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## Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, December 12, 2006**

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**Chair**

Mr. Gerald Keddy

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Tuesday, December 12, 2006

• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC)):** Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the Canadian seal hunt.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses. David Lavigne is from the International Fund for Animal Welfare, IFAW, and Rebecca Aldworth is from the Humane Society of the United States.

I know our members are anxious to ask questions. I understand Ms. Aldworth has a video presentation as well.

We would ask Mr. Lavigne to start, please, and we'll proceed. We have a few more members to arrive, but we might as well get at it. There will be more time to ask questions.

**Dr. David Lavigne (Science Advisor, International Fund for Animal Welfare):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Distinguished members of the standing committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today.

My name is David Lavigne and I am science advisor to the International Fund for Animal Welfare. I have been conducting research on harp seals and other pinnipeds since 1969.

IFAW is an animal welfare organization whose mission is to improve the welfare of wild and domestic animals throughout the world by reducing the commercial exploitation of animals, by protecting wildlife habitats, and by assisting animals in distress.

Let me begin by stating the obvious. The controversy surrounding Canada's commercial seal hunt, like all debates in modern conservation, is not about science or about facts. Rather, it is a conflict over differing attitudes, values, and societal objectives and differing views about what is right and wrong. In other words, Canada's sealing debate is a political debate with ethical overtones.

Within this political debate, scientific facts often become misrepresented, misquoted, or fabricated by some of the participants. Today I would like to spend a few minutes discussing what is known and what is unknown about some of the issues surrounding Canada's seal hunt. I will also provide a few insights from modern conservation biology to suggest a way forward.

Canada's seal hunt is the largest remaining commercial hunt of a marine mammal population anywhere in the world. That alone makes it an important conservation issue, despite what you may have read or heard. Modern conservation is about managing the impacts

of human activities on individual animals, populations, and ecosystems, and it is about values

According to the latest published estimate, the northwest Atlantic harp seal population numbered about 5.8 million animals in 2005. That estimate has confidence limits of plus or minus 2 million animals, meaning that the population could have been as low as 3.8 million, or as high as 7.8 million. Such scientific uncertainty must be taken into account when developing management plans for any exploited species.

Canadian government scientists also tell us that the current sustainable yield is about 250,000, but of course that estimate is also uncertain. If the population were actually lower than 5.8 million animals, then the estimated sustainable yield would be lower as well.

As you are well aware, the current total allowable catch, or TAC, for harp seals is 335,000 animals, and that exceeds the estimated sustainable yield. The current TAC should therefore cause the population to decline. In this sense, the current TAC is not sustainable.

For the fourth time in the past five years, Canada's landed catch in 2006—over 353,000 harp seals—exceeded the TAC, this time by almost 20,000 animals. Such overruns would not be tolerated in a well-managed hunt, yet this hunt is frequently described as well managed.

Unless the TAC is reduced and enforced, the government's model predicts that the harp seal population will continue to decline. Over 95% of the animals killed in Canada's commercial seal hunt are recently weaned pups, aged two weeks to about three months, animals that the majority of Canadians consider to be "baby seals".

Public opinion polls repeatedly tell us that the majority of Canadians are opposed to the killing of seal pups.

While the fullest possible use remains an objective of the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans, that objective is not coming close to being realized. Most of the carcasses are left on the ice or dumped in the water. A recent report from Memorial University in Newfoundland claims that 80% of the blubber is discarded. The situation has become even worse in Norway, Canada's major sealing partner, where the government subsidizes the killing of harp seals and now, apparently, pays out further subsidies to burn the pelts.

In short, hunts for harp seals in Canada and elsewhere are extremely wasteful, violating a 100-year-old founding principle of conservation, and raising serious ethical issues in the process.

Speaking of ethical issues and seal blubber, I note that one witness before this committee admitted that he has disguised shipments of seal oil to the United States. Such practice by Canada's sealing industry is not only unethical, but it is also illegal under U.S. law.

Moving on to broader fisheries issues, we know that harp seals did not cause the collapse of cod stocks off Canada's east coast. Furthermore, there is no scientific evidence that harp seals are impeding the recovery of cod or any other fish stock. In fact, culling harp seals might actually be detrimental to the recovery of cod. There is therefore no scientific justification for culling harp seals.

As DFO scientists, among others, have noted, legitimate proposals to cull seals should be submitted to independent evaluation, such as that outlined in the United Nations Environment Programme's protocol for the scientific evaluation of proposals to cull marine mammals. Canada has yet to do this. Regardless, there is emerging evidence that harp seals play an important and positive role in the northwest Atlantic ecosystem. Such marine ecosystems are extremely complex, and we have neither the expertise nor the ability to manage wild populations or entire ecosystems. All we can really do is try to manage human activities.

Then there's animal welfare, another component of modern conservation. Since 2000, two groups of veterinarians have examined Canada's commercial seal hunt. Although you would never know it from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, both of these veterinary reports are qualitatively remarkably similar. Both document what most reasonable people would consider unacceptably high levels of animal suffering. Consistently, when a third group of veterinarians was brought together by the World Wildlife Fund in 2005, that panel listed 11 recommendations that would have to be implemented in order to make Canada's commercial seal hunt more humane.

The only viable conclusion from the available evidence is that Canada's commercial seal hunt does not satisfy modern standards of humane killing as defined by folks like the American Veterinary Medical Association. Taken together, the facts of Canada's seal hunt raise a number of important ethical questions. Is it right, in the 21st century, to subsidize the killing of so many animals, many inhumanely, for non-essential products, while wastefully abandoning the majority of the carcasses and discarding most of the blubber?

In addition to factual issues, there are other things we know about, but the effects are unknown or difficult to predict precisely. Donald Rumsfeld might call these "known unknowns". The most obvious and important known unknown today is global warming and its effect on harp seals and indeed hooded seals. The best study of these effects is on the impact of global warming on the formation of ice, upon which these seals depend for whelping and nursing, off Canada's east coast during February and March.

For most of the past 11 years, this region has experienced warmer than average winter temperatures and below average ice cover. While it is relatively easy to document the effects of global warming on ice conditions, it is more difficult to measure the precise impacts on seals.

