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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)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and our study on the Canadian seal hunt, we invite our witnesses and members to the table.

Welcome, gentlemen. We have quite a group of guys here. From the Sealing Committee for the Fur Institute of Canada we have Jim Winter. As individuals we have Lewis Troake, John Gillett, Hedley Butler, Larry Peddle, Rick Kean, and Doyle Brown. It's nice to have you here.

As you know, we've been doing a study on the seal hunt. The committee has studied the seal hunt in the past, and I expect we'll probably be studying it in the future. With the rise of the anti-sealing industry again in Europe, we thought it was pertinent to look at this issue one more time. I will tell you that in the past—and I'm not going to speak for the committee today—we've been able to reach unanimous decisions. With an all-party group that's difficult sometimes. The committee has certainly been supportive of the seal industry in the past.

If you have presentations I'll ask you to keep them to ten minutes each, if at all possible. The less time on presentations the more time we have for questions. But at the same time I know a number of you have issues and points you want to raise and get across.

Mr. Winter, please.

Mr. Jim Winter (Co-ordinator, Sealing Committee of the Fur Institute of Canada): That presents a small problem for me, as your clerical people have taken my presentation to duplicate. Maybe I could pass until I get it back.

The Chair: Do you feel comfortable going without your presentation? I'm sure you know the industry.

Mr. Jim Winter: I'm employed by the Fur Institute of Canada and they have given me a presentation that they would like me to give as written.

The Chair: Mr. Gillett, go ahead. That's just what we like—a volunteer.

Mr. John Gillett (Fisherman, Twillingate, As an Individual): I don't know if I'm volunteering or not, but anyway I'll start it off. Somebody has to. I'm not a public speaker or anything like that.

I killed my first seal when I was only 12 years old, and sold pelts in 1980s when the price was only a dollar to try to keep the industry going. Now it's being taken away from me bit by bit. The seal hunt

has become 75% of my income, which is very important to my enterprise. This has been gradually taken away from me year after year by regulations brought down by DFO. In a three-week period last year I had only three days of hunting due to so many government regulations. Two years ago I spent \$50,000 on my vessel to make it safe for sealing, and the following year DFO brought in a new regulation that I could only kill 250 seals before returning to port. I would not have spent all that money if I had known that these regulations were coming down. I hunt seals from Bonavista Bay to Labrador.

I also think sealing income should be insurable earnings for EI.

I asked a DFO officer about the regulation on 250 seals plus 25 seals for speedboats prior to the 2004 hunt and where it came from. He told me that it was from the Canadian Sealers Association, the FFAW, and the small boat action committee in sealing area 6. Area 6 has the most licensed sealers in Newfoundland and Labrador. I inquired around and found out that there was no meeting in our area in 2004, or in Bonavista Bay. There was no voting done by sealers to have the regulations changed.

To be fair to DFO and not put all the blame on them, hopefully next time they will get their information from a reliable source. In the future, any proposal made to DFO concerning licence-holders should be made available to the fishing enterprises before it is made into a regulation. This way we will all know where the proposal originated. We have an aging population, and many of these fishermen are on the committees that advise DFO and make proposals that bring good fishermen or fishers in towns and areas down to their level of fishing, which is very little.

That's the end of that part. Can I continue?

• (0905)

The Chair: Go right ahead.

Mr. John Gillett: What I mean by this is the price of the diesel fuel. Last year I had 250 seals aboard my vessel. I was in Chateau Bay, Labrador. I called a DFO official and informed him that I had 250 seals aboard. I also had 250 seals held in to DFO.

The weather was very bad. We were in there, I think it was two days. DFO informed me that sealing might commence again the following day, but because of the weather we couldn't get across the straits to unload our seals. So I asked them, how can we work around this? He said you can put them out. I said I'd have to put them out on the shore and I said I didn't want to do that. Well, he said, you won't be able to continue on.

So I took a chance. I came across the straits in very rough weather conditions. I went to St. Lunaire. I burned all that diesel fuel to get the 250 seals out of my vessel so I could continue on the next day. And I had to beat it right back to where I came from because of these regulations made by people who don't understand the industry and who have no consultations with fishermen.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do we have some notes yet, Mr....? Okay.

● (0910)

Mr. Hedley Butler (Town Councillor and Fisherman, Bonavista, As an Individual): I have mine.

The Chair: This is going to work fine.

Go ahead, Mr. Butler.

Mr. Hedley Butler: Since John touched on the regulations and that, I'm going to go into more depth on what the seal fishery is doing to all our other stocks of fish.

I've been fishing for 34 years and I've been involved in the fishery since my childhood. Over the past years, Newfoundlanders have been called barbarians because of the seal hunt. These people should look at their own countries and take into consideration how they butcher and utilize their own animals.

I see the seal as a predator of codfish, salmon, capelin, lumpfish, etc. In the bay where I fish, we see hundreds of thousands of seals preying upon our codfish. We see seals with codfish in their mouths. We see codfish remains left on the bottom of the ocean and on the ice pans with the belly part of the fish eaten.

In the spring of the year, when we put our lump nets out in the water to catch lumpfish, we catch seals in our nets. These seals do a lot of damage to our nets and give the fishing people extra hard work. Talking to the processors, they say that the netted seal is the best one. We are not allowed to bring these seals in to sell. They would meet the top price because of no damage done to the pelt.

Seals have been noted to be at the mouths of rivers, in harbours, and up on slipways. There shouldn't be any reduction of seal quotas. It should be based on whatever the market can sustain.

Veterinarians say that the way seals are slain for the seal fishery is one of the most humane ways it can be done today. Over the years, the seal fishery has changed. Right now we are not allowed to take any whitecoats. We are being watched by observers. DFO officials are out in full force to ensure regulations are carried out.

The seal fishery for fishermen in coastal communities is a very important part of our livelihood. We have taken seals for the past 500 years for food and as a means of making a living. We have thousands

of people in our communities who are leaving. We have people who, at the end of the year, do not have the necessary earnings to qualify for EI. In the town of Bonavista, I, as the deputy mayor representing residents, see fishermen often fishing all summer, and when the fishery is over for the year, they have to go on a make-work program at \$6.75 an hour to qualify for EI. Earnings from the seal fishery should be made insurable, like any other fishery. We have to pay income tax on these earnings.

The animal rights activists should not be allowed to obtain permits from federal or provincial governments to observe the seal fishery and to put more pressure on fishing people. These animal rights activists can afford to pay anyone to kill the seals and make it look worse than it actually is. If you had a nose bleed and you used white tissue, it would certainly show more than if a darker material were used.

These activists can cause dangerous accidents on ice fields. It is better for these people to be more concerned about the hungry children in the world. It is not common to see the activists going to slaughterhouses and making videos there. Our local stations, like CBC, VOCM, and NTV, shouldn't be carrying their advertisements, because these people are looking for publicity.

In closing, since 1992, Newfoundland and Labrador fish harvesters have had enough taken away from their livelihoods. The federal government started off with our commercial salmon and then promised that we would have a salmon fishery after five years. We are still waiting. On June 2, 1992, they took away our codfishery, and this year they gave us a quota of 3,000 pounds. It was a joke. Seals can eat more than we can catch.

Please don't take away anything else.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Peddle.

Mr. Larry Peddle (Fisherman, Cottlesville, As an Individual): First of all, I should say that I am not a fisherman. However, I have fished over my lifetime periodically. I have sealed since I have been 15 years old. Every year I've been at the seals, and continue to do so.

I apologize that I don't have a written submission. However, I didn't have much time, so if it's required I will do something after this meeting and send it to the appropriate people. That's no problem.

I have a couple of concerns. First, I should say that I do support the previous speakers with regard to the activists and to the insurable earnings for the sealing industry. However, my concern is a little bit different. I was so frustrated last year that I felt I had to do something to find out who makes the decisions and if anything can be done to change them.

Last year I tried to get a crew of licensed sealers to go sealing. However, I couldn't get a crew of licensed sealers from area 6. I was told by DFO that I could not pick up licensed sealers from any area other than area 6. I could have got sealers from area 5, area 7, area 11, but I wasn't allowed to take them. The other option was to permit someone to come on my boat just prior to the season opening; I think you're allowed to do that. However, in my discussions with DFO, I was not allowed to do that because I wasn't a level-2 fisherman. Although I had the required papers and everything to operate the vessel that I own and operate, I still could not sign on for a permit for a sealer unless I was a level-2 fisherman. I don't think that's fair. It may be right according to the law, but it's not fair. Enough on that one, I guess.

The other thing, I guess, are the concerns the other sealers have as well. Last year I think I was tied to a wharf 14 days, watching other sealers—including boats over 35 feet—from other areas go out and kill their seals. Nick, who lives next door to me, was allowed to go out and kill seals. I was not allowed to go out and kill a seal, because I was operating a boat under 35 feet. That only occurred in area 6, I believe. I guess my question is, who makes those decisions? What can be done, if anything, to change those decisions? You certainly can't hunt seals two weeks after the season is opened, with the season opening the second week in April, particularly with the ice conditions the way they were last year. Everything had gone north, and most people at that time wanted to get back and get at the other types of fishing they do.

