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Chair

Mr. Gerald Keddy

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• (0910)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC)): I have a few words of greeting before we call the meeting to order. We still have a few members to arrive, but it is ten past nine, and for the sake of starting the meeting somewhat on time, maybe we could get started.

First of all, I'd like to welcome the members from the European delegation here. It is a real treat to have you in Canada. We were certainly well received when we were at the Council of Europe. We appreciated that, and we would like to have a frank, open, and fruitful discussion here today.

If I could, I would propose a slightly different format for our own membership today and for the European delegation. Rather than following our normal speaking order, perhaps we would be better served to have a more bilateral discussion, with perhaps five minutes for the speaker and five minutes for people to answer. We'll try to keep it within a reasonable timeframe, with more leniency going to our guests and less leniency going to our regular members.

I will recognize our members who are here. Then I would ask the leader of the delegation from the European Parliament, Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain, to introduce their members.

We have Bill Matthews, who is our vice-chair; Gerry Byrne; Monsieur Blais; Gérard Asselin, a new member of the committee; Fabian Manning; and James Lunney.

Mr. Ó Neachtain.

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain ((UEN - Ireland), Parliament of Europe): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With your indulgence, I will ask the members to introduce themselves. I will start with myself.

My name is Seán Ó Neachtain. I'm a member of the European Parliament for the west and northwest of Ireland, and I'm a member of the fisheries committee in the European Parliament. Coming from an island nation, we are very interested in fisheries, so I'm a member of the fisheries committee and of the transport and tourism committee within the European Parliament.

I will start now with Lasse.

Mr. Lasse Lehtinen ((PES - Finland), Parliament of Europe): Lasse Lehtinen is my name, and I come from Finland. I'm not a member of the fisheries committee. I know absolutely nothing about that.

Mr. Ian Hudghton ((Greens/EFA - United Kingdom), Parliament of Europe): I'm Ian Hudghton. I represent the fishing nation of

Scotland. I'm an SNP member and am also a member of the fisheries committee, and have been for eight years, in the European Parliament.

Mr. Toomas Savi ((ALDE - Estonia), Parliament of Europe): I am Toomas Savi, coming from Estonia. Estonia is a newcomer in the European Union. I am also not working on the fisheries committee. I am a member of the development committee, so I know something about poverty in Africa.

Nevertheless, Estonia is a sea state, and we have more than a thousand kilometres of coastline. We're not fishing it.

Thank you.

Mrs. Agnes Schierhuber ((EPP - Austria), Parliament of Europe): I'm Agnes Schierhuber from Austria. I'm on the agriculture and rural development committee. As you know, Austria has no seaside.

Mr. Iles Braghetto ((EPP - Italy), Parliament of Europe): [Witness speaks in Italian]

Mr. Den Dover ((EPP - United Kingdom), Parliament of Europe): I'm Den Dover, from northwest England. I'm a British Conservative member. I'm on the committees on industry, research and energy, transport and tourism, and also regional development. I'm therefore not a member of the fisheries committee. But it's a very key interest to us, and to my colleague Gary Titley, in the whole northwest, with a large coastline.

• (0915)

Mr. Gary Titley ((PES - United Kingdom), Parliament of Europe): I'm Gary Titley, also from the northwest of England, but representing the British Labour Party. I'm not on the fisheries committee, but as Den has said, it is a major issue for us, particularly the Irish box.

The Chair: Welcome. There is translation. English will be on number 1, French on number 2, Italian on number 3, and German on number 4.

With the formalities done, I'll call the meeting to order by Standing Order 108(2), our study on the Canadian seal hunt.

I'd like to remind our guests and my colleagues that as a regular meeting of the standing committee, this meeting is public and is being recorded and transcribed.

Again, welcome. Perhaps we could give you a little outline of our study on the Canadian seal hunt. This committee has studied the seal hunt on a number of occasions. We thought the topic was relevant, given some of the moves of the European Parliament, some of the motions coming before the Parliament.

We spent some time doing a fairly comprehensive study once again that included the front off Newfoundland, the Îles-de-la-Madeleine in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and Nova Scotia. Most members will certainly speak for themselves, but most of our members represent fisheries ridings and have a fairly extensive background in the fishery.

Without further ado I'll invite the chair, Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain, to begin.

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just before I start, one of our members is detained somewhat, but he will be along. Duarte Freitas, from Portugal, is also a member of the fisheries committee. In his absence, I want to introduce him, because he has some very direct views on fisheries.

As members of the committee with relations with Canada, we're delighted that we have the opportunity to discuss the fisheries issue, because of course, as we mentioned, many of us are on our own fisheries committee. But let me tell you from the start that I believe there's a vast difference between what we discuss, at times, and what might be discussed in other regions on fisheries, because the common fisheries policy is all basic remit within that committee. We are, I might as well say, somewhat critical of the way the common fisheries policy is organized, but it is our policy, and we endeavour to ensure that we keep the fisheries sustainable and that we preserve the stock that we have.

As Gary Titley mentioned, I was only a few days in the European Parliament some years ago when I was entrusted with the arduous task of protecting what we call the "Irish box", which is a very sensitive spawning grounds in the Atlantic Ocean into which many other member states wanted free access. But we did preserve that somewhat at the time, with the help of everyone in the European Parliament, and I believe now with our commissioner, Commissioner Joe Borg from Malta, we are endeavouring very much to bring about sustainability and preserve the fishing stock that is in our seas.

It's not an easy task, because the stock is diminishing. We have to understand that if we do not act and curtail overfishing, and particularly curtail the amount of bad fishing habits—let's put it that way—that we have brought about over the years, we will have no stock into the future to fish with. In that regard, we often come to a misunderstanding, let's say, with some member states.

I would like to point out that the legal remit for fisheries is the responsibility of the Council of Ministers, who annually come together—and that will happen now quite soon, in the month of December—and agree on the quotas and the TAC, or total allowable catch, and the quotas that go to each representative member state. Of course, that has an historical consequence in that when the quotas and TACs were originally given out in Europe, it was based on the capacity of each member state's fishing fleet at the time. Things have emerged and changed since, but there is no opportunity to give any

change to that quota and TAC, because it must be proportionate to the original division that occurred because of the member states' capacity to fish—in other words, the tonnage and available boat capacity of the member states.

So that has been a cantankerous issue since. For example, a member state such as Ireland—and I'll only give my own parochial view—has 11% of the seas, but we have only something less than 4% of the action. We're not very comfortable with that, but it's a sharing policy and we have to understand that we have to work within that. But the main concern at the moment is the sustainability of fish stocks, and that will be.

● (0920)

I know you have raised the sealing issue. We would not be as *au fait* as you are with that particular area of fishing, so we look forward to having a very good exchange of views on that. It is true that a declaration has been signed in the European Parliament and that is the position of that declaration at the moment, but it's merely a declaration. It is a request of the commission to report to Parliament and the Council of Ministers, and of course the deliberations of that report will be seen into the future.

But the situation as it stands is that I cannot remember that we dealt in any great depth in the fisheries committee with the subject of sealing. So we look very much forward to your conclusions and to your deliberations on that.

We have also in our presence a member, Ian Hudghton, who is longer on the fisheries committee longer than I am, and we have selected him as our spokesman here today. So if you don't mind, I'll hand over to Ian.

Mr. Ian Hudghton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not here as our selected spokesperson to promote the written declaration that was signed by a majority of members of the European Parliament. That's partly because I haven't signed it, but I'm not surprised that a majority of members did.

To be precise, it calls on the European Commission to draft a regulation to ban the import, export, and sale of all harp and hooded seal products. It doesn't specifically say we call on Canada to end the seal hunt, because that's not within our power of remit. I presume in some ways it could be considered that a ban on the trade and products could be, although that's a matter of opinion, I know.

I'm not surprised that a majority of members signed this declaration, because it was accompanied by a very high-profile and well-organized campaign of pressure, shall I say, or contact being made with members of the European Parliament. In my particular case, and I suspect we were all in the same position, I had hundreds of contacts from my own constituents demanding that I sign this written declaration, and these requests from constituents were very often accompanied by some of the graphic images that I'm sure you're very familiar with in terms of the brochures, and websites, and so on of animal welfare organizations. That's really the context in which that declaration gained the necessary majority of signatures.

As I did yesterday, I'll raise this particular newspaper, which is from last Saturday in Scotland. *The Scotsman* newspaper's front page says "From the killing fields of Canada to the shops of Scotland", with coloured pictures of a young looking seal about to be thumped with a club. That is the context as far as our constituents are concerned, although I have to say that *The Scotsman*, at least, in the two-page story that was inside the paper, did devote a quarter of a page to the viewpoint from Canada.