A lack of suitable ice combined with violent storms and early breakup disrupts the seals' normal pupping season. This can result in

increased abortions if female seals do not find ice upon which to give birth, or increased mortality of newborns if the ice breaks up before the end of nursing. For example, in 2002 DFO scientists assumed that 75% of the pups born in the Gulf of St. Lawrence died even before the hunt began. Such effects in any given year result in reduced cohort size, and have longer-term implications for population trends and population size.

● (1110)

If warm years with reduced ice coverage become the norm, as appears to be happening, there will be additional uncertainties. These include effects on the timing of reproduction, and the loss of critical breeding habitat. They also include effects on fish and invertebrates, leading to changes in the availability of prey for seals; and effects on seal condition, growth, reproductive success, and survival.

Managers have limited opportunities for dealing with the increased scientific and environmental uncertainty associated with global warming. But one thing management authorities can do, as recommended, for example, by World Wildlife Fund's climate change program, is limit non-climate stresses, including over-hunting, on exploited species like harp seals that are being impacted by global warming.

WWF's approach to building resilience to climate change is a good example of implementing a precautionary approach in conservation. Canada has included the precautionary approach in the preamble to the Oceans Act. The government claims that its management of the seal hunt is precautionary. It is not.

In modern precautionary approaches, total removals from a wild population are linked directly to the degree of scientific and environmental uncertainty. When uncertainty is high, the total allowable removals are reduced to ensure that wild populations are maintained at sufficiently high numbers that their future is not jeopardized.

In marked contrast, there is no mechanism in Canada's seal hunt management plan linking total allowable catches to current scientific and environmental uncertainty. Furthermore, Canada's management approach has never been subjected to the rigorous testing that is mandatory in the development of modern, precautionary management procedures.

A recent scientific study specifically examined the Canadian government's approach for determining population status and trends for northwest Atlantic harp seals, and for providing advice on total allowable catches. It found that Canada's management approach is likely to maintain a high total allowable catch, despite a declining population, and it risks seriously depleting the harp seal population by as much as 50% to 75% over the next 15 years.

That study recommended that Canada reduce the current TAC for harp seals to levels calculated from a well-established precautionary procedure, such as the potential biological removal method mandated for use with marine mammals under U.S. law. Such a step would drastically reduce Canada's TAC for 2007. It would also dramatically reduce the likelihood that the population will be depleted by further over-hunting. It would provide some measure of resilience for the seals in the face of global warming, reduce the number of animals killed inhumanely, and reduce the amount of waste associated with Canada's commercial seal hunt.

Thank you

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Aldworth.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth (Director, Canadian Wildlife Issues, Humane Society of the United States):** My name is Rebecca Aldworth. I am the director of Canadian wildlife issues for the Humane Society of the United States.

The HSUS is the world's largest animal protection group. We have nearly 10 million members and constituents around the world, and we work internationally through Humane Society International.

HSUS is a multi-issue animal protection group. That means we work on a variety of issues, from the conditions for animals on factory farms to laboratories, puppy mills, cruel animal-fighting, and of course the protection of marine mammals and the ending of the fur trade.

The campaign to end the commercial seal hunt in Canada is actually one of our most prominent campaigns right now. We have worked for many years to put a final end to it.

I want to say that I was very conflicted about appearing here today. It's my opinion that this committee is not impartial when it comes to the issue of the commercial seal hunt. Based on attendance at previous hearings such as this and previous reports from this committee, it's my belief that the outcome of this committee hearing on the seal hunt is actually predetermined. But my colleagues tell me I'm being cynical, and for that reason, I would like to take this opportunity to tell you a few things about the commercial seal hunt from my perspective.

I have observed the commercial seal hunt in Canada for eight years at close range. I've observed it in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and I've observed it in the "Front", which is northeast of Newfoundland. I, for that reason, have some experience, I think, in the issues regarding cruelty, and because I've studied this issue for 10 years, I have some knowledge about the economics of the commercial seal hunt and the various issues that pertain to commercial sealing in Canada.

I would like to talk just briefly about a few myths that I feel have been perpetuated in this committee and by this committee. I am going to go through these very quickly, as we all know we don't have much time here, so please bear with me.

The first issue is baby seals. Dr. Lavigne talked about it quite briefly, but I also want to touch on it. Canadian government kill reports show clearly that 97% of the seals killed in the past five years have been pups under the age of three months. The majority have been under one month of age at the time of slaughter.

When these animals are killed—and this is personal observation—many are not yet swimming and many are not yet eating solid food. They have literally no escape from the hunters and they're completely defenceless.

You can call them pups, you can call them juvenile seals, you can call them infants. I call them baby seals, because that's what I call a baby elephant or a baby hippopotamus or any other kind of wildlife. To me, they're baby seals, and anybody who's been on the ice floes with them would agree.

I want to talk about the issue—and this is a disgusting lie that has been stated by our government representatives repeatedly in recent months and I'm appalled as a Canadian that you're doing it—the concept that the footage that we're showing in Europe and elsewhere on our TV stations and on our websites is 20 years out of date. I was there over the past years when most of this footage was filmed. There is not one group out there using out-of-date footage. The footage that is being shown is from the last couple of seal hunts in Canada.

I'm going to show you some of it today, because I want you to see what the commercial seal hunt looks like. I would be willing to hazard a guess that many people in this room have never attended the commercial seal hunt themselves. I have for eight years.

I was appalled to hear members of this committee tell the European delegation last month that this is the most humane hunt in the world. I have been prevented by Canadian law and our unconstitutional marine mammal regulations from intervening as I have watched conscious seal pups stabbed with boat hooks and dragged across the ice floes. I have watched dead and dying animals thrown together in stockpiles. I have had to stand by and watch while a three-week-old seal pup choked to death on her own blood for 90 minutes. This is something I see routinely at the commercial seal hunt. I see wounded animals left to suffer, seals that are shot, some of them for up to eight minutes in open water.