I'll not take any more of your time, but again, I would be happy to do a written submission to try to get this thing changed.

As a result of that tie-up last year, I believe there was a substantial number of seals from area 6 left in the water that could have very easily been taken. I see speedboats going out and coming in, and giving up killing and tying on. My crew and other people's crew that were tied on there were not allowed to help themselves to seals.

I don't think that's right. I don't think anyone can spend money, fuel up their boats, prepare the boats for sealing and go out there and expect when you get out there that those are the conditions that will arise.

That's all. Thank you very much.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Peddle.

Mr. Peddle, it actually may be helpful if you want to put your thoughts on paper and explain the difficulty with fishing from one zone into another, and where you get your sealers from. In other areas, we've heard there were maybe too many sealers, and some of those sealers, obviously, could have been working in other areas. So it might be helpful to the committee.

Mr. Larry Peddle: I went with three as a crew last year; I could take five, but I couldn't get them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Brown, and then we'll come back to Mr. Winter.

Mr. Doyle Brown (Fisherman, Summerford, As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is Doyle Brown. I started sealing some 36 years ago on the *Gulf Star*. I always sealed on the big boats.

For the last four or five years I've had a little 34' 11", and as Mr. Gillett said, we fellows cannot afford to beat off to Labrador and take 250 seals and beat back to St. Anthony and lose another two or three days' hunting with 250 seals. It's gone clean out of our minds to send a 34' 11" out there, first.

About two weeks before the seal fishery opened last year, on the news almost every night all you could hear about was ice conditions. We were worried because the big boats—I'll say the big boats, over 34' 11"—were all concerned that there was no ice and they wouldn't want to get to the fields.

So opening day came on the 12th. I don't agree with that date. It was always the 8th. One time it was April 6. Now it's April 12, another six days later. I think myself it should be open April 8. That's a pretty good time to open it.

But to beat off up to Labrador, I went up to the line in the straits. We got one day on. The big fleet got three days on.

The other time we were up there sitting dead in the water listening to helicopters flying over telling us it wasn't open and we weren't allowed to kill seals. An hour after that there would be a plane, another helicopter, a coast guard ship going around you, and we were up there sitting dead in the water waiting for a storm to come to head back to St. Anthony.

If this is what we've got for a seal hunt, the ones who are footing this for a week, well, it's a suicide mission. If they're so concerned that the big boats had no ice, what about us two weeks later? We got three days on out of 14, and they gave the big boats three days in a row, and we are sitting like fools up there in the straits.

Now we've got to beat back some hundred miles to St. Anthony because a storm is coming, and after that we've got to beat down off the Round Hills and off to Labrador, some 350 miles from my home port.

Meanwhile, here are the seals right there through the Grey Islands, a hundred miles away. We could have killed our seals and come home comfortable. But I had to be down there three weeks, beating out all kinds of storms looking for 250 seals that I could have killed by my door.

Indeed, son, we were up off that Labrador coast, not worried—no coast guard ships down there are concerned about the 34' 11". But when the big fleet was opened up, there were coast guard ships, helicopters.... Nobody in Ottawa...I'm surprised that the Prime Minister wasn't out there his own self.

But if that's what we've got to look forward to this spring—a three-day hunt out of 14 days—while the big boats have their three days out of three days, killing seals around us, I think something has to be done with that, boy. That's not right to go up there, to beat up the straits, probably 200 or 300 miles away from home and sit dead in the water for three or four days and watch the other boats kill the seals around you, and you've got to take your ass in your hand, buddy, and beat back to St. Anthony because a storm is coming, and be in there another four or five days and then where is the ice to? Down off the Round Hills, boy.

And you've got to beat them off the Round Hills in a 34' 11"—and that's not a 65-footer, that's a 34' 11"—and look for 250 seals, and you can't come into a port. You've got to come back to St. Anthony to off-load 250 seals. I don't know where we're coming from.

We had 7,000 pounds of crab to catch last summer. I don't know what it'll be this summer. And if we've got to survive on 7,000 pounds of crab at 90¢ a pound, brother, it's like I said, they got a few terrorists up there in Ottawa there on the mainland during the summer. They should have come to Newfoundland and taken our union, because that's what I call a terrorist group, when you've got somebody there making plans and it probably takes them five or ten years to execute them.

I think what they're trying to do is take the 34' 11" out of it altogether because they don't want us out there. But I don't think that we can put up with too much of this. The 250 seals...if we've got to call in our seals, DFO knows if we've got 250 seals aboard. We're not going to call in 300 if we've got 250 aboard and take a chance of getting caught.

If we've got 250 seals aboard my boat, and there is another day's hunt in two days time and I'm out there 100 or 120 miles, why can't I stay out there those two days, wait for it to open, and kill my other 250 and come in with my 500? Why have I got to beat into land and take another two day's time and beat out there another probably 70 or 80 miles to look for the same herd of seals again?

• (0920)

Whoever's making those plans has never been sealing. I don't think they've seen bullshit.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Did Mr. Troake have a...?

Mr. Lewis Troake (Fisherman, Summerford, As an Individual): Well, basically everybody has said pretty well everything so far, but my biggest problem was in St. Anthony last year. I was sealing up there for three weeks, and we got one day and the next day we were out we wouldn't have it to count on.

The biggest problem is there are 20,000 of our seals left. We were suffering out there for three weeks, five on a crew, on a longliner. There were some down in Labrador, all over the place, waiting for a day here and there. We didn't know when we were going to get it. The 20,000 seals that were left...that's a lot of extra money in our pockets, and we don't have much to get. We were up there for these three weeks, and when we got home, people in our group had landed their crab for the season. So we were losing out on catching our crab,

which is something you have to get right off the bat. When the crab season opens, that's the best time.

There's an unemployment issue. I'd like for it to be EI-eligible for seals, because right now we don't have enough. There's not enough for us to survive.

I never wrote down anything, so I guess I'll have to make up something and write in, because basically everybody has told the story anyway.

So that's about it for me.

• (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Winter.

Mr. Jim Winter: Thank you, sir.

I'm making a presentation on behalf of the Fur Institute of Canada. The executive director, Rob Cahill, and the chairman of the sealing committee of the Fur Institute of Canada asked me to make this presentation.

For those of you who aren't aware, the Fur Institute of Canada constitutes 168 members. That includes all 13 provincial and territorial wildlife departments, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, aboriginal groups, and conservation and animal welfare interests in all sectors. So it's a national body. It represents people in the primary producing area of the fur industry throughout the country.

The Fur Institute was established in 1983 by the Council of Wildlife Ministers to act as a round table on animal welfare and conservation issues in relation to fur-bearing animals in Canada. The FIC maintains the world's leading trap research and testing program at our Alberta research—

The Chair: Mr. Winter, could we ask you to slow down just a little? Even though the interpreters have your submission, they still can't quite travel that fast.

Mr. Jim Winter: Sorry about that; it's a habit from where I grew up.

We have a research institute in Alberta that does a lot of work on the humaneness of the various killing techniques used throughout the world. It's the world's leading research institute on this, particularly on leghold trap issues.

That's basically the situation of the Fur Institute and what it represents. It's interested in sealing because people throughout Canada in the fur-bearing industry realize that the sealing issue is the animal rights vehicle, the thin edge of the wedge. Today it's seals; tomorrow it's muskrat, fox, lynx, you have it.

Before we get any further into talking about what's going on in Europe, which is probably the key to our situation right now, we have a couple of questions we need to ask each other. What have we learned from Canada's failure to address the European set of directives on an import ban in 1982? Or conversely, what have we learned from our success in countering the EU's wildlife fur ban in 1988?

First, we know that the European Parliament has no power to initiate any legislation, but they can make a declaration, which they have recently done, through signatures of members of Parliament being submitted to the commission. The commission then acts on the declaration issued by the Parliament; the Parliament does not take action itself. Such declarations, as you are probably aware, are very, very rare, and even more rare.... As a matter of fact, only twice have they dealt with issues external to the EU. Both times the issue was wildlife harvesting in some other country, not in their own countries. Both times the proposed and accepted remedy for the problem was an import ban. In 1982 it was for seals; in 1988 it was for wild-caught fur.

Both parliamentary declarations resulted in draft legislation from the commission. Both times foreign wildlife management practices were the major target, and Canadian industries in particular. The 1982 directive called for an import ban on whitecoat and blueback seal products, and was all about conserving the endangered harp and hooded seals—or at least that's what they said. Concerns about humaneness were not mentioned.

Canada either misunderstood the role of political pressure on the commission to address the public, i.e., their constituents', concern about perceived cruelty in the harvest in bringing in a ban, or Canada heard the real message but failed to develop a successful counter-strategy. Either way, we went from record prices in 1981 for seal products to nada—zero, nothing—in 1983.