One of the reasons I didn't sign it, apart from the fact that I'd been to Newfoundland and Labrador before and had had a certain amount of background on the other side of the story, is that I knew we were coming here on this particular mission, and I am here again—and I think we're all here—in full listening mode in terms of hearing not just your views but those directly involved in the industry's views, so that we can properly weigh up the evidence that was put to us by those who promoted this written declaration with the views of those directly involved in communities affected and involved in the hunt or the harvest of seals.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hudghton.

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: Mr. Chair, just one more member has asked for the floor on our side, with your indulgence.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: Gary Titley.

Mr. Gary Titley: Thank you, Chairs.

I indicated I'm not a member of the fisheries committee, so I don't want to make any statement, but I would like to ask some questions, if I may, for clarification from the Canadian side.

The killing of the whiteback seals is illegal now, but my understanding is that as soon as they lose their white fur, they're open to be killed. Is it correct to say that some 95% of harp seals are less than three months old when they're killed? This is a species that takes a long time to come to sexual maturity, so therefore it's quite difficult to judge the long-term effects of killing things so young.

I've seen figures suggesting that although there has been an increase in the harp seal population since the 1970s, that is an increase on a very low level from before. It's been suggested to me that at the current approach the harp seal population will be reduced by some 70% in the next 15 years. I wonder if you would comment on that.

Also, in a discussion we had last night, it was suggested to me that the seal hunt is still very important economically, yet figures I've seen suggest that in Newfoundland and Labrador it only represents about 0.5% of GDP, which compares very little with fishing and tourism, for example. So how big an industry is this, and how really important is it? It was suggested to me that a lot of fishermen rely on the sealing for their income, but I've seen other figures that suggest their income from sealing is only about 5%; it's not a huge amount. That may well be a crucial 5%, but I need to get a feeling for that.

We've had statements from the Canadian government saying that the seal hunt is carefully monitored, but I've also seen figures that suggested that this year in the Gulf of St. Lawrence the quota was

exceeded by 40%, so it rather suggests there wasn't that close a monitoring.

Perhaps you could give me some answers to those questions. It would also be helpful to know where exactly are the markets for seal products. Where do they go? What exactly are they used for?

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to give a quick answer to that on behalf of the committee, if I may, and then we'll give some of our other members an opportunity to speak.

Those are all good and legitimate questions, but you should be aware that in the low cycle of the harvest in the early 1970s, there were about 1.9 million seals in the northeast Atlantic. Today, by conservative estimates, we expect there are about 5.9 million seals. Many people will tell you there are more seals than that.

I will give you a quick example of my own. I used to work in the offshore oil field as a driller in the offshore in Sable Island, which is an island about 225 miles off the coast of Nova Scotia. When we first went out there in 1980—it also has horses on it—we used to always count the horses as we flew over in a helicopter, and you could literally count the seals on the northeast spit and the southwest spit. Eight years later, it was crowded for two miles on either spit, because that was the down point of the harvest. Those are primarily harps and greys. There are some hooded. There was a huge explosion in the population. That explosion was mainly because we were rebuilding our markets for seal products around the world, and it was simply at a low point in the harvest. But it was an exponential increase in the amount of seals.

On the east coast in Nova Scotia, if we think about grey seals for a moment, they've also adapted to fishing practices, and when you talk about the amount of fish a seal eats, you've got to multiply that by five, because they eat only 20%. The seal only eats the stomach and the soft internal organs of the fish. It'll rip the skin off the fish, because the skin's full of oil and it's very fatty. So whatever the estimate is on the amount of fish that is eaten, multiply that by five.

The other issue you spoke about is percentage of GDP. That's a convenient number found by a bunch of NGOs who are against the seal hunt. Quite frankly, in any of your ridings, if you took a group of individuals involved in any resource sector and said that an addition of \$15,000 or \$20,000 to their income in a very low employment area wasn't important, you would be mistaken.

Of course, in the overall economy of the country and in the economy of the province, for instance, in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is a small portion. For those individuals, it may be 50% of their income, it may be 30% of their income, but it is a significant portion of their income.

I see some of our observers smiling at that statement, but they've obviously never tried to live on \$15,000 or \$20,000 a year or less. But if you live in the outports of Newfoundland or in a coastal community in Nova Scotia, dependent upon employment insurance for most of the year, your income from sealing is extremely important.

Forty per cent of the quota exceeded: I would be shocked at that statement. I don't know where it comes from. We have allowed for an increase in the hunt over the last several years. That increase has been governed on the side of conservation. As I've pointed out, we went from a herd of 1.8 million or 1.9 million animals in the early 1970s to a herd of 5.9 million or 6 million today. So obviously the overall health and sustainability of the herd has never been threatened.

Your final question was on the beaters. The beaters are young animals without question, but they're fully weaned and have been abandoned by their mothers. So they're on the ice independent of any parent to depend on or to be fed by. They simply lie on the ice and live off their fat reserves until they're able to enter the water. They are forced by starvation to enter the water and learn to fish on their own, and it's instinctive. They're not taught to fish. They're simply abandoned by their mothers.

That's a quick rundown. My membership will have me hanged on the yardarm if I speak too much, so I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Bill Matthews, our vice-chair and first speaker.

• (0930)

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to welcome our visitors. It's nice to see you here, and it's nice to have this discussion.

I just want to make a couple of comments in reaction to what a couple of your speakers have said.

I want to make it clear from the very outset that we're all very concerned about sustainable fisheries—very, very concerned. It's one of our major objectives as a committee and for me as a member of Parliament representing a predominantly fishing riding in Newfoundland and Labrador. So sustainable fisheries is a big priority for us.

Of course, very closely connected, directly linked to sustainable fisheries, is sustainable communities and sustaining our rural populations. A big factor in that is a rapidly growing seal herd that consumes a tremendous amount of fish resource of some type, whether it's cod, or crab, or shrimp, or whatever. It's one humungous amount of fish resource.

I'm not saying that seals are the only factor in our diminishing fish stocks, but it's certainly a very important factor with the amount of fish resource that they consume.

The gentleman to my left talked about sexual maturity of seals, about taking them so young and how long it takes them to become sexually mature. If you look at a seal herd that has gone from two million to six million over the last decade or so, it's obvious that there is a lot of sexual maturity amongst the seal herd. I don't think

that's a matter of major concern, that they're not sexually mature enough to reproduce.

Science tells us that a seal herd of two million animals is sustainable. We're now at six million, according to science. That's only harp seals, by the way. That's not including the grey seals that our chairman alluded to, or the hooded seals, or the harbour seals. They're in addition to the six million harp seals that we say are in the ocean today, consuming these fish resources.

There are a number of issues. We've had a moratorium on cod since 1991 or 1992. We've taken some tough measures in this country and in my province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Again, I repeat, one of the biggest struggles we have is sustaining and maintaining our rural way of life, and managing the seal herd in a humane fashion is vitally important to rebuilding our stocks.

Our chairman has alluded to income. If any of us in this room—any of us, not only the politicians but the staff and everyone else—had to try to live on what those people live on, they would consider their income from sealing to be very significant. If you were to lose a quarter or more of a \$20,000 to \$25,000 income, it would mean having butter for your bread or none, or maybe not having any bread.

So that's the battle, and that's why we have chosen this study.

There are two reasons. One reason is the impact of the seal population on fish resources—and we feel that we owe it to the world, by the way, to rebuild those fish stocks. It's not just Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Atlantic Canadians and Canadians. We think we owe it to this great world to rebuild that tremendous protein resource that has been there for generations.

I think I'll conclude my remarks there.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Matthews.

Perhaps we'll go in the usual order and try to give everybody a chance, and then if there are some more bilateral discussions, we'll enter them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Blais, please.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Thank you very much.

As a politician or an MP, when I have to speak out about some issue, I think it is good to proceed as follows. It is important to look at both sides of the picture. I would even go so far as to say that it is important to look at all three sides, not only the front and the back but also the thickness. Sometimes, this gives us a completely new insight and helps us to make a decision.

I applaud your initiative. I am glad that you are taking the time to listen to us and to exchange information with the seal hunters who will be telling you more about the situation in a few minutes.

In my opinion, the declaration that was signed by a majority of MPs basically flouts all the rules. In fact, they have forgotten to look into the situation before solemnly declaring that all products of the seal hunt are banned. It looks like they are jumping to a conclusion without considering the consequences.