I've seen this each and every year, and I've seen things that no human being should have to observe, not to mention the sealers themselves. I've seen the working conditions on the ice floes for the sealers, the people you claim to be here to defend. Some of these people are in their fifties and sixties. They're running across the ice floes, working in extreme weather conditions as quickly as possible. It's dehumanizing work for them and it's really dangerous. There is a reason that insurance companies put a \$250,000 deductible on the boats when they go up there in those ice floes.

Read the news clippings. Boats get trapped in the ice every year. People have to be airlifted out of the hunt. This is a dangerous hunt for the people involved.

• (1120)

I want to talk to you a little bit about the idea of seals and fish. This is another myth that I hear perpetuated in this committee: that if we don't kill the seals, all the fish stocks will continue to decline and there will be no hope for recovery.

I want to make note of the fact that even the Magdalen Island sealers who were here in this room spoke to me in the hallway and admitted that seals had no role in the collapse of the cod fishery or the groundfish fisheries. Speak to fishermen. They will tell you what caused the collapse. It was mismanagement by the federal government.

I believe the people in this room have political careers that depend on scapegoating seals for fisheries mismanagement. For that reason, we're going to see in your report a lot of claims about seals negatively impacting fish stocks even though the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' own science shows that this is not the case.

I want to again talk very briefly about the humane aspects of the hunt, but to do that I would like leave from this room to show some footage. I think it's important, given that you have heard repeated claims that this footage is out of date or doctored or out of context. I'd like to explain some of the things that we see each and every year at the commercial seal hunt.

Is that okay, Mr. Chairman?

**The Chair:** You have four minutes, so the time is yours.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** This footage is from the 2005 commercial seal hunt in Canada. As you can see, sealers are not stopping to ensure that the animals are dead before moving on to the next one. That's a violation of marine mammal regulations. As you can see, this is not what we would call regulation killing. We are now in 2006, almost a year later, and no charges have been laid even though the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has had this footage for almost a year. As you can see, animals are clubbed to death in front of each other. They are often left, literally wounded, suffering, and choking on their own blood.

This seal was left for 90 minutes before the sealer finally finished him off by spiking him through the skull with the spike end of a hakapik. Those of you who know sealing know that this is not the way this implement is supposed to be used.

These animals are left wounded, conscious, and suffering on the ice floes. The argument that I hear from the Canadian government and from sealers themselves is that this is the 2% to 3% of any

industry that operates incorrectly. All I can tell you is that I've filmed this hunt for eight years. This is every boat that I film and every sealer I follow across the ice floes, in every direction I look.

This hunt is completely unregulated. It happens from 70 miles offshore up to 150 miles offshore, in extreme weather conditions and on unstable ice floes. These sealers literally compete against each other for quotas. They're killing as many animals as quickly as they can. I want you to think about this. In Newfoundland, over 140,000 animals are normally killed in less than two days. When you think about the scale of that hunting and what kind of humane considerations are taken into account when working in these conditions....

I'm showing this to you—and it's not easy to watch—because it is not shown in Canada on our media. It is shown in the rest of the world, and that's why many nations are taking steps to shut down their trade in seal products. Around the world, these images have been shown on television stations, and they're not our images that are being shown. Media from all over the world have come up and filmed this hunt for themselves. More European parliamentarians have viewed this hunt firsthand than have Canadian members of Parliament, and that is a disgrace for Canada.

These images are real and they happen every single year at the commercial seal hunt, and it's a level of cruelty no thinking, compassionate human being, no Canadian, could ever accept if they saw it for themselves. I say that as somebody who grew up in Newfoundland. I say that every Newfoundlander I know would stand up and speak up against this if they knew it was happening on the ice floes.

I will close by thanking you for the opportunity to appear here today. I'm going to submit to you some information on the economics of the commercial seal hunt, and I hope we'll have an opportunity to discuss that during the questions and answers.

This is a hunt that doesn't need to occur. It accounts for less than 1% of the gross domestic product of Newfoundland and less than 3% of the commercial fishery. The people who do it in Newfoundland brought home, on average, under \$1,500 each in 2005. This is an industry we could easily phase out and replace in a heartbeat if we chose to do it, and I hope you will do so.

As you know, this industry costs us far more than it's worth. An ongoing boycott of Canadian seafood products is beginning to impact the value of Canadian fish exports to the United States. In the 20 months since the boycott of Canadian seafood was launched in 2005, the value of Canadian snow crab exports to the United States has declined by over \$330 million. While we are not claiming sole responsibility for that decline, we believe the seafood boycott is a significant factor.

At HSUS, we would love the opportunity to call off the boycott and work with the Canadian government to find viable solutions for the people in outports of Newfoundland and in the rest of the country who are involved in this commercial seal hunt. We can't do that until the federal government works with us to find an end and put a final end to killing seals in Canada commercially.

Thank you.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Aldworth.

For the record before we move on to Mr. Byrne as our first questioner, you've stated that all seals are killed this way, but the committee certainly has heard testimony time and time again from sealers that states that the seals are clubbed, checked for reflex, and bled out.

It's obvious that this particular case would be against the rules as they've been set out by DFO. But that doesn't mean all seals are killed like that, and out of 350,000 animals, that scene certainly looks as if it was outside the rules. But I don't think it says that all seals are killed in that manner. I just want to make that point.

Mr. Lavigne, you mentioned that there is no scientific evidence or support for a cull of harp seals, but there is no cull. We have to use the right nomenclature here. There is a hunt.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Can I respond to that?

It all depends on your definition of a cull. In some of the scientific literature, a purposeful management plan designed to reduce the size of the population is a cull. The current TAC is set above the sustainable yield. The only goal of that act would be to reduce the size of the population. In that sense it can be considered a cull, because the goal is to reduce the size of the population.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** The language, or the semantics, are interesting.

I'm going to move on to our first questioner. You go right ahead, sir.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.):** Thank you to both David and Rebecca for appearing before us. These are interesting and valuable perspectives that you offer.

I don't think this committee is as cynical as has been suggested. We are very open to facts. Actually, what we do is challenge facts.

Rebecca, you said that \$1,500 is on average the value to the Newfoundland sealer from the seal hunt's commercial activities. You said it is not really a whole lot of money. Do you really believe that the \$1,500 is not a lot of money to a Newfoundland sealer?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I do believe it, because if you do the math, it's less than one-twentieth of their income. Of course, any money is money, and I'm not trying to trivialize income in rural communities in Newfoundland. I grew up in one.