The 1988 declaration on wild-caught fur was promoted by the very same groups who had led the anti-sealing activities in Europe. They succeeded with the seal directive, so they thought, okay, we'll go after the wildlife. Again, they targeted species outside the EU, not within the EU. Eventually they succeeded and a regulation was passed, called 3554/91, which is still in place today, banning all import of products from 13 wild-caught species coming from countries that had either not banned all leghold traps or had not trapped in accordance with international humane trapping standards—which was rather difficult to do, because those standards didn't exist at that time.

This time the Canadian strategy—supported by Russia and the U.S.A.—was first to confirm that the EU did not see this either as a trade or a conservation issue, but rather one of animal welfare, and then they said, well, we'll welcome the EU's interest in complementing the work already being done in Canada. We were the leaders at the time in internationally concerned issues of leghold traps.

After three years of negotiation and lobbying, much of it coordinated by Canada and by the FIC, the result was the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards, or AIHTS, between Canada and the EU and the Russian Federation. The result of AIHTS is rather interesting. AIHTS guarantees market access for countries who are signatories. It commits the parties to carry out trap research;

in other words, if you don't do the research and promote humane leghold traps, we can take action against you.

● (0930)

If you do follow the conventions of the treaty, you have guaranteed market access. That includes the EU countries that also use leghold traps. So this issue got turned back in on them, in essence. It's a very good lesson to learn, because right now all they're doing is looking at us as outsiders. They are imposing their views on us while they have no particular regulations or issues themselves.

From the day the EU ratified AIHTS, Canada enjoyed the guaranteed market, which is worth about \$80 million a year. Equally importantly, it neutered all the negative comments that were going on among the EU parliamentarians and within the EU press media. It stopped the letters going to the Canadian embassies and all that good stuff that we know happens all the time.

So what's happening now in terms of our particular problem? That's what happened then. That worked. On the seal ban, the activities of the Government of Canada failed. So have we learned anything from our success or have we learned anything from our failure? Well, in September the European Parliament passed another declaration calling for the expansion of the current EU ban to include products from all harp and hooded seal species. By the way, a record number of parliamentarians signed that. The anti-sealing lobbyists have been very active.

The European Commission has to respond by November 5. Well, we're passed that. They have to respond; it doesn't say what they have to do.

For more than two years, the Belgian and Dutch governments have been considering draft legislation that will ban all seal imports. This is not based on conservation, not based on humane killing, but based on morality and ethics. In other words, there's something immoral and unethical about our behaviour because we kill seals while they kill muskrats and a bunch of other animals.

Also, we have the German situation, an all-party resolution in the Bundestag that passes an act through their system to ban the import of all products from harp and hooded seals. It was an all-party resolution sponsored primarily by the Green Party in the coalition forum. And we all know politicians understand how coalitions work, so that doesn't necessarily mean all the politicians in the German Bundestag support this issue. It simply means they had a political problem that they had to solve, which does nothing for us because the ban is in place.

The ban has, despite some of these things I've read in the media in Canada, very significant aspects. One, we don't sell much in the EU, but as we all know or as anybody who is in the export business knows, when you start shipping goods, the major shipping points for transshipment—because nothing goes from A to B, it all goes via C, D, E, and F—in Europe are Hamburg, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and so on. If you have bans on products in the EU, how do you move the product to your ultimate destination? That's a big problem for the exporters in Canada.

The second thing is equally, if not more significant. For years the EU Commission has asked the member states to be stand unified, to act as a single body through the EU. The German legislation breaks that tradition. With the existing fact that the Belgians, the Dutch, the Italians, and the British are all discussing individual actions within their parliaments, we now have the potential to have five or six actions passed against Canada based not on humane killing, not on conservation, but on immorality and unethical behaviour. When you have that happen, you are in effect saying the public is looking at this and is saying to themselves, wait a minute, these responsible politicians in responsible parliaments in western democracies have passed these acts on these grounds, thus legitimizing them. They are legitimizing the attacks on Canadian sealers on the grounds of morality and ethics. It's a very serious issue, because that then can be transported back to our own country.

● (0935)

As you all know, within Canada, the very best polls get you an answer of maybe 60% support within the country, and that's based on people's understanding of the hunt in terms of humane killing and conservation. You can imagine what may happen if the issue is presented as an ethical and moral issue. It's something to be very concerned about. So the German ban is a serious thing from two points of view: business and, more importantly, to us as a people.

The vast majority of Canada's pelts, as we all know, go outside the EU, to Russia and China. From that point of view, we don't have to worry. These guys are not really strong in Russia and China, and they probably won't be tomorrow morning. But it is a concern down the road.

Wildlife management in the EU is a really crazy kind of a situation. In Germany, they kill about 1.5 million deer a year. Their licensing regulations and hunting requirements are a lot less stringent than those in Canada. They kill about 500,000 wild boar, including something called "squeakers", little squeakers, which are young boar. My gosh, that's terrible. An awful thing. But there it is. That's what they do while they castigate us.

In Belgium, Netherlands, and the Luxembourg area—the Benelux region, as they call it—they kill about a million muskrats annually. What do they do with them? Incinerate them. The pelt, the meat—nothing is used. That's illegal in Canada. And these are the people who are castigating us?

In the U.K., they have a deer hunt. One can quite easily argue that their deer hunting is not nearly as well regulated as ours, or as our moose hunt is, for that matter, or our caribou. The U.K. is now starting to put in culls in some places, primarily on squirrels, because they're getting out of hand and have threatened urban people. Do you know how they're going to take them? They're going to catch them

in live traps so they don't hurt them. Then they take a stick and whack them over the head to kill them. Sound familiar? It's a mini hakapik. And these are the people who want to castigate us.

So I ask you how those practices are acceptable in Europe and unacceptable for Canadians, when our regulations are much more stringent, much more well observed, and are improving all the time. We do not take the status quo as being acceptable; we strive to improve it all the time.

What's next? Well, our sources, meaning the FIC, tell us that Canada's current strategy to head off these proposed bans is to educate European decision-makers about Canadian facts, in the hope that they will change their minds and withdraw their proposed bans. In other words, what we're going to do is the same thing we've been doing since 1982.

Our sources also tell us that the Department of Foreign Affairs has concluded that the current strategy has a "very low probability" of stopping any of these proposed import bans. It would appear that DFAIT has decided that this issue is unwinnable and is therefore not deserving of the energy and creativity of thought required to develop a strategy that may have a better chance of succeeding.

The Fur Institute of Canada, which has successfully coordinated a creative strategy that kept the European markets open to Canadian wild-caught fur, has created a new sealing committee to coordinate primary source messages to complement the management messages coming from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Yet DFO and DFAIT seem very reluctant to renew that successful partnership and to work with the FIC again. Letters to Minister Emerson asking to meet and offering assistance in developing a new Canadian strategy have gone unanswered. Therefore, I would like to ask the honourable members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans three questions.

First, why has the Government of Canada not formally written to the European Commission to strongly protest their Parliament's call for an import ban? Is it because DFAIT secretly wants this embarrassing issue to go away? A repeat of the 1982 scenario might just succeed in doing that once and for all.

Secondly, what approaches has Canada made to other like-minded countries—in other words, other sealing countries like Norway, for example—or to countries with similar concerns? That would be countries like Greenland, which is very concerned about a potential market disappearing, as we are, and about the activities of the animal rights groups in both those cases. It's interesting that pretty well all these groups are banned in Norway, whereas in Canada we hand them out little permits to come and visit us.

● (0940)

Third, there is mounting political pressure on the European Commission and individual member states to do something, and the only something on the table is a ban. Canada hasn't presented any possible alternative visions, as they did with the leghold trap issue in 1988 through 1992, or 1991, whatever it was.

So recognizing that even if Canada took a WTO action, which is highly unlikely and a very expensive proposition at that, even if it succeeds, what do you gain? If I were a member of the EU and I had to face a WTO ban or response or conviction, I would simply pay the fine, because the sum total of a percentage of zero is zero. So what do I lose? I'd leave my ban in place and pay the fine.

What consideration has been given to shifting the international discussion to one looking at this as a wildlife management issue, where we can learn from the EU's humane wildlife harvesting practices, rather than continuing to educate them, as we're now trying to do? Remember that annually there are several times as many wild animals killed in the EU as there are in Canada, something most people don't realize. Yet they summarily disregard the facts and continue to castigate us.

Without a comprehensive strategy that effectively combines the talents and intelligence of DFAIT and DFO with independent fishers, biologists, veterinarians, hunters, both Inuit and east coast sealers, and those involved with the Fur Institute of Canada, who have seen this before, we fear we are choosing the course of action of 1982, not the course of action of 1988, and that resulted in failure, rather than the success of 1988.