Unfortunately, we are facing a demagogic disinformation campaign about everything that is going on. Seal pups have not been slaughtered since 1982, but the image of a seal pup is of great help to the abolitionists' campaign, the humane society and the International Fund for Animal Welfare or IFAW. It helps them collect more than 3 or \$4 million. For instance, for the Magdalen Islands. I would even say that it allows them easily to gather tens of millions of dollars. We should find out exactly how much is gathered through this campaign. The campaign uses pictures of seal pups. Personally, I was appalled when I saw Brigitte Bardot who came back to the battle line recently, and presented a poster portraying a real baby lying in its blood on the ice.

What does this mean? This means that they are trying to portray seals as humans, despite the fact that baby seals are being killed and not human babies. Do we hear about baby cows, baby chickens and so on? Why are they projecting this kind of image? The sad fact is that they are simply resorting to demagoguery and disinformation.

Clearly, we are dealing with an outdoor abattoir. What would be the effect of images of outdoor abattoirs if they showed chickens being slaughtered according to the current methods, if they showed all the animals, and especially pigs... Pigs are less attractive, less compelling. However, seal pups have a very compelling image, unfortunately. This is the situation we are facing. Let us look at things the way they really are. This is the kind of situation we are facing.

This is why your initiative is important. I applauded and I am very glad to be here today. I know that we intend to go ahead with this. And so, you will respectfully present to us what you have been told or the way you see this issue. We, in turn, will endeavour to give you as much information as we can. Then, you will make a decision, but it will be an informed decision.

That is the crucial part of the debate. We must debate this issue, let us remove the masks and shed some light on the facts. It will be up to you to accept or reject what I say, but at least you will have heard me out. We really must emphasize this.

Let me now turn to the seal hunt in the Magdalen Islands, in my riding with a population of 13,000. For these 13,000 persons, the seal hunt is more than just a custom. In fact, it used to be a custom. We have been hunting seals in the Magdalen Islands for the past 200 or 300 years, but some time ago, seal fur and seal skins have become lucrative.

● (0940)

We hunted seals in the past and we are still hunting them, but the economic factor has completely changed. With this in mind, we assumed our responsibilities. In fact, the hunters are trained. They are not only informed but they are also trained to hunt properly.

On the other hand, for a Magdalen Islands fisherman who hunts seals, the seal hunt can account for up to 20 or 30 % of his annual income. That is what the hunt is currently worth. Seal skins are not

the only valuable thing; some industries process seal fat. Moreover, there is research and development to find out what can be done with seal oil. Some ideas and projects are already afoot, but you will see that seal oil has very valuable properties.

We must also emphasize that in the tourist sector, people come to the Magdalen Islands before the seal hunt. From a helicopter, they can see what is going on and they can actually see the seal pups and enjoy the beautiful scenery.

On the one hand, we must realize that the seal hunt is not threatening the seal population with extinction, because the Greenland seal population has been growing substantially.

On the other hand, Greenland seals are not the only ones. There are other seals that are much bigger than Greenland seals. The seal population is constantly growing. I saw with my own eyes a site that I had never seen before. In fact, on the 600-kilometre Gaspé shoreline, we now see grey seals on the beaches, there were none before. This means that there is a population explosion. This is something else that we will have to look at. Nonetheless, it shows what the situation is.

This is why it is important not only to start discussing, but also to carry on discussing. We had an opportunity to do this yesterday. We are doing the same today, but it would be important to do the same again tomorrow, because in my opinion, as we are facing a demagogic disinformation campaign, you will have an idea of the value of the testimony brought before you.

Soon, you will be coming to Newfoundland and Labrador. I would like you to come to Magdalen Islands and I would certainly extend my personal invitation to you. However, I must stop now because I have gone over my time.

I thank the chairman very much for his indulgence.

Thank you very much. In any case, we will certainly have the opportunity to pursue this debate further. Thank you.

● (0945)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Blais. The pleasure is all ours.

As our guests can see, our membership is fairly passionate about this subject. Sometimes we feel a little boxed in and threatened by it, I think, but certainly I would like to convey our appreciation once again to all of you for coming here and having an open and frank discussion. Thank you also for hearing us at the Council of Europe at the Committee on the Environment this spring. Although we were a non-voting member, we were able to at least present a few points at that committee, and that was very much appreciated.

In terms of your list of questions, after speaking to our research people, we will give you a written answer to all of those. You should know that the TAC last year was 325,000 animals. Of the Quebec TAC or the Gulf of St. Lawrence TAC, 7,000 were the North Shore, and 18,000 were the Îles-de-la-Madeleine. The North Shore TAC was exceeded, but the overall TAC was not exceeded.

I'll ask for your understanding here, and I'm sure you can appreciate it in your own coastal communities, that the climate is changing. The ice has changed dramatically in the last decade or two here. It no longer comes at the same time of year; it's about two weeks ahead of time. It's no longer the same thickness or to the same extent as it used to be. Therefore, it is an issue of fluidity. The seals that are on the ice are in different places than they would have been a decade ago. Therefore, it does take some changing of circumstances in adapting to changing the TAC. However, the overall TAC, the total amount of animals allowed to be taken, was not exceeded.

I'll go to our next member. Mr. Manning.

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

I'd certainly like to take the opportunity to welcome you to Canada. Just as a point of note, for most of us or all of us around this table, our forefathers came from your side of the Atlantic Ocean. My own came from the counties of Waterford and Wexford in Ireland.

I represent a riding from Newfoundland and Labrador. As did our forefathers and our present fathers, in many cases, we've made a living from and sustained our livelihoods from the land and the sea. We've always done this, in whatever way, shape, or form. The killing of any animal, in any way, is not a pleasant sight, by any stretch of the imagination. I think we all realize that. It just happens that our abattoir is wide open to the world. You can be flown over in a helicopter and you can look at it. You can land on the ice and partake and see for yourself, when many animals are killed behind closed doors.

I guess from an animal rights perspective that is the catalyst that drives them, gives them the opportunity to paint us in Canada as barbarians, in many cases. To be honest with you, I have lived here for 42 years now, and I don't consider myself a barbarian in any way, shape, or form, and I don't consider my countrymen barbarians in any way, shape, or form.

The seal hunt is an important part of our economy. It's an important part of our livelihoods and has been for many, many years.

It's not easy to compete with the glamorous and rich. It's not easy to sit down, with an income of \$25,000 a year, and 30%, 40%, or 50% of that income derived from the sealing industry, and be able to put your case forward, compared with the Paul McCartneys of the world. It's not easy.

That's the dilemma we find, as politicians and parliamentarians, in trying to take the message that these seal hunters have and relay it to you people here today and to the European Parliament. I guess that's the tough position that we've been put in, to try to sell this as what it really is.

It's one of the most humane hunts on the face of the earth. We have had independent veterinarian working groups participate and watch over the hunt as it's taking place. We have had sealers who

have bought into the fact that we are in a very competitive world trying to sell this hunt, so therefore we have to ensure that we have a picture to the world that is not the picture of a barbarian.

What does the hunt mean to the fishermen in Newfoundland and Labrador and to the fishermen of Canada? It's a very important part of their income, it's a very important part of their family income, and it's a very important part of their communities. As Mr. Manning touched on earlier, sustaining economies and sustaining rural communities—I'm sure each and every one of you have that same objective as members of Parliament.

We've just finished hearings throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Quebec, and we listened to sealers themselves who came before us, just like you are here today. They told us how important the seal hunt is to them, and so on. But they also told us of some tactics that the animal rights groups had used. To be honest with you, it brought my eyes wide open.

They give an example of a fisherman in St. Anthony, in the northern part of Newfoundland and Labrador. His name came about through the protestors, and they continuously called his home. They continuously threatened him and his family. They went as far as to say—and this is all public knowledge—"We'll skin your children alive." But nobody hears that side. Nobody hears what the protestors are coming forward and doing to the people of our country, because that's not on the front pages of newspapers. But that is reality; that is what's happening.

● (0950)

You look at the TV screen and you see whitecoats being slaughtered. The fact is that 1987 was the last time a whitecoat was slaughtered in this country. That's what sells, and you can put it anyway you want to. You have a white seal on white ice and red blood; it's going to sell to the world. That is the situation we're trying to deal with here.

I welcome the opportunity to have you here in our country for the simple reason that we have an opportunity to get back to you with the facts and the figures, and what we believe is the reality of this hunt. It's a hunt that has grown to become, as I said, the most humane hunt in the world. That hasn't come easily, and many things had to be changed within the hunt.