That said, this is an industry that could be phased out through a licence retirement program by the federal government in a heartbeat, if it chose to do so. That would probably put more money into the pockets of the people participating.

And I have spoken to sealers. They are open to this idea. Sealers don't like going out there and killing seals either. It's a tough job, it's a dangerous job, and it's not fun work. We could find better solutions.

The seal hunt in the past five years has accounted for less than 3% of the landed value of the fishery. It's not the economic solution for poverty in outports. It never will be the economic solution.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Has any organization come forward and suggested that they would replace that income? Obviously, various animal rights activist groups have been raising significant amounts of money basically to publicize their version of the seal hunt. Are you aware of any organization that has invested in joint venture operations in the Magdalen Islands or in Newfoundland and Labrador to create alternative industries—anything at all? If \$1,500 is not a lot of money, that should be surrendered quite willingly.

I have the name of a sealer who suggested that if you were to provide him with a \$1,500 cheque from your pocket, he might not go sealing.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I'll write it today. As an individual, I'll write it today.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** I'll take the cheque. Would you present the cheque?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Yes, I would write it from my own bank account today.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Would the organization do more than that?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** You have raised a couple of things. I just want to address them one at a time.

For one thing, you asked whether organizations have invested in other economic opportunities in places such as the Magdalen Islands. I'm going to let Dr. Lavigne speak to that from IFAW's perspective, but the answer is absolutely yes. Some industries have been successfully developed; others have been turned down.

Organizations have stepped forward saying they would be willing to contribute to a licence retirement program; however, we cannot do so until the federal government wants to end the commercial seal hunt, because until you cap the licences and say you're not going to issue more licences, a licence retirement program will not mean an end of commercial sealing. What we may do is get rid of one generation of sealers and have an entire new demographic step into its place.

What we want to do is have a licence retirement program that the federal works with us on to implement, to end the commercial seal hunt. As you know, there are wealthy people all over the world who have been discussing this and discussing contributing the funds towards it.

That said, I do believe—

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** But they never do it, though, Rebecca. The interesting thing about it is that they never, ever do it.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** They can only do it with your cooperation.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Why?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Because unless you say we will not issue any more licences, what we're doing is essentially buying existing licences. You can turn around and issue another 5,000 tomorrow.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** That model doesn't follow the Greenland salmon fishery and the moratorium there. It doesn't follow any sort of model that has been established.

• (1135)

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** There is a model. The model is the whale hunt in Canada. If you look back to the 1970s and the moratorium on commercial whaling—

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Can I ask a question about the video you presented this morning? Obviously you have some pretty sophisticated videographers. What was interesting on those video clips is that you saw the hunting process, there was a break in the footage, and then all of a sudden you went to up-close scenes of individual seals. Why didn't you follow the sealer and keep with a constant videograph of the animal you were pinpointing?

It seems to me there's a certain amount of cynicism in Newfoundland and Labrador and on the Magdalen Islands, where people have been duped by people posing as videographers who were not actually there for the intended purposes. In fact, some atrocities were created by those who were creating the videos for the purpose of effect.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** The only organization I know of that has ever been—

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** It seems rather odd to me, Ms. Aldworth, that you would not follow them so there was an absolute clear basis of evidence.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Can I please answer?

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** When I finish my question, you can answer.

It is odd that you would not follow so there would be a clear path of evidence suggesting those things you saw.

I'm not a prosecutor or a lawyer, but basically there's no basis of evidence that was presented in any of those videos that any prosecutor could use to establish any violation. In fact—

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** There actually is.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Well, not that I saw. The film broke away from the actual coverage of the commercial hunt itself and then the video zoomed in on individual animals.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I had four minutes to show you footage. These are clips from the footage. The footage that was turned over to DFO does—

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** This is a parliamentary legislative committee, Ms. Aldworth. I'm sure that in four minutes you could—

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Can I answer the question? You've had the floor for quite a while, and I'm trying to address your question.

You're my mother's MP. I know you've made some allegations about footage. She's the one who has to deal with me when I come back from the ice floes, and she's not very happy about those statements.

We film without editing. Of course there will be times, if the sealers move out of the area, when you will shut off your camera and walk over to the next area where they're working and begin filming again. Because it is legal evidence, the footage we give to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is raw uncut footage. It shows violations. It shows faces. It shows the boats these people are from.

Over the past several years, I've been involved in submitting hundreds of those apparent violations. To date, not a single charge has been laid. I am hopeful this will result in a charge. I am very hopeful. I am working very closely with DFO to get charges laid. They've identified the people involved, they are moving forward, and I hope it will result in a charge. But for every clip of a video like this, we have hours and weeks and months of footage you could look at if you want to come to my office. Any time. I will sit down with you and go through it. We have nothing to hide.

When we go to the seal hunt, we land in our helicopters in the middle of the ice floes. We walk to where the sealers are operating, and we film. We film openly. There is no editing. There is no changing of the images.

You mentioned doctored footage or interfering with images. The only organization I've ever heard of that was involved with something like that was the CBC, in 1964. That's not an animal protection group; that's a news agency. There is no animal protection organization that has ever been involved in faking, doctoring, or staging any footage of the commercial seal hunt. We're an animal protection group.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Or calling for the murder of those that would prosecute.... There has never been anyone or group involved in any animal rights activity that has ever called for the murder of those involved in the commercial sealing activities. Nor would there ever be any ethical animal rights type of group that would post a sealer's name on a website and instruct people to call them and threaten their children. That would never, ever occur—ever.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I have never seen any documented evidence of what you're talking about and I would never advocate such a thing. I don't know anybody in this movement who would do that.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** One final question, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lavigne, is the World Wildlife Fund a credible organization, or is that an organization that bases itself on false science, false beliefs, and false premises?



**Dr. David Lavigne:** The World Wildlife Fund is a very large international conservation organization, and like most large organizations, sometimes people working for those organizations make silly statements.