I'm here today to urge you to recommend that the Government of Canada embrace a new, different, hopefully better strategy for dealing with the Canadian sealing issue.

Thank you very much. I'm sorry I took so long.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Winter. Your comments did take quite a while, but I think it was important for the committee members to hear them. It was a good presentation.

We usually run out of time for our members to ask questions here, so we'll start our first round, work through it, and then if we have time for a second round, what we did in St. Anthony was to allow all members a five-minute round and everybody got a chance to ask questions.

I think our first questioner is Mr. Simms.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For the sake of the people watching, Mr. Winter referred to DFAIT. For the record, that's the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. A lot of people may not be aware of that.

My question is for Mr. Winter, actually. I want to draw on some of his experiences in dealing with the Europeans. How many years have you been doing this?

Mr. Jim Winter: Since about 1978-79.

● (0945)

Mr. Scott Simms: So you have pretty good experience. When you say that right now the emphasis is switching toward an immoral act, as it were, do you think—and this is a quick question off the top—that as a government we understand what they're doing, and the action we're taking is to combat them? I mean that if they say that what we're doing is so immoral—

Mr. Jim Winter: One of the big problems has always been that there's a complete misunderstanding of what the animal rights groups are doing in Europe. I've been throughout Europe and I've done all the things that parliamentarians do—television, radio, focus groups and all of that stuff, and I've done the same thing in the United States and in Canada. My experience is that this is not about economics. The seal issue is merely a tactic of the animal rights movement to further their agenda of changing the way human beings perceive the use of animals, period. Seals are merely the thin edge of the wedge.

In Europe and in many parts of the mainland as well, you're dealing primarily with urban people who have very little understanding of killing, period. When you kill in an outdoor environment, as we do, it's very easy to make things look repulsive and repugnant and ugly. Unfortunately, we live in a modern society where the words “repugnant”, “repulsive”, and “ugly” take on a moral value. If you're pretty, you're beautiful people, that's good. If you're not so pretty, that's not so good. This is pure crap, from any kind of a perspective, but that's what's being sold. The European population genuinely believes, because of this information, that what we do is morally repugnant. This is the message they've been sold by the animal rights groups.

European politicians, like politicians in Canada, are elected by constituents. What we feel and what we tell them is secondary to the consideration of the needs of their own political constituency. So what we're facing is the reality that as much as we may set the record straight by putting a reasoned Canadian perspective forward, we're tilting at windmills.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Winter, on the reasonable Canadian perspective that you speak of, you mentioned the Department of Foreign Affairs and DFO all running parallel towards a common goal. In my opinion, the weakest link in that entire chain is Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Jim Winter: Certainly my experience is that Foreign Affairs pays more lip service than dedication to the issue. I've been in embassies and consulates throughout western Europe. As a matter fact, I've even been in some in the Middle East, and believe it or not, it comes up out there. I wrote an editorial in *7Days*, which is a Dubai magazine, after a four-page spread on Canadian sealing—in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates. The Canadian embassy in Abu Dhabi did not say one word. The Canadian consulate in Dubai did not reply one word.

Unfortunately—and again, this is just my personal experience—my feeling is very strongly that the individuals involved, as good as they may be, simply don't understand the issue or don't want to understand the issue. They respond according to the pamphlets that are sent out through DFO with about as much passion and sincerity as the average lemming. That doesn't wash with the media in Europe; it doesn't wash with the general public in Europe. Meetings behind the scenes are very good things, but unless we deal with the general public in Europe, we're finished.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Winters, one of the things that came up yesterday was the example they used of a group of politicians many years ago, including Frank Moores, a former premier, and many others I can't remember. I think someone made the comment that it was deemed a failure.

Mr. Jim Winter: Yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: If you agree with that, what happened there, and what do we need to do now to make our case over there?

Mr. Jim Winter: Frank Moores felt very strongly about the issue and wanted to do something about it. He put together a group of people, which consisted of members of his cabinet, some experts from the biological veterinarian side, and some sealers, and they travelled to Europe to convince Europeans, and to America as well. The problem with that kind of a situation is that the anti-sealing people simply ambush you if you go and do any kind of public presentation. This is just fodder for their machine. The media essentially will follow the protestor, not the explainer, and they had to call it off. They got ambushed in Washington, they got ambushed in London, they got ambushed in France, and they called it off.

The intention was very, very good. Travelling circuses like that, when you are dealing with very well-informed, very well-organized, very astute protest organizations, have a tendency to backfire. The individuals on that thing all had very good intentions, and they did individually make some very good remarks. The overall effect of it was negative.

• (0950)

Mr. Scott Simms: You mentioned the declaration earlier from the EU, and this is a pretty serious thing. Is it an EU issue, or each individual member of the EU, their member states? Is that more dangerous?

Mr. Jim Winter: I think they're equally dangerous. On the EU potential, the commission under Commissioner Dimas has been very good at sticking to what should be the considered points, which basically have to do with the conservation issues and with humaneness. Within the commission, he has been very focused. However, he is only one, and there is a tremendous amount of pressure on the commission to follow the will of the Parliament, to follow the will of the constituents. The animal rights groups are very, very active at that.

Secondly, within the individual parliaments, the animal rights groups have recognized that they need to change the focus, and they have been targeting more and more the individual parliaments, which will result in more activities like those in Germany. The problem with those things is that they then turn back in on the EU. Not only do they constitute a legitimization of the animal rights views through those individual parliaments, but it forces back on the

EU more pressure to take the action, because their argument is that we're taking the action because you didn't do it. So it just turns back in on itself.

Mr. Scott Simms: I have a quick question, and I ask the other members to weigh in on this as well.

Yesterday we talked about banning the hakapik. It's interesting, because when I was in Europe and we talked about this issue, banning the hakapik and that sort of thing, the animal rights groups actually adjusted the wording of their resolutions, or the politicians did, to include firearms as well. Evidently they want to get rid of the hunt. That's just my opinion, to preface it. But beyond that, I'd like to get your opinion, and perhaps others would like to weigh in, on the hakapik. We know the hakapik is not widely used here, but how do you feel about it?

Mr. Jim Winter: First of all, you have to look at the fact that what we're doing is killing animals. There are two humane ways to kill seals. One is a hakapik. One is a rifle. As you point out, in Newfoundland the hakapik is not widely used; about 90% plus of our seals are not killed with a hakapik. In the gulf it's a different issue, not because they like the hakapik any more than they like the rifle; it's simply a question of the ability to use a tool in an environment. They're working in much more confined, close areas.

Now, as for banning the hakapik, it's a humane tool. It has been proven again and again to be humane by veterinarians from every place you wish to consider. If you want to discuss the hakapik in terms of the optics, it looks terrible. There's this guy beating this little animal over the head. So if we stop doing that, all these people are going to go away? Malarkey. It won't happen.

So what you're doing in effect is you are trying to buy off these people by saying we know it's humane, but if you don't like it, it's not pretty, okay, we'll do that for you. You'll go away, yes? No, they won't. It reminds me a little bit of Neville Chamberlain getting off the plane when he came back from Berlin saying "peace in our time".

Negotiating with fanatics doesn't end the further you go. In Newfoundland, there are two issues with the hakapik. There's the issue of killing with it, which we don't do a whole lot. There's also the issue of being on the ice without one, and a lot of sealers don't feel comfortable not having a safety tool. I don't think from two points of view that it's worthwhile pursuing banning the hakapik, either from the practical point of view, particularly for the people in the gulf, and from the point of view that I don't like the idea of abandoning a humane killing technique simply to appease people who aren't going to be appeased anyway.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Winter.

Mr. Blais. Or was there someone else who wanted to comment on that?

Mr. Scott Simms: I was hoping to hear from the others, just quickly.

The Chair: Yes. Is there someone else who would like to comment on that?

Mr. Hedley Butler: Years ago they took away our gaff, and like Mr. Winters said, to gaff, we mostly used the gaff for safety reasons. I don't know if you people have ever jumped over the side of a boat on a pan of ice or not, but the hakapik to us right now is a safety issue as well as a humane way of killing animals.

• (0955)

Mr. John Gillett: I agree with Mr. Butler on that. It's a safety tool, plus sometimes probably you want to make sure that the seal was dead and you use it for that purpose too.

The issue is to not have all these bloody cameras out there filming it. A permit should never be given. If I go to Alberta and I go into a slaughterhouse, I'd probably throw up, and I've killed thousands of seals, thousands. I don't like it. It's part of my livelihood.

So banning that is not going to make it go away. It's the pictures you've got to stop. Misinformation.

Mr. Larry Peddle: I agree with Mr. Gillett on that. I haven't killed a dozen seals with a hakapik, I guess, during my lifetime, but it is a safety thing and I believe that for the people who are killing with it it is a humane way to kill a seal. And to stop the activists from being out there, that's the key, I believe.