If the seal population is so detrimental, we have to ask ourselves why the population has tripled since the 1970s. The population has tripled since the 1970s. These estimates are peer reviewed. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans estimates are peer reviewed. So it's not something that's isolated to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The hunt is sustainable. I even questioned one of the sealers during our meetings: the population has tripled since the 1970s, we have a TAC that's 325,000, would you like to see the TAC increased? The hunter answered no. He said, no, we have a good hunt here now; we have a good product from America and we're doing very well on it. He said that's where they want to stay. It's not a grab-all situation we have here.

The bottom line is that we are involved in a hunt, and we can look at all the different hunts that go on in the world.

I'll finish up with this at the present time. I'm being a little bit repetitive.

No hunt is nice to look at. No killing of any animal is a pretty sight. The fact is that we have the most humane hunt in the world that's very regulated. Contrary to what others may try to convince you of, it's very regulated.

To throw a question back, I'll finish with this. How do we as Canadians, as parliamentarians, go across the ocean to the European Parliament and to the countries of Europe and get our real message across to the people—the real message, not the one that's bought and paid for by the animal rights groups, the real message of what the seal hunt is? It's important to the people of Canada. It's important to the people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As some would say in court, that is the truth, so help me God.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Manning.

We've had an opportunity for a group of our members to speak. Perhaps we would offer the same opportunity now to some of our colleagues from the European Parliament.

Are there other comments or further questions?

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for those comments. Now I will allow some members who have asked for the floor. First, Mr. Freitas wasn't here when we started, so I'll give him the floor.

Mr. Freitas.

Mr. Duarte Freitas ((EPP - Portugal), Parliament of Europe): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm Duarte Freitas. I'm Portuguese from the Azores, some islands in the middle of the Atlantic. I know quite well the problems of farmers and the fisheries communities.

The first thing I want to express is my solidarity with the people of Canada, the fisheries communities, that are hunting seals. I did not sign the declaration and I will never sign a declaration like this, because we have to understand the whole picture and not only what some NGOs and some media place before our eyes on the front pages. You have to understand this.

Of course there is the issue that we are not barbarians. We cannot kill the animals or the fish like we did two or three centuries ago. We have to upgrade on this, causing the least suffering possible for the animals, but we cannot be so naive as to think that we will not kill any more fish, any more animals, and we will eat vegetables.

This is not the point. I think one of our colleagues from Canada pointed that out very well. We are worried about the sustainability of the fisheries and the sustainability of the fisheries communities. They are linked. We cannot fish everything today, because we will not be able to sustain the ecosystem and the fisheries communities. We have to face this very carefully. We have to pay attention, and I am going to give an example. I heard what was said about the population of the seals. I will give you an example in my area, the Azores.

Until 1984 we hunted whales, but not with harpoons. We never hunted whales with that gun, but only with little boats with seven people, like ants trying to catch the whales. It was a very heroic

thing. Many people were injured or died, of course, but it was the only way to get food for their families. After that time we stopped killing the whales, and then the dolphins too, of course, because it is a very media-attracting thing. At this time there are lots of whales and dolphins, and of course this does not help the balance of the ecosystem. We have to do something. What can we do? I am sure that some years from now—10 years, 15 years, I don't know how many—we will be talking about sanitary reasons and balance-of-the-ecosystem reasons to kill some dolphins and whales. Things are like this, and we cannot be naive.

I know it's politically correct now to defend everything that can hurt animals and fish. But, my friends, do we all want to be vegetarian? No, I don't think so. I don't want to be vegetarian only. I respect those who want to be, but it's voluntary. No one can make me be a vegetarian.

In the European Parliament especially, we sometimes go too much into politically correct things, and lots of times in this direction. We have to see the whole picture, and especially we have to take into consideration that some environmental NGOs have not only environmental reasons to be in the field. I have experience myself in working in the European Parliament with some NGOs who lobby for economic reasons, not for environmental reasons. I think this is growing. We have to pay attention to this, because some of the pressure they put is to earn money for their own organizations. I'm not talking about all of them in all situations, but we have to take this into really good consideration.

• (1000)

For example, in my family, we were farmers. I don't accept that anyone can say to me they care more for animals than I do. I don't accept especially an urban guy who comes to me saying that I don't respect animals. Please. My family and I have always been with animals, and along comes an urban guy who lives in a block and says he loves animals and respects them more than I do? Please. I don't accept this.

I'm sorry to be so frank, not politically correct, but I think that these days we cannot all stand in this politically correct direction. We have to have some cutting positions. If not, we will not get anywhere, anyway.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: Thank you, Mr. Freitas.

Two more members have asked for the floor, and I will give them in order: Gary Titley first, and then Ian Hudghton.

Mr. Gary Titley: Thank you for those answers, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for offering to provide them to me in writing.

I don't think I got an answer to my question, though, about where exactly these markets are. I want to be clear as to what the picture is, as to where seal products from Canada go and what they are used for.

Secondly, you yourself raised an interesting point about global warming and the ice conditions changing and the ice actually retreating. I had some direct evidence of that on holiday in the Rockies, in walking up a glacier that has retreated by about two miles in the last 40 to 50 years. But because, as I understand it—and as I say, I'm not an expert in this field—the seals need the ice in order basically to give birth and for the youngsters to thrive originally, what studies have you done on the effect the retreat of the ice fields is having on the birth of the seal population, and does that influence decisions about quotas?

Finally, could I just be clear on your answer? You say that although there were variations in the TAC in different parts, the overall TAC was not exceeded, that this brought it on schedule.

• (1005)

The Chair: I'll start with your last question first. On the overall TAC—I just double-checked the numbers again—there was a 6% overrun, but the overall TAC is still based on 70% of the herd, so there is some fluidity allowing us to change there. The herd that's left has to be 70% larger...am I correct in that?

I was close.

The TAC is actually set by what's called objective-based fisheries management. It's used to manage the harp seal hunt and it's designed to ensure that there's an 80% probability that the harp seal population will not fall below 70% of the maximum observed population. We can give you that in writing as well. That's the way it is set up.

The ice retraction is more of a difficulty for the sealers than it is for the seals. The seals will simply whelp on the islands and on the beaches and on land if the ice is not available. Certainly that has happened in Nova Scotia. The ice generally doesn't come in to the southwestern area of Nova Scotia, where I'm from, but it does come in as far as the Cape Breton Highlands, the northern part of Cape Breton Island. The last few years it has not been there, so we've seen, on all of what we call the eastern shore of Nova Scotia, seals whelping on the islands and on the beaches.

This year there was a bad storm in the middle of whelping season, and most of the pups were drowned because they got washed off the beaches. The NGOs actually wanted Natural Resources to go and pick these seals up and somehow bring them back and have a major human interference in the birthing grounds. It really wasn't a practical answer to something that was happening.

The markets are many-faceted. There is certainly a big market in skins, and it's a sustainable, biodegradable product. It's a good product: it's very tough; it's a very beautiful product. There's that market. A lot of those skins are processed in Europe and then sent on to Asian markets. There's a huge market in Asia for seals.

There's a market for the omega-3 oil. There's a lot of it sold in North America, and certainly in Canada. I suggest you all buy a bottle before you go home. It's an excellent product and it's good for your health.

There is some market in northern Europe, certainly in Norway and Russia, but I'm not the expert on the marketing. There is a large market and it's a growing market.

Mr. Gary Titley: I'll follow up here, with your permission.

What effect would it have on your market if the EU were able to, which I don't think it is, ban all seal products within the European Union? Would you simply sell more elsewhere, or would it have a detrimental effect?

The Chair: I think the concern here is having a reputable organization shutting down a product not based on any realistic proof or fact. That's more our concern.

I agree with you. I don't think this would stand an outside chance of anything actually being passed before the WTO. I would very much agree with that statement. However, it does cause us some grief, quite frankly, in other areas and other markets. We don't simply market seals in Europe. It's a very small issue for us; however, it's still an important issue, and it should be for other nations as well.

Are there any more speakers? Some of our other members will want an opportunity.

• (1010)

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: Mr. Chairman, I have two more requests from our side: Ian Hudghton and Den Dover. We'll allow them, and then you can come back.

Thank you.

Mr. Ian Hudghton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Like Gary, I was interested in the value of seal products being imported to the EU and I had asked the European Commission in Brussels before we left and hadn't been able to get an answer to that. But one of your officials whom I spoke to yesterday gave me this paper this morning, which does give a breakdown. I'll give it back to you. Perhaps it would be more appropriate for you to answer the question than for me. It's certainly given here.

