footage and see what conclusions they'd reached from it, which you can't really do from the compilation tapes.

So for things like the seals being shot and left to suffer and their culling so many seals in that category, we were able to look at those same sequences and see that indeed, the seal might have been shot, and then it took a certain amount of time for the sealer to get to the seal and give the hakapik blow. It was—I forget the exact numbers—an average of maybe 30 seconds or 37 seconds or something. So they saw that as “shot and left to suffer”. We saw the 37 seconds in which the sealer got as quickly as they could from the boat to the seal as an unavoidable delay, with the sealers still doing the best they could in the circumstances. They called that “left to suffer”.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: I guess what is very frustrating for us is that all these observations were done by very good-quality video and everything, and we would be very interested in having access to all this information, because all these hours of video would show us exactly what the proportion of violations is. For one sequence of violations, we probably have 30 or 35 seals properly killed.

I don't know how we would proceed to track the bad guy who is doing everything wrong, but it would be good for our scientists to have access to this information, because there's a lot of money involved. We do not have the funds to do that. It would be very interesting for us to have access to this information and to have an objective view on that.

I guess if these people really want to improve the system and avoid any suffering of animals, they should provide us with material. If we could work from there and try to improve the system to reduce the suffering, it would be nice.

Dr. Alice Crook: In recent years they haven't provided it.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: No, they never provided it to us. I guess they don't trust us.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Yes, but you do request it?

Dr. Alice Crook: We did last year.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: It is ongoing, yes.

The Chair: If you wanted us to get that information, we would certainly request it on your behalf, on behalf of the committee, officially.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: Okay, thank you very much.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You make a recommendation about education and the development of strong organizations. I think

you just shared an example. Sometimes the violations are not so much wilful violations; they're a result of a lack of education. For example, in the case of the .22 magnum shell, those hunters probably didn't know that it was an inappropriate shell. Could you maybe make a comment as to whether the violations are wilful or not?

Dr. Alice Crook: That's pretty clear. It's in the regulations, currently. It's very clear—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Oh, it is? Okay.

Dr. Alice Crook: —so I don't think there's any question on that.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: For my part, because as I say, I'm a young guy and I believe in man and I think that everybody's good, I really have to admit that in the case of this violation, I thought at the beginning that because the guys have so many seals, they'd have just one or two regulated weapons and a rifle. And some of them didn't. First of all, they should not have a .22 magnum on board.

• (1250)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Yes.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: Then the official of Fisheries and Oceans told me that in fact they have as many regular rifles on board as are needed for everybody. They just use that one for economic purposes, because the .22 magnum bullet costs, I guess, something like 12¢, and the .222 or .223 costs 25¢. So if they kill 1,000 animals during the season, which is a good season for them, I guess it's going to make a difference of \$130, which is the price of one pelt this year.

I totally agree about ignorance and that education should be provided to reduce some of these things, because I discussed it with many sealers on the boat and showed them the proper way of checking the animal to see if it was dead or not. I provided some information, and they were really willing to listen. I don't know if they were scared or not. I'm not a scary person, hopefully, but at least they were listening, and I think they were interested. And hopefully the next time they look at a seal, they'll know what to look at to see if the seal is alive or not. But in this case, obviously, and in the case of the violation when the boat was still hunting after the hunt had stopped....

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I have just one last quick question. Does your group receive any funding from the sealers or DFO? That's just for my own clarification?

Dr. Charles Caraguel: Did we start washing cars this year?

Dr. Alice Crook: Washing cars. Yes, we did start a car wash.

There was the one-time funding from the World Wildlife Fund, which was wonderful, but really, there is no other funding. So as Charles said, we take opportunities to go and make observations, but really, there isn't any funding.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: So you're noble and poor.

Dr. Alice Crook: Yes. I don't know.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: The very tricky point, and it is something we really want to insist on, is our independence. We are not on the animal welfare side and we are not on the hunters' side. So to date, all the observations have been done at the invitation of Fisheries and Oceans, and there were very good conditions and everything. But for example, just for me to go to Newfoundland, Dr. Daoust has to use his own research funds from other projects to fund my plane ticket. Once we are there, DFO takes care of us under very good conditions. But once again, it's very hard for us, because we want to keep our credibility as an independent group. Hopefully we can easily find some money to pursue our research, but we don't want to be on one side or the other.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: No, I understand that.

Dr. Charles Caraguel: It's a very tricky point. You deal with money more than I do, so probably you have some advice for us.

Merci beaucoup.

Dr. Alice Crook: Can I respond to the previous question?

The Chair: You can go ahead.

Dr. Alice Crook: You asked what the differences are in something that might be seen on the videotape, that we might interpret differently. The obvious one is movement, which we might interpret as swimming reflex, and which they interpret as an animal being skinned alive.

But there is another point that's really important, and it's part of the training. Certainly sealers who have been sealing for a long time know this, but because of the competitiveness of the hunt and how lucrative it is these days, there are a lot of new sealers getting into the business. When seals are struck but are not unconscious, they have not been struck properly, and they can be in a state of fear-induced paralysis, in which they become stiff and contracted. They actually hold still. So if we see a seal being dragged by a hook, and it's all huddled up like this in the video, then we're concerned that the seal is not actually unconscious.

Again, it's a question of training and education.

• (1255)

The Chair: Would it be incorrect to say, though, that if the animal were in shock, and the three-step process were still followed, it would be in shock rather than unconscious, which is a different thing? But if it were still bled before skinning, the animal would certainly be dead.