Mr. Doyle Brown: Definitely we need the hakapik or a gaff. Say you kill a seal out there 100, 150 yards from your boat and you send a man out with nothing in his hands—it's a suicide mission. If you happen to fall in the water, you've got that hakapik to haul yourself back out. And not only that, if you get up there and that seal is not dead you've got something there to finish killing it off. We need that hakapik, definitely.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Good morning, everyone. Thank you for appearing before us to discuss the seal hunt issue. I'm a member of the Bloc québécois and I represent the people of the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands.

First, I'd like to make a comment on the hakapik. With what we heard about it in St. Anthony yesterday and here today, it's surprising that your premier, Danny Williams, took the liberty of making the statement he made on the subject not very long ago. It didn't help the cause at all because, at the height of a crisis, he amused himself by telling us that we should review the use of the hakapik. Let me tell you I found that inconsistent with and irrelevant to the debate we're currently involved in.

I don't think that helped us because, when you present your point of view before people, there should be an exchange based on the facts, on the truth. If you amuse yourself by making apologies or negotiating your way of doings things, you're losing from the outset. Although I very much respect Mr. Williams and I think he is paying a lot of attention to the seal hunt issue, I don't think he helped you, or us either, when he made that statement.

Furthermore, I would like you to provide us with slightly more detailed comments than those of Mr. Simms on the strategy of the

Canadian government and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. I think the work should be done by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. That department should be the leader in this strategy, in cooperation with the people from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade or any other department that could potentially help. Somewhere a leader is needed on this issue.

Mr. Winter, first of all I'd like to hear your comments on the ineffective strategy that has been used to date. What conditions would be necessary for it to be effective? What alternative solution or procedure do you suggest for it to become effective?

• (1000)

Mr. Jim Winter: It will be easier for me to answer you in English, if you agree to that.

[*English*]

As Monsieur Blais says, it hasn't been successful in the past, so if it ain't working, maybe it's time to fix it.

The question is whether DFO is really the leader. Well, DFO's mandate, according to their statements, their bureaucracy, and their minister—ministers, in the plural... By the way, remarks about sealing and the strategies and activities of times past are not based in any way on a partisan view. As we all know, there have been a variety of governments over the period of time since the 1960s when this started, and the only thing that's been constant, really, is the bureaucracy, not the political side.

The Chair: None of us at the table would ever be partisan.

Mr. Jim Winter: Of course.

DFO interprets its mandate as explaining and defending management policies, not defending the citizens who engage in sealing. So is DFO the appropriate lead department? I'm not so sure. Yes, we have more than adequate management philosophy and practices. We run probably the best wildlife management killing operation in the western world, but defending that is not the issue. The issue is how do we stop people who are using arguments that have nothing to do with the operation of sealing, other than in a facile manner, but have to do with a desire to end killing of a particular species with, as I believe, the ultimate goal of extending beyond that species to others?

It appears to me that the main player should be the Department of Foreign Affairs. These activities are led by foreign groups, primarily American-based and British-based, and take place in foreign countries. They are attacks upon the respectability, reputation, and dignity of Canadian citizens, whether they be Inuit, Quebecers, or Newfoundlanders, with the odd time some sealing taking place in other places. These are reprehensible, and something that citizens of a country should not have to accept.

Therefore it seems to me that the explanations of the management of the hunt are fine and dandy. We've seen how effective that is, but the Department of Foreign Affairs is in a much better position to argue with foreign governments as to the reprehensibility of their parliaments passing regulations on the activities of Canadian citizens when Canadian citizens are following the legal dictates of their government.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Winter, I read the statements that were made not long ago before the committee in Ottawa by the people from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. They told us — and tell me if you agree with me that this is a relatively weak strategy — that our missions in Europe, on the advice and counsel of Ottawa, in particular of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, adopted an approach that was proactive at times and reactive at others, depending on the circumstances.

Starting in early 2005, to support the missions in their efforts, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade organized training and information sessions for Canadian staff and locally engaged employees responsible for providing information.

They said they had maintained consistent virtual contact with a network of missions to ensure that standard messages were transmitted across Europe.

When I heard that — and I'd like to have your opinion on this — I thought it lacked substance and action. If we always react, we run the risk of always working on their terms.

This is a war of images. In addition to the image of the whitecoat that's still used and that causes a lot of emotion, they use the words “baby seals”. We don't talk about baby cows, baby deer and so on, but they use the expression “baby seal” and the image of the whitecoat.

• (1005)

[English]

Mr. Jim Winter: When is the last time anybody ever heard, in a public battle, facts defeating emotion? It doesn't happen. We are sitting in a situation in response to exactly what you have identified. On paper, a lot of what our people are doing looks great. In reality, it doesn't work. We've had 40 years to figure this out. And unless we change our strategies, I don't think we're going to be around.

My biggest concern is, to follow up on what you're thinking... The people and the individuals in the Department of Foreign Affairs are very nice people. They're doing what they're told to do, but they have no commitment and no heart in it. And you can't blame them. They don't understand it, most of them. They have very little exposure to it. They've never been to the Magdalen Islands; they've never been to Nunavut; they've never been to Newfoundland and Labrador. To them, it's a foreign concept. They're mostly urban people. They don't associate their food with the killing of a baby cow. They don't associate their kid gloves with a young animal. Yet we're asking them to go out and take a brochure that is produced by DFO and explain something. How can they put passion in it? How can they put emotion in it? And if you don't put passion and emotion, you're lost.

You have to realize the enemy we are looking at is not the parliamentarians of Europe. It's not the little old lady in Hamburg who donates money to an anti-sealing group. It's not the little old lady in Boise, Idaho, who gives money. It's not the little old lady in Manchester. It's the people who put the propositions before the little old ladies that encourages them to donate. That's who the enemy is.

And these people are smart. They are media savvy; they are well organized. And we go off half-cocked. This year, we're sitting around. I was watching an exchange of e-mails. Who is the leading group? DFAIT is saying it's FA; FA is saying it's DFO; DFO is saying it's somebody else. We're going around in circles again. You'd think after 40 years we'd have our act together. So far, I don't really think we do. The ultimate payer, if we don't have our act together, is the citizens of those areas that depend on it. These are rural communities throughout eastern and northern Canada where nobody gets a chance. Their income is comprised of a mosaic: a bit of this and a bit of that and a bit of the other thing. All put together, it looks like a pretty picture. You take one stone out and the whole thing crumbles and they can't live in the villages. And sealing is that stone.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Winter.

Somehow you got eleven minutes out of that, Monsieur Blais. I don't know how that happened.

We'll go to our next questioner, Mr. Manning.

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

And I want to thank the people for coming forward this morning and making their presentations. As it was yesterday, it's a learning experience, to say the least. I'm not going to try to pretend in any way, shape, or form that my experience with the sealing industry is anywhere compared to the people here at the table. But I have some questions on your work itself.

I want to continue in the vein of Mr. Blais' question to Mr. Winter. As you told us here this morning, you're a man who has great experience, not only with the industry, but with the biggest problem we face in the industry, and that's the marketing of our product to European countries, the States, wherever. Not to put words in your mouth, but you've outlined several concerns that you see as the way things should not be done versus the way they should be done. If I were to ask you, as I am now, to name two priorities where you think government should be able to go into Europe or into the States, whatever the case, and take these two bulls by the horn, as we say here in Newfoundland, and to further the ideals of what you're trying to do in the sealing industry, what would the top two priorities be? I'm looking at it from government. If you were to tell the government today about the two things we should do now to help your industry and promote your industry and save your industry, what would those two things be?

• (1010)

Mr. Jim Winter: I think there are two issues. One would be internal. There are a lot of things that need to be fixed up that a lot of these other gentlemen have brought up: the question of the EI, the question of the regulations governing boat size, movements, loading principles. All these administrative things need to be done.

Externally, we need the Government of Canada to stand up to the European countries and say: "It is unacceptable for you to attack citizens of our country, following the dictates of single-issue groups who use—and I don't think this is overstating the case—violence of language and portrayals. If you have no facts, there is no conservation issue. We have six million seals; we've tripled the herd in the last 30 years. Conservation is not an issue. Our killing techniques are better than yours. You will not pass acts, without retaliation, attacking the dignity, the respect, and the rights of our citizens."

That would be what I would do.

Mr. Fabian Manning: When you say we don't need to—

Mr. Jim Winter: Of course I'm not a politician and not a member of the government. It's easy for me to say.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Fair ball, and that's what I wanted to hear.

When you say it's not the parliamentarians in a lot of cases that we have to convince in Europe and other places, how in your mind do we reach out to the ordinary Joe and Mary on the street whom we need to convince in the populace?

I remember back when Captain Morrissey Johnson and others went to Europe trying to promote our seal hunt, and they met with the protests. It seems that the protesters are well organized, as you said, and well funded, and they grabbed the media attention, because there is nothing as bad as blood coming out of a white seal on white ice.

What, in your mind—and you've been over there yourself—would be the best way for government to approach getting to the general population of European countries?