You have perhaps noticed in my presentation that on the one hand, although you don't have the end notes that I submitted to the committee yet, some of the statements made by WWF Canada in recent years have been slightly strange, saying, for example, that the hunt is not a conservation issue. On the other hand, I was on a panel a couple of weeks ago with WWF's climate change expert in the United States, and in fact I cited their work and their recommendations as essentially a recommendation to this committee.

So WWF is obviously a very important player in this field, but they tend not to get terribly involved in Canada's seal hunt because they claim to be a conservation organization and not an animal welfare organization.

Now, I would like to make one point. You made some comments about animal rights groups, and I just want to emphasize that IFAW is an animal welfare organization with interests in conservation. It is not an animal rights organization. If it were an animal rights organization, I presume the name would be the international fund for animal rights, and clearly we're not that. There is a difference between animal rights organizations, on the one hand, animal welfare organizations, on the other—and indeed conservation organizations, on the third hand. So that is for clarification.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** We will go to our next questioner.

I have a point of clarification on the World Wildlife Fund. Mr. Byrne's question was whether you accept the World Wildlife Fund as a legitimate organization. I didn't hear a clear answer. On one hand, you seem to accept some of the things that may suit your argument, but there are other things the World Wildlife Fund are stating that you don't accept.

So do you accept them or do you not?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** I don't accept everything that any organization says. That comes from my scientific training.

**The Chair:** You accept part of what they say, because you quoted them in your discussion.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** You can see the contradiction.

**The Chair:** You have to appreciate it's very difficult for us as a committee. We need to make very clear recommendations on this hunt, and we have to have very clear, factual evidence to make those recommendations on.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Well, let me give you a clear and factual statement of my problem. On the one hand, WWF Canada says this is not a conservation issue. On the other hand, WWF, in the United States, is making recommendations that apply to this particular conservation issue. There's a conflict there, and—

**The Chair:** The people who are in Canada, on the ground, are making recommendations not accepted by their American sisters and brothers.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** No, what I'm saying is that the World Wildlife Fund around the world, I would think—and I can't speak for

the World Wildlife Fund—recognizes that global warming is a conservation issue. Global warming is an issue in this particular discussion. So to say, as one WWF spokesperson has said repeatedly, that this is not a conservation issue is simply not consistent with the evidence. You wouldn't be having this meeting if this hunt was not a conservation issue.

**The Chair:** I'll leave Monsieur Blais to continue along that line.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning to our witnesses.

I will take the same tone you took at the beginning of your presentation, Ms. Aldworth, which was provocative. You are, quite simply, liars. I repeat: you are simply liars. You lie with regard to...

[English]

**The Chair:** You do need to be polite, Monsieur Blais, *s'il vous plaît*.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** That's right, I was adopting the same tone.

[English]

Okay. You are liars.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** [Inaudible—Editor].

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** I will now tell you why. I would like to take another tone. I prefer the tone of exchange and dialogue, rather than that of provocation. However, you say things and write things which are outrageous lies. Further, you say it to the public. You have a certain degree of credibility. Unfortunately, I do not understand why you are taking advantage of the credibility you have, and I don't even want to imagine why. I am extremely disappointed.

When I hear your organizations describe the seal hunt as a massacre, I believe you are lying. When you refer to baby seals, you are also lying. It just doesn't happen. It's just a way for you to sell an image and an issue. Any communications expert will tell you that you have chosen an excellent subject, namely baby seals. When your supporter, one Brigitte Bardot, gives a press conference with a poster in the background showing a baby harp seal or a seal on the ice being battered, these are lies too. That is why I unfortunately feel caught in the vice of demagoguery and disinformation. Congratulations, you've done a great job.

Here is my first question. You said that you saw a seal which was left on the ice for 90 minutes. When you realized that it was probably still alive—in my opinion, that would have taken three or four minutes at the most because you said you have a lot of experience in this area—why is it that you waited 90 minutes?

•(1145)

[English]

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** First of all, there is a lot there, and I'd like to address a couple of things. I don't know if this was the translation, but if you're saying the concept of baby seals is a lie, then you, sir, need to go to the ice floes and visit these animals. There are baby seals out there.

Sealers will tell you that these are very young seals. They will tell you they're pups, some will even say baby seals. The fact that I choose the word "baby" is my own choice. Our organization alternately uses the word "pups", "juvenile seals", "very young seals", "babies". The word "baby" is an applicable term, in my opinion and my organization's opinion. The fact that you don't agree doesn't make us liars; it makes us having a difference of opinion.

I also want to say that the actions of any other animal protection group are not controlled by me. If Brigitte Bardot chooses to use certain images in her publicity, she is not a part of the Humane Society of the United States and she doesn't work for me and I don't tell her what to display or not display. Brigitte Bardot runs the Bardot Foundation in France, and they choose their own images. That's not the Humane Society of the United States.

So to answer your question, no, it didn't take me three to four minutes to realize the seal was alive. I realized the seal was alive the second I saw this seal crawling, breathing out blood. It was very clear this animal was not only alive, but conscious. We had no way to humanely euthanize this animal.

As I have witnessed over eight years, it is very difficult to kill a seal. I see so many of them left behind after they've been clubbed. These sealers are strong and they're out there with heavy clubs, with long wooden clubs with metal ends on them, with wooden bats. They hit them hard, and still these animals are revived. They regain consciousness when they're left in piles on the ice floes.

I am not a veterinarian and I am not qualified to euthanize a seal. This was very heartbreaking to live through, because this animal was in a lot of pain, and there were no enforcement officers anywhere out there, because there never are. All I could do.... I had a satellite phone and I called the United States and I asked them to see if they could find a marine biologist or a veterinary college to see if we could move this animal, if this animal could survive a helicopter trip, if there was something we could do.

We had just got the Atlantic Veterinary College on the phone when the sealers came back and stabbed the seal through the skull with a spike and then proceeded to cut the seal open as it continued to move its upper flippers and show signs of response to pain.

This is not easy to live through. And if this were one incident, that would be one thing, but it's not. Because when I went to the next pile of seals, there were two conscious seals there. The year before when I was up on the ice floes, I filmed a seal that was there for 60 minutes, and this is not easy. It wouldn't be easy for a sealer. It wouldn't be easy for you. You're a human being, and I'm sure you have a dog or a cat at home, and you care about animals.