I think there's a question here of how you now get your message over to us. Well, that's part of the reason we asked that this particular issue be on the agenda here and partly why we want to go to the coastal areas that we're going to.

Perhaps it might be slightly helpful just to put on record the status of the declaration—where it is now, our role. A written declaration is, in effect, one of the tools we have as individual members or groups of members to promote whatever interests we might have, and if a majority of signatures is achieved, then it's over to the European Commission, which then is duty bound to respond. But I think I'm right in saying they're not necessarily duty bound to obey. Correct? So we now await the formal response of the European Commission.

I would suggest then that giving your views to the European Commission would be helpful before they give their formal response. Our position as members of the European Parliament is to reflect public opinion in our constituencies, and that's why, as I said earlier, I'm not the slightest surprised that we got a majority, because public opinion in our constituencies cannot accept this kind of thing. They just can't.

One of my questions is this. Is there nothing that can be done in terms of changing methods so that we don't have this kind of image being beamed around the world? As long as this can be circulated, it's a no-win, I would say, in terms of public understanding, apart from perhaps in our own coastal areas, where they do understand the economics of living off the natural resources of the sea and how, in the case of Scotland, there are many similar concerns from the point of view of our commercial fishing fleets.

We have had a number of questions suggested to us by various people, including the Grey Seal Conservation Society of Nova Scotia, based in Nova Scotia, who question the authenticity of the independent veterinary inspections that were mentioned. I just want you to amplify that you do in fact have veterinary inspection and approval and, in particular, respond to some significant allegations that a significant amount of skinning alive has been observed. Can you comment on that?

Also, very specifically, from the Nova Scotia organization, there are questions about potential food safety hazards in connection with the processing methods. The suggestion is that seals are processed under fish inspection protocols as opposed to meat, if you like, or mammalian meat, and the possibility that there may be certain infections carried by seals that could be passed to humans and into the food chain in the otherwise healthy products out of the seal.

• (1015)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): I would like to hear your reaction to the same issue.

[English]

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: Mr. Chairman, I just want to clarify one thing. I would like to clarify this issue of the oft-quoted declaration and the technicalities of that, if I may. I will ask our representative to the commission, the EU Ambassador to Canada, Mr. Dorian Prince, to give you directly what that entails, because I think there is a misunderstanding perhaps and I would like it clarified at this stage.

H.E. Dorian Ford Prince (Head of Delegation and Ambassador Designate, European Union - Delegation of the European Commission in Canada):

As was pointed out by Mr. Hudgton, the European Parliament declaration calls upon the European Commission to take action. The commission is not obliged to take action, and even if the commission were to take action, it would be in the form of a proposal, which would have to get a majority of the member states in the Council of Europe, plus approval of the Parliament. So it's a long process. But what is very important, I think, is that today there is a discussion at the European Commission in Brussels on the reply to the European Parliament.

If I could make a suggestion, you have talked about a study you are doing, and I think it would be very helpful if an extract of that study could be on the commission's table at the very latest on Monday next, because the commission will be obliged to reply to the Parliament very quickly, since not only is there a Parliament declaration, but there is also now a resolution of the Council of Europe. You can imagine the lobbying and all the pressure the animal welfare organizations will be putting on the commission, so I would expect the commission to come out with a formal reply to the Parliament within the next week. That is my guess.

I would strongly urge you to supply as much information as possible at the highest level. I would even suggest perhaps a letter to the two commissioners responsible: Mr. Dimas, who is the main commissioner responsible on our side, and Mr. Borg, of course, officially.

I would strongly recommend you to do that, and please, as quickly as possible.

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: Thank you, Ambassador.

Just to finalize on our side, I will ask Mr. Den Dover to take the floor.

Mr. Den Dover: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Prince has covered one of the two points I wanted to raise, and that is, really, where are you up to? Your letter to the commission would be a very good summary, which you will copy to us, no doubt, because I would like to know whether you are undertaking a study, whether you have completed the study, and whether this is one of many ongoing studies all to do with sealing.

My other point is that under the topics listed for today we have "State of the fisheries in Canada: adaptation since the moratorium on cod fishing". Cod fishing and the lack of stocks in European waters is a major issue, and it affects Mr. Titley's and my own region in the northwest very much. I hope that in the time remaining we will be covering that matter. We've dealt with the general study and your inquiry very satisfactorily, but if we could turn to cod and other aspects of fishing in Canada, I'd be very grateful.

The Chair: If we don't have an opportunity before lunch, we can discuss some of those other issues—NAFO and the fish stocks—over lunch, but we will try to get to it, certainly.

I would just reply very quickly to the ambassador's request for our report. Unfortunately, our report will not be ready by next week. We have just completed our travels, and we have a bit of discussion. I would not think we'd have our draft report ready before Christmas, and since we don't sit during the month of January—or, as they say in Newfoundland, "January month"—it would probably be early February before we'd be able to have our report. We could, however, certainly put something together outlining a number of areas that might be helpful to the group, and we could give you our last report on sealing—which we did, I think, in 2002, so it's fairly recent and it addresses a number of the same issues.

If I may, I will ask our members to try to get another round in here. Perhaps I'd ask that some of these independent questions.... Maybe Mr. Byrne could reply to the issue of seals being skinned alive, and the working group of international veterinarians.

• (1020)

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and 100,000 welcomes plus one to our distinguished guests—Your Excellency, and members. I'm delighted to have you here to participate with us in a very profound discussion. I think this actually covers probably more ground than simply seal hunting in Canada. It's actually how we deal with issues.

One of the things we admire most about the European Parliament and your efforts is that you take very difficult issues and you come together in common bond and common cause to actually work through issues on which many of you and your constituencies have differing views and opinions—but the reconciliation of those views are based on sound fact and analysis—and the communication of that sound fact and analysis, in terms of an overall direction for a policy. That is really the job of good, solid politicians, to be able to take constructively and responsibly somewhat difficult issues and to seek out the best and most responsible course of action, and then actually have it translated into policy that's in the best interest of our common gains.

This is one of these issues for one of those reasons. Environmentalism and environmental activism and its approach to how sustainable resources are exploited, whether it's appropriate or inappropriate, I think is going to be a more common thread for the European Parliament, as well as parliaments, whether it be the Canadian Parliament or parliaments throughout western democracies, generally speaking.

I feel very strongly that on the basis of an analysis of the facts, the rhetoric and the innuendo being brought forward by those who have a vested interest in supporting misinformation will be brought down. That information will not stand up to the test of scrutiny. For example, one of the lead proponents of some of the information that's put forward to the European Parliament and to your respective governments is the International Fund for Animal Welfare. They've taken a very, very hard position on the Canadian seal hunt. Reflect very carefully on the name of the organization. It's the International Fund for Animal Welfare. Their key objective is to raise funds.

The question was asked about getting that image off the newspaper. The reason that image is in the newspaper is because the Government of Canada openly supports observers from all of these organizations coming to the hunt and observing for themselves and taking pictures. There is no attempt to disguise what it is we're doing. Unfortunately, it is very strongly misused. The images that have been assembled do not properly represent exactly what is proceeding. In fact, the image that Canadian sealers are still in the process of hunting whitecoats, despite the fact that there has been no whitecoat hunt since 1987, still persists in the lobbying efforts of those who would purport that it exists.

Therefore, if someone were to use misinformation in one instance, they would potentially or probably use misinformation in other instances. It has been reported to you as parliamentarians that we've exceeded the quota by 40%. The facts do not stand up to that point.

In fact, often, in many years—most years—the Canadian quota has not been caught because of market conditions or because of ice conditions.

Approximately four years ago, because of the natural biological characteristics of the animal—its fecundity and its sexual maturity—a multi-year quota plan was able to be put in place. In other words, if quota was exceeded in one particular year, it could be taken from another year in a three-year timeframe, so that there would always be sustainable limits to the harvest and it would be conducted responsibly. That's an element that doesn't necessarily hit the pages in tabloids or in respected newspapers, either.

• (1025)

Mr. Lasse Lehtinen: May I interrupt you? Is this the only way to hunt?

Hon. Gerry Byrne: No, there are two ways that seals are harvested. One is through a device called a hakapik. Approximately 10% of animals are harvested using that technique; 90% of animals are harvested using harvesting methods used in other harvests: the rifle.