Mr. Jim Winter: Mr. Manning, I have a lot of ideas about that. I'm not sure a public forum is the place to discuss them. I don't mean that in any kind of negative way to you, or to the committee.

Mr. Fabian Manning: No, I appreciate that.

Mr. Jim Winter: I think, whatever needs to be done—and as I say, I do have ideas, and there are a lot of you who have ideas—you need to get the ideas together before you go public with them, because I'll guarantee you one thing: ten minutes after you come up with the idea, they'll know about it.

So I'd just prefer to avoid the question, if you don't mind.

Mr. Fabian Manning: No, that's fair ball. The struggle, I guess, for government, whatever party is in power, is trying to find a mechanism to get that—

Mr. Jim Winter: Ask me after the meeting.

Mr. Fabian Manning: I will.

Again, we're dealing with situations where the hearts override the minds.

Mr. Jim Winter: I think fundamentally that's exactly right, and if we do not come to grips with the fact that we are dealing with a propaganda campaign that is unparalleled in the twentieth century—the latter half.... I won't say the twentieth century, because there was certainly a very good, parallel campaign run in the 1920s and 1930s that resulted in a democratically elected government going on to behave in an abhorrent manner.

This campaign is equally efficient, equally well-run, and it has equally captured the minds and the hearts of European and American, and I must say, some Canadian people, with the same kind of tactic. It's called the big lie. If you repeat a big lie, the thesis goes, often enough, sooner or later people start discussing details. The minute you are discussing details, the big lie has won. That's what we're dealing with. We're not dealing with facts and figures; we're not dealing with economic realities. This is what we're dealing with.

• (1015)

Mr. Fabian Manning: Yes.

I want to get back to Mr. Gillett, if I could. Correct me if I'm wrong. Did you state that 75% of your income came from sealing this year?

Mr. John Gillett: That is correct, sir.

Mr. Fabian Manning: And none of that income was permitted to be EI-eligible?

Mr. John Gillett: No, but it was taxable.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Are you aware that there are sealers for whom part of their catch is EI-eligible in this country?

Mr. John Gillett: I didn't understand you, sir.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Are you aware—because I wasn't until yesterday—that there are sealers in parts of Mr. Blais' province who are allowed to use part of their sealing income for EI eligibility?

Mr. John Gillett: No, I was not aware. It doesn't surprise me, though.

Mr. Fabian Manning: If I understand correctly, it's part of how the catch is recorded in regard to the boat itself—the people who put, more or less, labourers on the boat versus being a shareholder. That's how they get around it; that's how they do it. I wanted to know if you were aware of it, because I wasn't aware of that until yesterday.

I find it amazing that you go out on the water and fish, it's all fishing. You fish or you seal and you can't use it as income, especially when it's 75% of your income. Yesterday we were dealing with about 20%, but at 75% it really blows it out of the water for me.

In regard to the hakapik, I haven't run into a sealer yet who's against using a hakapik as a safety tool as much as part of the work. So I don't think you should be listening to anybody else, except for the people who are around the ice, when it comes to that.

With the protestors, again I have a big problem. It's the only industry that I know of where people can go in and interfere with your job, and not in any way, shape, or form be penalized for it, unless there were some small situations earlier this year.

I don't know if anybody mentioned this morning—I'm trying to make some notes—the hail system. Yesterday we heard in St. Anthony a fair bit of concern with the hailing system. I want to know, because there was some concern up there on Holy Thursday. Then things were shut down Good Friday, Easter Saturday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday. There was no way to phone in, because the staff from DFO weren't there. Would you give us some idea of your experience with the hailing system, anybody who would like to answer?

Mr. John Gillett: Around the coast of Newfoundland, usually you're somewhere where you can get to a coast guard radio, but there are places in Newfoundland and Labrador where you wouldn't be able to hail in because your VHF radio or some other means.... There are going to be isolated cases where you won't be able to hail in because there's no cell coverage and no VHF coverage, or you mightn't have a big set on your boat. There are going to be times when you're not going to be able to hail in, but generally, you'll pass the information along to a second party who'll be able to hail in.

The other thing is that probably what you got from St. Anthony is the same thing we've been talking about here today. It is that we have to hail in and then we have to remove the seals from our boat. DFO doesn't have anybody counting seals on weekends. We have to wait from Saturday to Monday or Tuesday for them to count the seals that have been killed. That means we're out beating around in the ice. I have a 34' 11" boat—she's not called the Comfort Inn—with five people on it out there for two weeks or three weeks. I'll tell you that, now.

I'm saying that the excuse by DFO last year was to slow down the hunt, but you must realize that seals, when they're going north, they go at 25 miles a day, usually 25 miles in a 24-hour period. Like Mr. Brown was saying, you stop that for four days, they've gone 100 miles. That's 100 miles you have to steam to get to those seals again. Our season should be open earlier. It should be open around April 8, because the seals are in the water. Once they get in the water, you have a very, very hard job to kill them, to get them, a very, very hard job.

Premier Williams said to ban the hakapik. There was no consultation with sealers before he made the statement. Mr. Williams is not a sealer, that's the bottom line. I don't tell a farmer how to grow something, because I don't know how to grow a stinging nettle. Do you know what I mean? A lot of things have been said about the seal industry by people who don't understand the industry.

• (1020)

Mr. Fabian Manning: I guess that's the purpose of our visit here, trying to find out so we can make recommendations.

One more question—

The Chair: A quick question, a very quick question.

Mr. Fabian Manning: In regard to your TAC, Mr. Winter talked to me and we've seen incredible growth in the seal herds for the past number of years. Last year, 2006, I think it was 325,000. In your

view, can we sustain a larger TAC or is it environmentally and economically okay at the level we're at? What's your view on the TAC?

Mr. John Gillett: My view is that we can probably kill even more if the market is there, but we should maintain the market.

Mr. Fabian Manning: We don't want to dry out the supply and demand.

Mr. John Gillett: We don't want to dry it out, but I think we certainly can take more seals out of the seal herd that's there. Most of the studies that are done are done on harp seals. We have a lot of grey seals, we have a lot of hooded seals, we have a lot of bearded seals, and what we call dotards or jar seals. We have a lot of those, but they're not included in the equation. When you count seals, you only count what's on the ice. You don't count what's under the water, because you don't know what's under the water. If he says there are six million seals out there, I say double that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gillett, and thank you, Mr. Manning.

Gentlemen, we do have another group to hear from. It is 10:20, and I know that everyone has more questions. We can go overtime with this group and the next group. But if we take another half-hour and allow a five-minute round for each member, would everyone agree to that?

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): I'd like to suggest that in the interest of time, if those out-of-province members want to ask our sealers some questions, I think they should be afforded an opportunity. I'm willing to forfeit some time to my colleagues who may have questions that may be more obvious to me than to them.

Mr. Scott Simms: I agree, and I think that's a good idea.

The Chair: Good show, guys.

I know that Monsieur Blais will take his five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I'm ready. Thank you very much.

I'll try to be as generous tomorrow back home, on the Magdalen Islands.

I'd like to hear your comments on something quite specific, the training of seal hunters. First, does the association, or another group, provide you with training?

Mr. Gillett, would you like to answer?

[*English*]

Mr. John Gillett: Yes sir, we've had training. We have fellows who have been sealing for 50 years, who could teach the instructors, doing training courses. We know our work, we know how to pelt a seal, we know how to kill a seal, and we don't need any more training. Seeing some of the videos that are on television, maybe there should be some training for some people.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: That's precisely the problem. Earlier we were talking about images, emotions and information campaigns.

In my opinion, with all due respect, you know what to do, and so on, but in dealing with propaganda, you have to provide verified and verifiable information that hunters have the opportunity to take several hours of adequate training so that the hunt is less cruel. That's one way of proceeding. That will also make it possible to counter that image that the hunters are only hunting for pelts, for the economic aspect or what have you.

• (1025)

[English]

Mr. John Gillett: I have on my vessel assistant sealers. When one comes aboard the boat, we teach him the right way to dispatch a seal, the correct way to pelt a seal. We want people there who are professional. We want to get the maximum from the seal that we can.

You can have a training program. I didn't benefit from the training program—I took it, but I didn't benefit—because I had the time in. If the government would see this as a benefit, which I doubt—if anything, they want to get clear of the seal hunt—you can do what you like.

The bottom line is that they want to get clear of killing seals. Maybe I'm wrong in saying that. Maybe they don't want it. Maybe they want to make more money from it. I think the worst thing that could ever happen is that the seal hunt would disappear, and I guess they would just turn it off on kangaroos or something else, I don't know, on bottom trawling, or something like that. It's not going to benefit me by adding that.

Mr. Hedley Butler: It's not going to benefit me either, because my best trainer was my father when I was only a boy. It's nice to bring in training on safety—not a problem. But when it comes to training us old fellows again, as John said, we can teach some of the instructors how to do it.