The problem is this happens on the ice floes every year, and it can't be stopped because of the physical environment in which the

hunt operates and the speed at which it has to operate. That's why it needs to end.

•(1150)

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Now please explain to me briefly why you maintain that the seal hunt is a massacre.

[English]

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** To me it is a massacre of wildlife. I believe this population should be left. It should not be hunted commercially for fur coats. I believe this hunt is a very large-scale, very intensive hunt that occurs over a couple of days during the year. This is the world's largest slaughter of marine mammals. In the past three years, more than one million seals have been killed. Yes, it is a massacre.

**The Chair:** Merci.

Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank both of our witnesses for appearing before us today.

I want to start out by saying that, in the end, I know what IFAW's main goal is, not just within the seal hunt but within all animal welfare—that is, the protection of animals in their environment, which leads to the protection of the human species. In many, many ways, such as the Sable Island Gully and many others, you should be congratulated.

But where I have differences of opinion is on the seal hunt. And, Rebecca, you're right. If that footage was passed on to DFO and if they have refused to move on it and charge, then the charges should be appropriate. The reality is, you are correct, this committee has unanimously accepted the commercial seal hunt, based on the evidence that is before us, in many, many years of observation. I, like many others, have observed the seal hunt, although I have not witnessed the rapid, as you call it on the footage.... I have seen others, so I have experience in that regard.

One of the things that I have, though, is that I speak to DFO scientists on a regular basis on behalf of our party, right across the country, Mr. Lavigne, and they say things differently than you're saying them. You appeared before us in 1999 and you're appearing before us now in 2006, and scientifically, you haven't changed your wording at all. Basically, you said the same thing before. But the scientists at DFO are saying something completely different—and not just one scientist, but several scientists.

I'm just wondering. It's like you get 100 lawyers in a room and you get 100 legal opinions. You get 100 economists, and you get 100 different economists' points of view. But in the scientific view, not just within DFO but within various universities in the Nova Scotia area and others, they're saying things differently, that the hunt can be sustained at 250,000, or the current TAC that is there now of 330,000, I believe. But obviously if global warming and serious things do take effect, there will be other mitigating factors that affect not just the seals but other species.

Are you saying, then, that DFO has its science incorrect, or are they telling us something that is not factual?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** No, not at all. In fact, when you get the endnotes to my presentation, you will note that many of the sources I cited are papers authored by DFO scientists.

There isn't nearly as much scientific controversy about the current situation as there is conflict over values. If the estimate of sustainable yield, and that's DFO's estimate, is 250,000, and if you set the total allowable catch above that, it follows—and I don't think you'll find a scientist in Canada who would disagree with this—that if the models are all right, that population has to drop. That's what the sustainable yield level is.

The only one specific example you gave me of a gross difference of scientific opinion was this comment about sustainability. Every time you use that word, of course, you have to define it. So what I'm saying, and I don't think you'll find a scientist who would disagree with me, is that—and I was very careful in the wording in my presentation—the current TAC is higher than the sustainable yield; therefore, the population should decline.

If you look at this over—what was the timeframe I used—15 years, there will still be seals out there. So in that sense, if you want to define it, it's sustainable in the sense that you haven't wiped the population out yet.

You know as well as anybody that scientists tend to use technical terms and things like this, but I worked very hard in my presentation to give you examples where Canadian government scientists are saying exactly the things that I've been saying.

I think it's very interesting, your comment about my presentation perhaps not being very different from 1999. Well, the science has changed qualitatively since 1999, but the Canadian government's management of that hunt has not kept up with the developments in modern conservation biology. It hasn't been sufficiently precautionary.

If you're suggesting that I might have some arguments with Canadian government scientists—who I also talk to, by the way—yes, we'd argue on the details. But when we first suggested in 2000 that the Canadian government should adopt a precautionary approach in the paper on conservation biology, within a year or two the Canadian government or the DFO scientists were putting forward something they called precautionary. Now the scientific argument is on the definition of "precautionary".

So I don't see any big conflict. I'd be quite happy to sit down with my colleagues in DFO in front of this committee, and I think you'd be surprised at the level of agreement among us.

•(1155)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I tend to agree with you that DFO has failed repeatedly over the years to exercise the precautionary principle with this species and other species—in terms of cod, salmon, and every other species.

Rebecca, on the issue of the—I can't even say that word—the hakapik—

**The Chair:** Mr. Stoffer, quickly.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** —the instrument called the hakapik, there have been a lot of recommendations about shooting the seals instead of using that. Obviously, that still wouldn't satisfy the concern with ending the hunt, but would it satisfy the so-called humaneness of it, if, instead of using the hakapik, they used a heavy-gauge rifle in order to kill the animal instantly, if at all possible?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** No, it wouldn't, from our perspective.

From my observations, and also studies by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, if you look at the commercial seal hunt, these guys are shooting at seals from moving boats, they're shooting moving animals on moving ice floes. It's very hard to kill a seal with one bullet in those conditions, often in extreme weather conditions, big ocean swells.

I was just at a North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission meeting in Denmark. They noted struck and loss is very influenced by environmental factors. We have a hunt that occurs far offshore, on the ocean, on these ice floes. So when sealers are shooting at animals, they often don't kill them with just one bullet. What I observe up in the Front, where the Canadian government claims that 90% of the seals are killed, is that sealers will immobilize seals with a bullet, pull the boat up alongside, climb over the side, hop onto a very small ice pan and finish the animal off with a club, hook the animal, drag the animal onto the boat. Sometimes they don't bother clubbing before they hook the animal and drag them onto the boat.

It's a very inaccurate way of killing animals. The Canadian government admits that 5% of the young seals that are shot at on or near ice floes are struck and lost, which means they're wounded and they're allowed to escape. They're recovered and they die slowly. If you do the math, that 5%, plus the 50% of adult seals that the Canadian government estimates are struck and lost, translates to an average of 26,000 seals per year. That's a tremendous number of animals dying slow and painful deaths. So, no, we don't believe that shooting is a good way to kill these animals.