In terms of the killing method—

The Chair: There is the issue of seals being skinned alive and the international working group. Maybe you could deal with the that.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: In some instances, there has been video produced of a seal purportedly being skinned alive. In the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador, there was an instance where a particular group.... They're very difficult to identify because of the circumstances in which they're working, but a particular group came to the hunt purporting to be a hunting advocacy TV show. They hired sealers to take them out on the ice. They then asked the sealers to engage in hunting activity, skinning the pelt and so on. The image that was then portrayed.... It turned out that the film crew were not hunting advocates; they were working on contract for animal rights groups, and they took the image in a completely different context from what reality dictated and then projected the image as if animals were being skinned alive.

There is a swimming reflex, as with chickens. When chickens are beheaded, they will continue to move about for a period of approximately ten minutes, I understand, and there is a swimming reflex in seals that will continue to cause a flutter, a twitch, a nervous twitch, after the fact.

That's a really important issue, because again it plays to what we are all facing as parliamentarians—what is the fact, what is the reality, and what is the interest of someone who may have a different point of view or different interest.

On the issue of food safety—

The Chair: Mr. Byrne, your time has almost expired.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: We're done?

An interesting issue was brought forward by the Grey Seal Conservation Society. The group itself has a very limited membership, we'll put it that way. It's a very small membership. However, we'll respect that they do have a point of view. The issue of parasites and the transfer of communicable diseases to humans by consuming seal products were raised. There's no medical evidence of this. There's no scientific evidence of this, but committee members did offer some anecdotal evidence at that point.

Seals have been harvested by aboriginals in Canada in the Arctic since time immemorial. A very large database would be available. There is no incidence, no reports, and no evidence whatsoever of Canadian or Russian aboriginal, Inuit, or Innu being susceptible to any parasitic infection or any other kind of infectious disease. And that's one of the things I'll leave off on.

The seal hunt is not a new fishery. It's not a European fishery, although it was started by Europeans in the 17th century. But it's also an aboriginal fishery, and in terms of the economics of this, our first nations are very dependent on it as a source of income and as a source of food. It's also ceremonial. It's a cultural practice. In terms of a modern-day harvest, almost all skins today, all pelts, are transported to Norway for processing.

So these are important points in analyzing fact versus fiction, reality versus some other points of view.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Byrne.

As you can see, and as I said before, our membership are very passionate on this subject. We will try to get all the questions answered and have all our members speak.

Mr. Asselin will be next. *Cinq minutes, monsieur Asselin.*

•(1030)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Asselin: Good morning and welcome to all of you. I am the member for the riding of Manicouagan, which is located along the North Shore of the St. Lawrence River, and extends to the Labrador border. In my riding, there are a number of municipalities or small communities living along the Lower North Shore of the St. Lawrence where fishing is the sole source of income.

We know that the fishing industry has been hit by a drop in the cod, crab and shrimp stocks. It has been demonstrated that the seal population feeds mainly on cod, crab and shrimp. Faced with a disappearing fish stock which is unrelated to fishing but, rather, is the fault of the seal predator, the federal government was forced to impose a moratorium on quotas. Quotas were reduced in certain areas of the fishery. This has led to a great deal of poverty in some villages. Fishermen meet their quota after four, five, or six weeks at most, and can no longer continue to fish. Because the moratorium does not allow them to continue to fish after they have met their quota, they can no longer provide for their families. And since they do not qualify for employment insurance, they are faced with extreme poverty. Some of them can barely afford to feed their families.

Earlier, my colleagues appeared to be rather delighted, even joyful, in showing us a newspaper photo. As my colleague Mr. Blais explained, the picture that you see in the newspaper represents only

one side of the issue. If you look at the other side, you will see the following: the hunter went to work in the morning; he killed a seal so that he could put some food in the refrigerator, and take it from the refrigerator to put on the table to feed his eight or nine children, to feed his family. The work that the hunter did that morning to put meat and food on the table also generated a certain amount of money to allow him to buy clothing for his children and send them to school so that they might enjoy a proper standard of living. That is what life is like in the North Shore villages where the only livelihood is fishing or seal hunting.

Moreover, global warming means that things are becoming more and more difficult. Our hunters and fishers are extremely concerned, and have been for many generations, about being able to feed their family, about ensuring a standard of living that, often, does not allow them to aspire to anything other than poverty.

You must understand that the hunter who goes on to the ice flow in the morning will be killing a seal so that his family can eat, so that he will be able to send his children to school, and buy them clothes so that they might have an honourable living; his intention is not to do any harm to society, but rather to benefit from the resource which is available and which he is allowed to use in order to feed his family.

That is the other side of the story. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup.*

A new member, whom I'll introduce, has just arrived at the table, and that's Mr. Peter Stoffer.

I'll go next to Mr. James Lunney.

I would ask my colleagues to try to answer some of the questions that have been asked; otherwise I'll have to take the committee's time and answer them myself. And I know that's not adequate response from my colleagues. And then we'll come back to Mr. Stoffer if he has any immediate questions.

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

I also would like to welcome the members who have travelled to be here from across the EU, and the ambassador. Your Excellency, welcome. I think it's a very stimulating discussion, and I appreciate the opportunity.

I don't know if you had a chance to meet our minister, Loyola Hearn. He's from the island of Newfoundland—and you mentioned being from an island, Mr. Chair. He has written an interesting song, *From an Island to an Island*, which I gather is carrying some currency and being played in Europe, actually, about the Irish heritage in Newfoundland.

I'm from the far west coast of Canada. Vancouver Island is my riding. This is not a Vancouver Island issue. In fact, some of you, probably those of you who live in Ireland and Scotland, are closer to Newfoundland than I am geographically, but with my colleagues, I feel passionate that this is not an issue that Newfoundland and Labrador and the coastal area of Quebec or Atlantic Canada should have to deal with alone. As Canadians, I feel that we have to stand with them on this issue because it has been so misrepresented, and because this island of Newfoundland was colonized by people from Europe largely because it had one of the most prolific fishing grounds in the world, in the Grand Banks.

We know that the problem in management has been a big one, and NAFO addresses some of those concerns, because our continental shelf goes beyond the 200-mile limit, and so on. Newfoundland has suffered tremendous depopulation. The reason people lived there was largely the abundance of the sea. We have huge problems.

Give me a couple of minutes. I think this has to be said.

The chair wants me to address the specific question. I'm getting there.

The Chair: Please.

Mr. James Lunney: There are about half a million people there now. We've tried creating other means of keeping people there. Let's create a window factory. But they're hundreds of miles from markets. It doesn't work. We're trying to get that resource re-established.

These seals eat a lot of fish, about a tonne a year per seal. And that's only estimated by the feces. They examine the feces. As the chair correctly mentioned—I'm getting to your points, Mr. Chair—they estimate that the seals eat only about 20% of the fish. If they shared the blinking fish, it wouldn't be so hard on the resource. We're trying to recover that resource, the cod. I wanted to make that point.

I also wanted to make the point that on Îles-de-la-Madeleine, which my colleague Mr. Blais represents, they refer in French to these seals as *loups-marin*. There's an island called Île-de-loup-marin, which means "wolves of the sea". They do eat an awful lot of fish. We're trying to see these stocks recover. We don't like to see animals wasted. That's why we're trying to develop markets so that they're used like other animals that are used for domestic purposes.

I wanted to address the issue of the hakapik. It looks brutal in the image that you have there, sir, and you correctly said, can we not do it some other way? It's not used extensively everywhere, but we do have an independent veterinary group that has examined this, and they have appeared here—and I have a background in zoology, so I paid close attention to this issue. The hakapik is actually the most humane way to kill these seals at this stage. The vets have examined this. It's better than a bullet, because often when you shoot a seal, if you miss the brain, they fall into the water and they're not dead.

The Chair: It's not often, James. It's sometimes.

Mr. James Lunney: It's less humane than the hakapik, actually. It's only a small percentage that use the hakapik, but when they're on ice, and ice that's thinner and ice that's slippery, the fishermen will use the hakapik sometimes to save their own lives. If they're slipping, they can use it to pull themselves back up on the ice. But the

veterinary evidence is that, frankly, that's the most humane way. The hakapik makes sure they're dead and they're dead quickly.

I wanted to address the swimming reflex, because I don't think that was adequately explained. The veterinarians are very clear on this. Concerning these nasty images of animals being skinned alive, you've all heard of the chicken with its head cut off and it continues to run. For ninety seconds, I think, up to two minutes after an animal is killed, it has a swimming reflex—they're swimming animals—and it looks like a swimming motion. So you can have an animal that is clinically dead, and the veterinarians have testified to this, but if you take an image during those few moments—the fishermen are under pressure because of time; it's a very limited harvest period—that's where some of these nasty images have come from. There has been very, very careful scrutiny of these issues.