Dr. Alice Crook: The other thing is that the first step in the skinning process is cutting the major arteries in the axilla. So really the first step in the skinning process is the bleeding process. So if indeed, after they were struck, they were very quickly bled, then that would definitely ensure death. But if someone were to skin a seal that was in this hunched-up, contracted state, then conceivably the seal would be conscious.

The Chair: But there is a four-step process. It's either shooting or using the hakapik, palpating of the skull, bleeding, and skinning.

Dr. Alice Crook: After they're bled, they're dead. So when I talk about dragging those seals that might be in a contracted state, this

would not occur if they had a crushed skull. So if they'd gone through the process and they'd palpated for a crushed skull, that seal would not be....

The Chair: So again, it's what you said earlier: follow the process, and it'll be a humane process.

Dr. Alice Crook: Yes.

The Chair: Monsieur Asselin, do you have any questions? No? You're good.

Mr. Kamp, go ahead, please.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you for coming. It was a very good presentation, and I appreciated it very much.

Let me ask a couple of questions. I have two unrelated questions.

A *National Post* article in June 2005—you may have seen it—by Mary Richardson says:

As a Canadian expert in humane slaughter, and past chair of both the Animal Welfare Committee of the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association and the Animal Care Review Board with the Solicitor General of Ontario, I was asked by the HSUS to review their 2005 seal hunt footage.

Without a doubt, what I witnessed was clear evidence of unacceptable and illegal cruelty to animals.

She goes on then, in a paragraph I won't read, to describe the practices that she thought were clearly illegal. She says:

These are not humane ways to die as defined by the Criminal Code of Canada.

As veterinarians, with respect to the death of an animal, what would you say “humane” means?

Dr. Alice Crook: I'd like to make a couple of preliminary comments. I know Mary Richardson. I've served on committees with her in the past. The videotapes she's talking about are the ones that we have not been able to view, but that, we have heard, do show infractions. So we may well agree with her in what she's saying there.

As far as what constitutes a “humane” death goes, the definition is widely accepted. This is what you're talking about in slaughterhouses, with research animals, and whatever. It's a rapid, irreversible—irreversible is important—loss of consciousness followed by death. Usually bleeding is the way of confirming the death.

Mr. Randy Kamp: So the concept of pain is not part of the definition.

Dr. Alice Crook: With rapid, irreversible loss of consciousness, I guess maybe there's a very short period of pain when they're being clubbed or when the stun gun is used in the abattoir. But the point is that it's very rapid.

Maybe I'm not answering your question very well.

Mr. Randy Kamp: I think I know what you're saying.

In your report, you refer to the fact that the DFO officials who are responsible for monitoring can be well known to the sealers. You speculate on the possible conflict of interest or difficulty for them to enforce the rules with their friends or people they rub shoulders with. Did you want to comment any further on that?

Dr. Alice Crook: I think that was a comment made by some members of the committee. There wasn't a consensus, but it was one of the things observed in the discussion—that it was a possibility, that it could be a problem for some officers.

• (1300)

Mr. Randy Kamp: This is my last question.

Your group is ongoing, and you have a timeline of things you plan to do if you find the money to do them. What assistance do you need? Is there any way this committee could assist you as you do your report?

Dr. Charles Caraguel: That's a very good point. I'm very happy to hear that.

We have many projects and ideas of things we could do. But once again, the hunt is very short, and it is very hard, for example, for a coast guard vessel to have scientific objectives and, at the same time, control and also ensure the safety of the people around them.

We would probably have to discuss that with the others, but we can bring you many ideas of how you could at least facilitate us in this process. But already Fisheries and Oceans are very good....

Dr. Alice Crook: It's unfortunate, because when we talk about remaining independent, where do you get funding or assistance where it's still considered not to be compromising you? You mentioned bringing in Pamela Anderson. Well, we don't see ourselves as on one extreme or the other, but certainly the IFAW group sees our group as tainted and probably on the side of DFO, and yet DFO is a Canadian government organization itself that I believe does have credibility. Again, perception is such a huge part of it.

But we would be happy to consult the group to see if we could come up with an idea we could propose.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Crook and Dr. Caraguel, for appearing at committee today. It's much appreciated.

I think you get some feeling for the time we've spent on this subject. We had a sealing report put out a few years ago, and we're redoing it this time around.

I was at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe this spring. We spoke directly with some of our European counterparts, and there was a huge gap between us. I hesitate to speak for the committee in that we're all pro-sealing, but I think I can say that. Certainly our last report recommended a continued hunt, and without trying to prejudge this report, I expect we'll probably be headed there again.

Importantly for those members of the committee who have never been to an abattoir or who didn't grow up on a farm, as many of us did, I have used this comment many times. One of my brother-in-law's first jobs as an RCMP officer was to supervise the hunt back in the 1950s. He was a hunter and certainly used to being around the woods, but he thought it was a very bloody hunt because of the red blood on the white ice. That's an image I don't think we can counteract in the short term—or maybe never.

The thing that came out very clearly for me today—and we'll see where the committee goes at the end of the report—is the fact that the hakapik is a useful tool and probably more humane than some of the alternatives. I would have tended to go towards some of the alternatives to get away from the image of the sealer with the hakapik in the air. But it's quite obvious to me that it's not just humane but probably more humane than some of the alternatives.

Perhaps if we also looked at what other jurisdictions are doing, such as Norway, where the seals are shot and then the hakapik is used even on the shot seals, and your recommendation that we look at more of an open window, a longer timeframe for the hunt, to take some of the competitiveness out of it, maybe all of that combined could help alleviate the 2% of seals that perhaps are killed inadequately.

I want to thank you very much for your presentation. It was very helpful to our study. Thank you.

This meeting is adjourned.

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