As a final point on that, processing companies take off money for every bullet hole they find in the skin, so sealers have an incentive not to shoot seals more than once. So if you immobilize a seal with a bullet, you don't want to shoot that seal again, because the company is going to take off money for that extra bullet hole. That's why you will wait and go and club the animal to finish it off. That is the reality of the commercial seal hunt. It's because of the physical environment in which this hunt operates that shooting and clubbing are both inherently inhumane.

**The Chair:** Mr. Manning.

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

I welcome our guests. I have a couple of quick questions to begin.

Does your organization, Ms. Aldworth, agree with the killing of any animals?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Do we agree with the killing of any animals? I would find it very difficult to answer that question. Does anybody agree with needless killing of animals? No.

Do we recognize that there are industries that use animals? Yes. Do we work to improve conditions for those animals in those industries? Yes.

We work in factory farms and laboratories to improve conditions for the animals that are involved in those industries.

We don't agree with the killing of animals for fur coats. We don't agree with the killing of marine mammals for commercial reasons. So I would say that we're opposed to commercial sealing and we are opposed to other industries that use animals. Whether we're opposed to all use of animals in industry, I would probably have to say no, because we work with those industries to improve conditions.

• (1200)

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** So you work with those industries in the laboratory, but it happens that the ice floes off our province is our laboratory.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** It's certainly not a laboratory. It's the wilderness.

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** In a chicken house, where they're cutting heads off the chickens, or at an abattoir, or whatever you want to call it, the fact is that any killing of animals is a messy game.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** The one thing I would argue about—

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** What I'm trying to get at, if I could, is that you work with these other organizations to improve on the way they kill the animals, but there doesn't seem to be any leeway in working with the government or the people who are involved in the sealing industry on how they kill animals. It's a carte blanche, cut it out, we don't want anything to do with that.

In that regard, why wouldn't you assist in addressing that concern? Or is it the fact that a baby seal on a video clip is more eye-catching to the general public than would be a chicken getting its head cut off in the chicken house?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Our largest program area in the Humane Society of the United States is factory farming. So I would state that clearly.

I guess I have three points in answer to you.

First, of course we support any effort that will make this hunt more humane. But we believe, as Dr. Mary Richardson does—she's a Canadian veterinary expert in humane slaughter techniques—that this hunt is inherently inhumane. It can never be made humane according to Canadian standards of humane slaughter because of where it operates and how fast it has to operate. So yes, we support any effort to make it more humane, but we don't believe it can be made acceptably humane.

This is not a laboratory setting, nor is it an abattoir. This hunt occurs far offshore, on unstable ice floes, in extreme weather conditions. I would, I guess, argue in terms of whether we work to make it more humane. There is a reason we submit this footage to Fisheries and Oceans Canada year after year. It's because we want it to crack down on the worst offenders out there. Unfortunately, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, in my experience, has not lived up to that task. That's why, having been involved in submitting over 700 instances just like these, just as shocking as these, just as heart-wrenching as these, we still have not seen a single charge laid by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. So yes, I certainly do support making the hunt more humane in any way it can be. But no, I don't believe it ever can be made humane.

I would also argue that this is not a hunt for food. This is a hunt that produces fur coats. The Canadian government itself—Ken Jones—describes this as primarily a fur hunt. The carcasses are dumped out there on the ice floes. Blubber is a by-product of the fur trade. This is a hunt for skins that are used in the fashion industry.

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** In your opening remarks you mentioned the fact that your concern in coming here today was to discuss this with us as a committee, but I guess if you stayed here for 100 years, you think you may never convince us of your belief. And I guess if we stay here for another 100, we'll never convince you of ours, because you're fixated on your side of the equation, and you believe that we're fixated on our side. So I guess it's a situation that is going to be competitive going forward, because we're not going to change your mind anyway, no more than you believe you can change ours.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I'm not here so you can change my mind. I'm here to hopefully change yours.

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** Yes, exactly.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** But I would argue this one point. As a politician in Newfoundland, I know how hard it would be to ever take a stand to end the commercial seal hunt, politically. It would be almost impossible. I'm not saying the people in here have personal biases. I'm saying that politically it would be very difficult for many of the members sitting around this table to take a stand against the commercial seal hunt. That's what I'm saying. Perhaps it sounds cynical, and I apologize for that, but I have been to a number of these hearings, and I understand the constraints within which you're working.

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** As an organization, do you have estimates of what the seal population is at the present time?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I only have the Canadian government's estimates. And as Dr. Lavigne pointed out earlier, I believe that's 5.8 million, according to the last survey. What I would note—

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** Do you believe that?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I don't believe that.

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** Now, what would your estimate be?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I'm not a biologist. I wouldn't make an estimate. All I would say is—

• (1205)

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** But your organization receives, I'm sure—I don't know the exact amount—a large number of dollars per year. Wouldn't it be in your best interest to see what the population is out there to determine for yourselves what the population would be? If you're going to argue the point of the Canadian government population, wouldn't it be good to have a counter-argument?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** We do have a counter-argument, in that we've looked at the modeling the Canadian government uses to arrive at those populations. For example, to arrive at that 5.8 million, the Canadian government surveyed about 2% of the breeding site seal population, came up with a pup production estimate, and modelled from there to arrive at the population of 5.8 million. We look at the way the survey was conducted and the fact that it relied very heavily on visual counts from helicopters by DFO staff.

We look at those problems in the population survey. I believe it is the responsibility of the Canadian government to conduct accurate population surveys. I would not rule out our conducting a population survey. What I can say is that I fly over every square inch of the gulf and the front every single year. We see adults out there. We don't see pups. It's getting worse and worse out there in terms of ice conditions. Where we used to see pack ice everywhere, we don't.

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** One of the biggest issues we face in Newfoundland that's now growing is the fact that we are being told—I don't know how you count the pups, either, you can't go out running around the ice trying to count 5.8 million pups—that there are 5.8 million pups out there compared to approximately two million in the 1970s.

**A voice:** You mean animals.

**Mr. Fabian Manning:** I mean animals, I'm sorry.

The fact is, we've been told, Canadians have been told, the world has been told, that this seal population has increased vastly over the past number of years. We have a total allowable catch of

approximately 300,000, and we still continue to increase. So wouldn't you think that from your organization's point of view it would be money well spent to counter that argument?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I'm going to turn this over to Dr. Lavigne in one second, but I want to answer that.