So I wanted to make sure we got that point on the agenda here.

• (1035)

As far as disease is concerned, the grey seals in Nova Scotia are twice the size. There's a huge grey seal herd there now that was managed maybe for decades at about a 10,000 population and is now up to about 300,000, as I understand it. Colleagues may want to correct me. We're hoping to see cod and other fish re-established in some of these coastal areas, but the seals eat a tremendous amount of fish. As I say, they only eat about 20% of the fish. There's a concern among fishermen now that the feces from these seals is being eaten by the cod, resulting in a real problem with the cod having a parasite that they've picked up through a cycle from the seals themselves. In managing any ecological system with biodiversity, we have to consider this.

When we talk about this animal management situation, if it were.... We're talking about wolves; they call them "sea wolves" in French. If it were wolves jumping over the farmer's fence and tearing the viscera out of sheep in the fields of Austria, Germany, England—or Scotland, for that matter, where you have a lot of sheep, I understand—would you not have some call for people to manage the wolf packs in your own communities?

• (1040)

Mr. Lasse Lehtinen: We are not allowed to do that. We have a situation in Finland where we are not allowed to shoot the wolves that are doing what you just explained, because they are listed as an endangered species. Now we are in trouble with that.

The Chair: Do you have six million of them?

Mr. Lasse Lehtinen: Two hundred.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. James Lunney: Gentlemen, as politicians I think we understand the sensitivities of this. For the record, I'd like to say that we understand that committees make recommendations that aren't always heard. We certainly have sensitivities here as well. In Canada, 80% of our population is now urban, and for those who represent rural ridings there's a challenge to explain rural practices and to put them in the right perspective. I guess we all share that responsibility.

Thank you very much.

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

We have one more witness whom I want to hear from on our side. Mr. Stoffer, you just arrived. Perhaps you could speak directly to a couple of issues: the issue of the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group—I think we've dealt with the issue of skinning seals alive—and the issue of processing and food safety standards, if you could.

Perhaps I'll add one point before Mr. Stoffer begins, and I want you to think seriously of this. It's been said several times, but we have a change in population on the planet. It's gone from rural to urban. Canada is a huge nation, and we have 50% of our population in three major cities, so we are in the same condition.

I respect the member from Portugal; I have a farming background as well. People today think that food comes from a grocery store, that milk comes from a box, that meat comes wrapped up in the grocery store. They have no concept of harvesting or slaughtering practices. That's a great difficulty for us, with a very open and humane hunt.

A question was asked about the humanness of the hunt, and I'll ask Mr. Stoffer to enlarge on this, but the International Veterinarians' Working Group has said time and time again that this is the most humane hunt on the planet. I'll give you some instances.

Six million seals are harvested, and in 2005 there were 50 charges laid for violations in the seal hunt. Those 50 charges wouldn't all involve humane killing. Some of them could be that the individual on the front in Newfoundland, for instance, was using a .222 calibre instead of a .223, which we've asked them to change to because it's more powerful; for some of them, it could have been that they were there a day early or a day late, or that they had 50 carcasses on board when they were supposed to have 40. There's a whole myriad of issues that could be there.

On the issue of skinning alive, I want you to think about something. If you take an animal that weighs 40 pounds, which is a small dog, to 80 pounds—that's a large dog—and that has a mouthful of teeth, would you like to skin that animal alive? If you were so inclined... It's ludicrous to think that any reasonable individual for any purpose would skin an animal alive. It's misleading by NGOs, who really aren't qualified to judge the hunt, because they're not licensed veterinarians and they don't understand it.

Mr. Stoffer, please.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the opportunity.

First of all, I want to apologize to the chair, my colleagues, and our visiting delegation from Europe for being late, but as parliamentarians you know that your schedule can get you tied up sometimes.

I want to let you know that we in the New Democratic Party, the smallest party in the House right now, fully support the commercialized seal hunt that comes off our east coast. We have supported that for many years. I want to show that we are unanimous as a committee, that we believe the seal hunt is humane and that it is done sustainably. We have always argued on this side, along with my

colleagues, that the hunt should be sustainable, market-driven, and located where there are economic opportunities for people in the outports and, most importantly, for our first nations and Inuit populations. You may recall 1982, with Brigitte Bardot and the mass seal hunts. We had an estimated two million seals then, and they were complaining about the hunt then. And also the issues surrounding fur trapping and so on had a devastating effect on our first nations people.

The United States has something called the Marine Mammal Protection Act, under which they do not allow seal products to come in from Canada. They allow those products to come in from Alaska but not from us. There is a bit of an irritant there that we've been trying to work on for many years.

It is true, as my colleagues have said, that independent veterinarians have said time and time again, and I won't repeat it, that this is a humane kill. But the reality is that when you go to a slaughterhouse, go hunting for a moose or a deer, or put down a dog that's been hit by a car, it is not pretty and it is not nice, and cameras can make any image look deplorable.

To be completely frank with you, politically, for me and my party, if we really want to be honest, if we opposed the seal hunt, we would probably increase our votes because the vast majority of Canadians live in cities. As my colleague said, that's where the votes are. We could tell Newfoundland and Labrador to take a hike. In Nunavut there is one seat. Why would we even care? But the reality is, as my colleague Mr. Lunney from the west coast said, we need to show solidarity with our neighbours and brothers and sisters in Newfoundland and Labrador and throughout. This is an opportunity for employment.

I would encourage all of you, when you have the opportunity, to visit these communities, not during the seal hunt, but to visit these outports and first nations groups on your own and talk to them. Find out what they go through in their daily lives. Moving to other parts of the country is simply unacceptable.

I am somebody who was born in Holland, had to move from Holland in the fifties because of the closure of the coal mines, and who lives in Atlantic Canada. The vast majority of our young people move from Atlantic Canada to other parts for economic opportunities. Like my colleague Mr. Keddy, who is from the south shore, from my neighbouring riding, I don't like that. We like the opportunity—there is a resource that's healthy. We have an opportunity to utilize that resource as we do other fishing products in the ocean.

On the question of skinning alive, I can assure you that I've seen the seal hunt on many occasions and I have yet to witness one myself. Is this to say that it's never ever happened? No. It may have happened once or twice or several times. The reality is that if you put a whole bunch of hunters out there, there's bound to be one or two of them a camera will catch not doing it properly. Is that the image of the entire hunt? No.

First of all, I want very briefly to thank you for coming, hearing our points of view, and exchanging views. I know we'll have more time after lunch. I can assure you that politically the easiest thing to do would be to just stop the hunt. We'd win votes and we'd be happy campers. But the reality is that it will have a devastating effect on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and we simply cannot allow that to happen. If you start with seals, then you'll move on to something else and something else again. This country was built on hunting, trapping, and utilizing of the resource.

There are many people out there who don't like the idea that we take animals or fish out of the natural environment for our own consumption. They simply don't like that. They don't like the idea of seeing somebody in a seal coat or a fur jacket. As someone who has lived in the Yukon for nine years, I know that is part of our tradition. When you visit the far north and you see the Inuit people and they see a National Geographic special and they see polar bears and walrus, they sit around their table and say, hmm, yum, yum, what's for lunch? Most Canadians look at that and say, oh, those are nice. They have no concept of what wildlife means in terms of consumption and basing country food in terms of their sustenance.

• (1045)

If we cancelled the seal hunt, that wouldn't just have a devastating effect on the outport communities on the east coast; it would also have a devastating effect on our Inuit people and our first nations people in this country. It wouldn't stop at the seals; it would go on to everything else.

We encourage you to have a pragmatic look at this. Don't necessarily take our word for it, but please go to the outports, go to the Inuit communities, and sit and talk to them. I think you'll find that very helpful in your deliberations.

Again, thank you so much, and I apologize for being tardy in my delivery here.

• (1050)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer. We appreciate that you kept to your five minutes. You went over by 30 seconds. You're the only member to stick to the time limit so far.

We have one more member. The hour is getting late here. I know you may have some more questions. I'd like to ask our European delegates whether they have another question.

I know we wanted to discuss fish stocks as well, and especially, I'm sure, transboundary stocks. We can certainly do that over lunch.

If there are no questions, I'll ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Mr. Kamp, whether he would like to have a final comment here.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will likely be the second person to stay within the timeline.