As I said in my presentation this morning, red on white doesn't look good, no matter what you kill. If you kill a moose in the snow and cut his throat, red on white, that's not a nice thing. But you didn't see any cameras when I got my moose.

That's the problem we've got. These people are going out there, and one of these days...until somebody says they are not allowed out there. But when somebody gets killed, the Government of Canada or Newfoundland will say “No more permits”. That's what it's going to come down to. The fish harvesters right now are pissed that much. There's going to come a time when someone gets hurt over this. I don't want to see it. It's far from my mind, but when that happens you'll say there'll be no more cameras allowed and no more news media. That is what's going to happen.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Butler...

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blais and Mr. Butler.

Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming today. As committee members, we want to give first line to our Newfoundland colleagues here because they're representing your interests first. However, I want to say that your views have been very well put forward today. Some of the things you've said are news to me, although we've had hearings on this before.

Mr. Winter, you put your case forward very forcefully and passionately. You raised some good questions about letters that seem to have gone unanswered. We are very interested in the things we're not discussing this morning about how we might move forward on this with the Fur Institute and DFAIT to actually form a strategy to combat this more forcefully.

We face similar issues here on the coast in the nose and tail of the Grand Banks with lack of enforcement. Now we're starting to take these issues much more seriously, and I think we're making headway on that front. There is hope on moving ahead on this file, but we obviously need to come up with a more effective strategy. For the record, I just want to let you know that message has been heard.

I am concerned about comments from fishers like Mr. Brown that he has to steam all those miles out there, sit idle for several days, put his life at risk because it's stormy out there, and then have to wait while other boats come along. It seems to me that when this season is as short as it is and you're trying to participate in the crab fishery as well, we have to look at management strategies that allow you to do what has to be done as quickly as possible. That might be helpful in keeping some of these other concerns at bay.

We've heard your message that science supports the use of the hakapik. I probably shouldn't say this on the record, but doggone it, I live on a hobby farm on Vancouver Island. It's about as far as you can get from here, frankly. If anybody had been around when that mink got in my chicken house and we were confronted by six dead chickens.... At the end of the day only one of us came out alive, but it was quite a battle, I'm telling you. It would have been handy to have had a hakapik or something. Those critters are fast.

I want to ask about incidents. You mentioned that you've been worried about people getting hurt. We were in St. Anthony the other day and we heard about fishermen being harassed. They're supposed to be 30 metres away. Have there been incidents here of people being in your face violating that? We had fishermen talk to us the other day about people attacking them with sticks, making threatening phone calls, naming their boats, publishing names, having people phone their homes and threaten family members, and so on. Is that part of your experience here as well? Can you elaborate on those concerns?

• (1030)

Mr. Jim Winter: It's happened to me. I've had death threats. I've had people threatening to skin my children alive, when they were much younger, so that I would understand how a mommy seal feels.

I've also seen people confronting sealers on the ice, when we've been there. But that goes back a few years.

I think Hedley's point about observers is well taken. There are no observers and there never have been. There are simply protesters who go under the guise of observers.

It is inconceivable to me how a man like Jerry Vlasak—a man who is banned from entry into the United Kingdom, who is banned from entry into Norway, because of his well-known, clearly espoused views that it is perfectly acceptable to kill human beings—could be endorsed by the Government of Canada and given a permit to be out confronting sealers in the Magdalen Islands. I don't understand how that could happen.

I think you have to look at the sealing operation as an outdoor abattoir, as Hedley has referred to it and as all the guys do. We know what it is. It's an outdoor abattoir. In Canada, abattoir workers work inside walls, on private property, and are protected from confrontation with anybody. I think, as do many sealers in Quebec and Newfoundland, Canadian sealers deserve the same protections.

There are examples in Canada of public lands and public properties being closed to the public for reasons of public safety or reasons of ecological concern—i.e., don't walk on these daisies; they're the only ones in the world, so we can't let you in there. There is absolutely no reason why the Magdalen Islands, an area that unfortunately, from the point of view of the Magdalen Islanders, is extremely accessible to all these protest groups....

The people on those islands are the ones who have to put up with an awful lot of stuff, even more than we do. We have the advantage of being a little bit harder to get to. Of course, that's not to say we haven't had to put up with our own amount of crap—excuse the language—over the years.

Can anybody explain to me why Canadian workers, obeying the laws of Canada, should be subjected to this type of harassment? Because I don't understand it.

On the other hand, I do think it is imperative that we have international veterinarians—independent veterinarians, not sponsored by animal rights groups—observing what we're doing. We do, like everybody else, want to do it properly. We would like to improve.

To my mind, and I think most sealers in the Magdalen Islands and in Newfoundland would agree with me, the whole concept of permitting these protesters under the guise of observation is just leading to disaster. As Hedley has said, and I agree with him, it's going to be a big problem one of these days; somebody is going to get hurt. It's like the old intersection where they don't put the darn spotlight up until after somebody's dead.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Winter.

Thank you, Mr. Lunney.

Mr. Kamp.

•(1035)

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

I think most of my questions have been answered, but let me ask a question or make a comment or two.

To Mr. Winter, you haven't said much in terms of our relationship with the United States with regard to sealing. Have we lost that battle, do you think, or should we do anything more there? That's one question.

As well, you've said that you can't approach an emotional issue with just facts; that's a losing battle. However, I still don't think I've heard an answer in terms of what approach we need to take here. If we try to approach it emotionally, don't we just play into the hands of the media-savvy folks you refer to? It's an argument that's difficult to win no matter how we approach this, it would seem.

Maybe you could just recount for us what you think that strategy should be.

Mr. Jim Winter: On the first question, the original branch in America came under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which has been superseded by ICES and so on. But the Americans haven't changed their perspectives, or their attitudes. There was a small activity going on in the Senate prior to this last election, with about 10 or 15 senators basically pushing a “we're the good guys and these are bad people” kind of thing. It's not really a very serious thing.

However, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which exempts us from marketing in the United States, is a big problem. In all the areas where these bans went into place, whether it's the EU or America, the market didn't go away; the market is still there. The people who were buying before will buy again. They are prohibited from buying by their state. We, the state, know what's good for you—it's as simple as that—and we're going to tell you that you can't have this product.

I think that whatever action the Government of Canada is undertaking in terms of America, it has to be around the Marine Mammal Protection Act. If I understand it correctly, there is a lot of discussion going on in the United States right now around the Marine Mammal Protection Act. I wouldn't just write that off. I certainly would keep the focus on that.

As to your second question, as I said to Mr. Manning, I don't particularly want to go into too many details of my particular ideas of what needs to be done. But I do think there's one thing. There are a lot of very, very capable people in Canada who can deal with issues like this in any kind of a forum you choose, whether it's with the general public, media, or political people. Some of those people are politicians. Some of them are lay people. I would not undersell our abilities, and I certainly wouldn't oversell theirs. Just because they've had a free reign for 40 years is no reason to keep giving them one.

Mr. Randy Kamp: A question for Mr. Peddle. You said you had trouble getting licensed sealers. I think you mentioned that part of the problem was that you weren't a level-2 fisherman. Can you tell us what that means?

Mr. Larry Peddle: The problem I had getting licensed sealers was that I was not allowed by the regulations to pick up a sealer, other than a sealer from a particular area. I agree about giving local preference, but if I can't get them locally, I should be able to go to Bonavista Bay, or somewhere, and pick up a sealer. But I wasn't allowed to do that. On the other end, prior to the sealing season opening, DFO did say that you could permit a sealer. A non-sealer without a licence could go, but you had to be a level-2 fisherman before you can permit. Although, if I was a master mariner, for example, I wasn't allowed to sign on that sealer.

Mr. Randy Kamp: How do you become a level-2 fisherman?

Mr. Larry Peddle: For a level 2, I understand you have to fish for a number of years, and you have to be active in the fishing industry, not the sealing industry. You have to be a core fisherman.

I'm not knocking the fishermen, don't get me wrong, but it was very frustrating that I couldn't sign on someone when I had the required skills to operate that boat.

The Chair: Mr. Butler.

Mr. Hedley Butler: I can probably answer the question about how you become a level-2 fisherman. Years ago, when you first started off, you had a part-time licence. The fishermen of Newfoundland and Labrador are professionals just like an electrician is a professional. You have to go through certain schools; you have to fish for so long, and you work up through the system. You fish as an apprentice, you go to level 1, and then you become a level 2. After you become a level 2, you can buy a core licence. It's very simple.

● (1040)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

I know we're out of time, but we're going to take a little more time.

Some of the members have some quick questions that are not going to take three or four minutes in preamble. Why don't we start, and any member with another question can certainly feel free to ask it.

Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Thanks, gentlemen.

The three-year management plan was introduced a few years ago—the rolling plan—where there's 975,000 animals that can be taken over a three-year period, basically. On average, that's 325,000 in any one particular year, but allowing rollover between years. I think that has been very helpful to the industry.