I want to welcome our guests. I have appreciated your questions—the ones I was here to hear. You've come, I think, with a certain amount of objectivity, wanting to base your opinion and view of things on the facts, and we appreciate that.

In summary, I think, although we've heard a fair bit of passion from each of the members, which I share.... I'm also from the west coast of Canada, where no seal hunt takes place, but I was with the committee when it visited sealers and was near the places where it happens, and it gave me a different perspective on things from what I might otherwise have had. I encourage you to try to have that experience as well.

I think there are probably three facts that we, in summary, would want to make for you to take away.

One is that the seal population is not endangered. There is no evidence that it is. It's not regulated by CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. There are almost six million harp seals in Canada, and there could be more. So that is not part of the issue.

Secondly, harvesting methods are humane. That's always been the conclusion of the Canadian and American veterinarian associations, whether you go from the 1986 Royal Commission on Seals and Sealing or to more recent studies by the independent groups. I know our researchers would be happy to provide copies of all of those to you if you haven't seen them already. But clearly, as has been said here, the harvesting methods are humane.

Thirdly, something that I think has been undervalued by critics, but hopefully not by you, is that sealing comprises a significant part of the income of sealers and is a significant part of the social and cultural fabric of many of our coastal communities, and we ought not to undervalue it. The seal hunt is very important to Canada, and it's important to us that it be understood as fully as possible and as objectively as possible. You can help us with this, and we appreciate that.

I look forward over lunch, if not now, to questions about fish stocks. Concerning the northern cod, for example, Mr. Dover, this committee in a previous Parliament did a study on the northern cod. In fact, we were trying to answer the question why, since we had a moratorium in 1992, we have not seen a significant recovery on the offshore of northern cod. In fact, our study concluded that it may be a maximum of 2% of the biomass it had in the 1960s or 1970s, when it was near its peak. Why, since we have not basically fished it domestically since 1992, have we not seen a recovery?

That report was published by this committee in 2005. You might want to take a look at it, if you haven't. I'm sure we'd all be glad to discuss some of the things we learned and some of the things we need to learn still, based on that study and other things we've done.

Thank you again for being willing to come and to have this interchange. We have appreciated your questions and look forward to being able to answer them in a more detailed fashion. Thank you very much.

• (1055)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Kamp. Thank you for sticking within the time limit.

I'm sure we have some more questions from our European colleagues, and I'd ask you go ahead.

Mr. Gary Titley: On a completely different subject, if I may—

The Chair: The finest kind.

Mr. Gary Titley: It's probably too late, but could I give notice, in effect, to—

The Chair: We can overrun a little bit here, if you have the time. I don't know what your agenda is.

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: We're meeting another group at 11 o'clock, the Magdalen Islands, then we have the lunch afterwards.

The Chair: Yes, we will meet for lunch.

Go ahead.

Mr. Gary Titley: A notice of questions, in that case.

I'd like someone to explain the issue surrounding the EU quotas for cold-water prawns and the problems that creates for Canada. Maybe the commission can answer that one, as well.

The Chair: Are you saying cold-water prawn? I didn't quite hear.

A voice: Shrimps, prawns.

The Chair: Cold-water shrimp.

Gerry, as a Newfoundlander from the shrimp fishery, would you like to touch on that? Have you a comment?

The quota limits on cooked and peeled shrimp, we look at—I'll just speak quickly—as being extremely unfair. They're not based on any quota restrictions on the resource. We look at them very much as a non-tariff trade barrier.

Does somebody else want to enlarge on that, the parliamentary secretary or Mr. Byrne? Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: The background to the issue is that the commission has the right to impose a tariff. A 20% tariff is imposed on imports of cold-water cooked and peeled shrimp into the European Union, but the European Union has decided to provide special exemptions and a preferred tariff rate for a certain amount of shrimp to enter the EU at a reduced tariff rate of 6%. The amount of quota that can enter the EU under the preferential rate has been increasing in the last few years as a result of discussions between Canada and the European Union, obviously indicating there is some merit to increasing the supply. The U.K. is the primary market for cooked and peeled shrimp; however, many European countries enjoy the product.

A 20% tariff does create a very difficult situation for Canadian producers. The vast majority of cold-water shrimp in the world today is from Canadian producers. The tariff rate does impose a somewhat large burden. We have been asking the European Union to consider increasing the amount that can enter the European Union at the reduced rate of 6%. All countries can compete, Canada included, for what I think is currently 7,000 tonnes that can enter the European Union at a 6% rate. The interesting note for parliamentarians—the calendar year being the beginning of the time period, January 1—is that 7,000 tonnes is normally filled by around January 15 of each year.

The European Union is a large consumer of cold-water shrimp. We feel very strongly, and we've been trying to make the case, that from a consumer point of view it would be extremely beneficial to have that either enter the European Union tariff-free or a much larger percentage enter with the lower tariff rate.

For example, as a result of the tsunami, the European Union has allowed a lot of warm-water shrimp to enter the European Union duty-free, tariff-free, as a constructive measure to support victims of the tsunami.

Again, it would be a strong move for consumers in the European Union to have access to this product at a lower tariff.

• (1100)

Mr. Gary Titley: Do cold-water shrimp and warm-water shrimp compete with each other or are they distinct markets?

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Some would suggest no. I think, though, when you consider that there's a shortage on the market, the answer is yes. Substitution is readily made between warm-water shrimp and cold-water shrimp. When sources of cold-water shrimp are not readily available, there's an obvious substitution of warm-water, in my opinion.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen. We're going to have to continue this discussion.

Mr. Ó Neachtain.

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: Mr. Chair, again on the technicalities of this, I would like to ask our ambassador representing the commission on this particular subject to clear up an ambiguity that is obviously there.

H.E. Dorian Ford Prince: On the cold-water shrimp, this is a unilateral concession by the European Union. We are under no obligation to open any tariff quota at all.

Secondly, the tariff quota of 6% is a matter of negotiation between the commission and the processing industry in Europe. The quantity of 7,000 tonnes is what the processing industry in Europe asks as a special derogation from our normal rule, so it is more a discussion within the EU than with supplier countries.

Finally, the quota. The commission has proposed to increase the quota from 7,000 tonnes to 10,000 tonnes.

Thank you.

The Chair: I thank the ambassador for that clarification.

Mr. O'Neachtain.

Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain: Mr. Chair, I just want to say in conclusion that I'm very grateful for the comments and the very informative views you've put unanimously and passionately before us. I think it was a very useful exchange, because we came here to listen in a very open format.

We have one very important word in the European Union and that is "subsidiarity", but it's best done at local levels. That is very important.

We did not come totally uninformed, because your minister, Loyola Hearn, visited us recently in Brussels and informed us very passionately as well, may I add. As late as last night, your chairperson of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, Senator Lorna Milne, also put her views across very definitely, as you all did. We are taken with your unanimity and with your reasoning on this very particular subject, and we take that on board very clearly, let me tell you.

We have devoted a large section of our agenda to sealing and to fishing and to Newfoundland. We are very conscious, looking at the names here.... I am sorry Mr. Manning has gone, because I wanted to say to him that we do feel our ancestral bonding very strongly and even the retention of some of the accents. We are very conscious too—and I've said this before—that the Irish named Newfoundland very adequately in the Irish language, which I will say to you now: *Talamh an Éisc*. Translated, that is the land of the fish. So I think we got there much earlier than some others to recognize what we saw yesterday in the sculptures on the Parliament wall of the boat being delayed because of all the fish coming into the rocks, I presume, at that stage.

We're very conscious of the importance you attached to your subject, and I'm also very conscious of the time. And therefore, I hope over lunch we will have an opportunity to delve into the other fisheries aspects we have, because when your delegation in Parliament visited the European Parliament in March 2005, the subject of fisheries took such time that we said, when we return, we will devote more time to the subject, because of the interest there. But I've gone past a health break—plus it's here in my agenda—so

I'm conscious that it's very important to take whatever amount of break at this time.

So again, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members, and thank you for your honesty and your forthright comments. As I said, we'll take them on board, and I'm sure all the members have been very conscious of your unanimous voice.

Thank you.

● (1105)

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Ó Neachtain, Ambassador, European colleagues. We are going to adjourn this meeting.

I'd like to welcome the group from the Îles-de-la-Madeleine. It is very important that you have an opportunity to speak with them and that they should take priority over us. We will have a further discussion over lunch and settle all international disputes over fishing and transboundary stocks.

Thank you. We are adjourned.

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