I want you to talk a bit about opening and closing times and fleet quotas. The whole objective here is to be able to get as many seals as possible at the best possible price, and to manage the fishery as reasonably as possible. Is it helpful or hurtful to the seal fishery to have different opening and close times, different fleet quotas, and so on?

What do you think, John?

Mr. John Gillett: I think in our situation in area 6, the rollover is all right; there's not a problem with it.

I lost my train of thought. What was the question?

Hon. Gerry Byrne: The opening and closing times.... There's a three-year management plan with a rollover, so what you don't catch this year, or if there's quota left in the water this year, you can move it over to next year. That seems to be a really sensible or practical way to manage any fishery, not just seals, but other fisheries as well. But each year we seem to get in.... I think someone said—I can't remember who—that 20,000 seals were left in the water unnecessarily this year. It seemed you were saying that's because of the intense regulation, the micro-management of this industry.

Is it helpful? Is it hurtful? Some small-boat fishermen like it in some instances, but sometimes they don't; big-boat fishermen like it in some instances, and sometimes they don't. It all depends. Should we have more of it, or should we just open it up?

Mr. John Gillett: I think you should open it up. I think the opening of the season for us has been put forward and forward because of the ice conditions; the ice is melting faster and we're losing a lot of seals because of it. I think we should go back to at least April 8 and open it then.

But as for the rollover, I agree with it. If it's not killed, we'll roll it over for the next year, but everybody's going to have to speak for their own zone. I mean, what's good for me in area 6 is probably not good for somebody in area 4, or something like that.

I certainly think we should be allowed to hire sealers from other areas, but as the regulation states now, if I've got a person on my vessel from area 5 he's got to cease when the quota in area 5.... Although he is on my boat, he's got to stop; I've got to put him ashore.

Where did they get all this?

Hon. Gerry Byrne: He's a shareman or a—

Mr. John Gillett: He's a shareman; he's only working on my boat. My boat is licensed for area 6. Right? But if I've got a fellow from area 5, he's got to stop.

We were sealing the other year and we stopped on a Friday for a count. We had to stop Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. We stopped hunting seals for three days, and were waiting, all ready, for it to open again. All of a sudden we saw two more boats coming up where we were. Well, that's fine, you know, you're not allowed to kill any seals, so that's all right. We'll share our seals; that's not a problem. All of a sudden they started killing seals. They were from area 5; we were from area 6. They killed all the seals around us and left.

I mean, that's ridiculous.

● (1045)

Mr. Jim Winter: It keeps Ottawa happy.

Mr. John Gillett: I don't know who it keeps happy, but it sure as hell doesn't keep us happy.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Thanks. That's good.

The Chair: I'm not sure it keeps Ottawa happy either.

Anyway, Mr. Blais.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Butler, I'd like you to provide more details on the seals' diet.

I know that seals eat cod, or that they ate cod, because there's less of it now, but they also eat other things. Do you observe that they're now eating more crab or other species such as lobster?

[English]

Mr. Hedley Butler: First of all, I've got to correct you there that there's less cod. In my book, there's not less cod. Years ago we used to put out 40 gillnets and probably get 3,000 to 4,000 pounds of cod, and now we put out one net and we get 1,200 pounds of cod. So there's not less cod, so don't kid yourself. Don't let anybody kid you, because now in Bonavista Bay there are more species of fish than you've ever seen. The problem we have—and I speak about codfish, mackerel, and squid—is we can't sell it. This year has been a booming year for fishermen in the area where I live, but we can't sell anything any more. I don't know what happened. Millions of people in the world are starving to death, but we can't sell anything.

The last few years we've been seeing seals eat codfish, with just the belly part eaten out, lumpfish, belly part eaten out—miles and miles on the bottom of the ocean where seals had eaten it and left it. We see them with salmon in their mouths. We've seen them with capelin. I never did see them with any crabs. But I have experienced a harp seal down as far as 180 fathom of water in the gillnet.

If we don't control the seals—and this is another big part, probably something we never touched on—if the Government of Canada gives in to the IFAW and says we're going to close the seal fishery, every other stock.... I can air a statement that came on the radio not long ago that said in 2048 the oceans will be clean. The oceans will be cleaned by the seals, because they're millions. They're not thousands, they're millions. And if we don't control them....

All we're asking for is whatever the market can sustain, that's what we want to kill. That's all we're asking for.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Mr. Manning. We'll come back to you, Mr. Lunney.

Mr. Fabian Manning: I want to ask Mr. Gillett two quick questions.

How many buyers do you have in your area for seal products? That's the first part of my question. I guess you're aware of the plans for 2008 with regard to the processing and the possibility of forthcoming regulations that all seal products be processed here in the province. Maybe someone else can answer too, but it's just from a feedback point of view. Trying to get the best dollar value for the pelts that are up now but at the same time trying to create employment as well in the province is kind of a see-saw thing we're always involved in here. There's always concern about competition when we get back there; that was the big issue.

I wondered from a sealing industry point of view, because I'm not totally familiar with it in my area, how do you see that unfolding? Are there concerns within your groups?

Mr. John Gillett: There's not a problem with the buyers. If we had as many buyers for fish as what we have for seals, we'd be all right.

You take so long to ask a question, I forget what you said. I dealt with your first one. What was your second one?

Mr. Fabian Manning: With regard to 2008, the new regulations are going to come in that all seal products will have to be processed in the province. My only concern with that is are you going to put the few buyers you have now that are creating the competition at the end of the wharf for you fellows, that are keeping the price up and making it sustainable, or are you concerned that some of the companies will be taken out?

Mr. John Gillett: Obviously. In the province now, we have so many fish plants and they want to eliminate some of them. When they go, we'll have to have something in their place. I can see what's going to happen there: if they don't pay the price for the seals, Quebec is going to get them. We'll come to Quebec; we'll come somewhere else. We have to have competition, and it looks like it's being taken away, almost like it's being taken away along with the fish, and that's why we get such a low price on our fish.

• (1050)

Mr. Hedley Butler: I don't agree with taking away our competition. I don't care where it's to. I know the people of Newfoundland and Labrador want to make a living too, but we also have to make a living. Once you take away our competition, you can forget the fishermen. We're not going out there. There were years we wouldn't go at the seal fishery because there was no competition. But we've got competition—leave it there. The majority of the processors around this island are getting their fair share of the seals now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Manning, and thank you to all of our presenters and members on the committee.

I would like to leave you with a couple of thoughts. We have studied this issue in the past, I think twice actually, at the fisheries and oceans committee. We are studying it again. I am not about to prejudge the committee and what we'll bring in for a report, but I can tell you that in the past we've been very supportive of the industry.

As chair, I'll tell you that governments have struggled with the issue and are continuing to do that, but our job is not to prejudge what any government is going to do. Our job is to try to present them with some alternatives.

On that comment, Mr. Winter, I'd be very interested in hearing more testimony, from you in particular. That testimony could be in written form. It could certainly be kept confidential and in camera, if that is your wish, and we would be very respectful of anything you would have to put forward to us.

I can tell you this is a difficult issue. I know different people have tried and we've had discussion around the table of how we deal with the hakapik and the image of clubbing the seal. There is no discussion on whether or not it is an acceptable method; it's all about how to deal with the image.

The protesters are problematic. I am not going to give a speech here, but I can tell you that I stepped out of the house one day at the time they were harvesting seal penises for the Asian market and I had a microphone stuck in my face. The question was asked, "What do you think of that?" I said, "You've already killed the seal. You've already sold the skin. You've already harvested whatever meat is harvestable. So if you have another product from this animal that can be sold, why not?"

From that, I got put on Greenpeace's hit list. Most of these letters come from a long way away and I really didn't take them too seriously, but I remember one in particular. I am going to share it with the committee and share it with you. It was from this lady, I think in Colorado but she may have been a little farther south than that. She said she was a 78-year-old grandmother and was absolutely appalled by anybody who would make such a terrible statement. She

went on to talk about male mutilation and castration and a number of issues, which I really didn't take kindly to.

You can't deal with that. I agree with your statement. You can't deal with that, and that is something we have to try to deal with as a committee.

Monsieur Blais has been to the European Council. I've been to the European Council. Mr. Simms has been to the European Council. I met with the foreign minister from Belgium, who, by the way, is supportive of the industry but would never say that publicly. We've met with DFAIT. We've met with various ministers, in the previous government and this one, who have been supportive of the industry.

I think we have to sit down and try to come up with some type of strategy that has the potential to work, because what we're on seems to be a slippery slope and is going in the wrong direction.

On that comment, I want to say thank you again for coming. It was excellent information, very informative and useful to our study.

I am going to ask all of our members to stay at the table and I would ask our presenters to stay at the table. I am going to adjourn. We do not allow cameras during the session. We have a couple of people who want to get some pictures. So if we just sit tight for 30 seconds, we can do that.

I am going to adjourn. I'll ask you to sit tight and we will start our next meeting.

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