I think it would be money well spent and something we would certainly be interested in doing. However, a seal population study takes several years to complete. It's a very costly and involved undertaking, and you need to have the cooperation of the Canadian government, I believe, to do it adequately.

You mentioned being unable to go out to count these seals, but being told that the seal population is dramatically increasing. What the Canadian government forgets to mention when it uses that statistic is that the population had been dramatically reduced by the 1970s, when it was at a level of approximately two million. Some senior Canadian government scientists estimated that up to two-thirds of that population had been removed by the 1970s.

At the time, they were worried that without an absence of commercial hunting for at least a decade we could lose the harp seal population. Yes, the population has grown; I would definitely say it has grown. But it's been in a recovery.

Do I think it's at 5.8 million? No, I don't, but I'm not a biologist, and that's why I'll turn it over to Dr. Lavigne, who is a biologist.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Picking up on this discussion, the one point I would like to make, citing my colleagues at DFO, is that the population is not in fact increasing at the present time. It stabilized a number of years ago; the increase kind of leveled off. In fact, the Canadian government scientists now believe that the population is declining—as it must do, if their numbers are right, and if we continue to remove more than the sustainable yield from this population.

I would urge you to talk to the government scientists and ask them what the population is doing right now, because it's not increasing; it's decreasing. It will continue to decrease as long as the government maintains a total allowable catch above the sustainable yield and as long as the government allows sealers to exceed the total allowable catch.

You made the statement at the beginning that we could stay in this room for 100 years and never agree on anything. But you and I are reasonable people, and I think we could agree. Between 1950 and 1970, scientists said the harp seal population is declining, and you have to do something. It took 20 years, and what did they do? In 1971 they introduced quota management. I'm sure there was a committee hearing in 1960 that said we could sit in here for 100 years and would not do anything, but at the end of the day the science and reason prevailed, and things were changed.

I think we have a wonderful analogy with the current discussion of global warming. The first paper I published with global warming in the title was in 1990. Ever since, there have been all these people denying global warming. Suddenly, in the last year or so, we've come to realize that global warming is real and that we caused it—and, incidentally, it's causing problems for seals.

I think you and I sitting in a room—perhaps for a few months, not 100 years—could agree that in the face of scientific and environmental uncertainty, maybe it would be prudent to put into place a precautionary approach that might just benefit both the seals and the people who want to hunt them.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Manning.

Mr. MacAulay, and then Mr. Matthews.

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

Dr. Lavigne, what you're telling us in essence is that your information is correct, but DFO's information on the population of the seals is incorrect.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** No, I've been using DFO figures.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** It went from 2 million to 5.8 million. I would think that would be an increase.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Yes, but the 5.8 million was back then. Don't forget that we have wide confidence intervals on the estimate, and don't forget that we've had hunts—two hunts at least—since then. I think if you get in touch with your government scientists, they will tell you that the population isn't at 5.8 million now; it's declining.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** There's no way that you people will accept a seal hunt. You do not feel that it affects other fisheries at all. You do not think it affected the cod fishery; you do not believe that it affected the cod stocks.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** That's what the scientific evidence suggests. The scientific evidence in the published literature—not by me, but by scientists in fact on the east coast—suggests that you can explain the decline of cod by one factor, and that is largely over-fishing, just as many fish stocks around the world are in serious states today because of over-fishing due to the non-application of the precautionary approach.

If you listened to my closing remarks, I did in fact suggest a way forward that would not result in no seal hunt, but would at least result in a precautionary management plan that would largely ensure that the population does not become jeopardized by continued overfishing.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Just quickly, do you have veterinary pathologists on the ice with you? Do you observe the seal hunt in Greenland and Russia?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** As early as 1973, I was an official observer for what was probably the Humane Society of Canada, but I can look that up. I worked at the University of Guelph as a professor for 23 years. They have a vet school there and I worked with veterinarians. I'm a physiologist by training. In fact, I taught veterinarians how to take blood from seals in my career.

IFAW has taken veterinarians out on the ice. One of the three veterinary reports that I referred to this morning was done by a group of veterinarians who were brought together by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, and I've been observing this hunt since 1970 or 1971.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Bill.

**Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Ms. Aldworth, with your video, you had said you hoped DFO would lay charges as a consequence of what you presented to them. You were on the ice, obviously, as an observer and with permission from DFO.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Yes, I was.

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** Have you ever been charged by DFO?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Yes. I was arrested during last year's commercial seal hunt for allegedly being slightly within ten metres of a sealing vessel. We were not within ten metres of a sealing vessel. We did not break any regulation. We were subsequently charged months later, following the European Parliament's passing of a resolution stating that they would be looking for a ban of harp and hooded seal products. Shortly thereafter, I was charged. I believe it was politically motivated, and we haven't yet had the opportunity to be—

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** Your answer was yes, so it's obviously someone's opinion that you did something wrong. It's like me saying to arrest the bank robber if I robbed the bank myself, I would think.

I want to take exception to your remark, by the way, that Newfoundland politicians wouldn't say anything about the seal hunt if they thought there was something. That's not correct.

• (1215)

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I said they wouldn't be able to.

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** If I thought this seal hunt was wrong, I would oppose it regardless of what the political consequences would be. I would suggest to you that you get more benefits because of the seal hunt than I do. I say that quite sincerely. That's what you're about, okay? I'm about being right. If this seal hunt was wrong, if I did not think it was a factor in the collapse of our fish stocks, which I strongly do.... I believe global warming is a factor, as Dr. Lavigne has said, and I believe our fishing practices in the past have been a factor. But I also very strongly believe that our harp seal population, at six million, is a factor that has to be addressed.

I support the seal hunt for two reasons. I believe it's humane, but the other thing is that I think it's a factor in bringing back the rural way of life in my province.

I sat in this committee a few weeks ago and I listened to the testimony of two veterinarians, Dr. Alice Crook and Dr. Charles Caraguel. I listened to them very closely, as intently as I've listened to you. They said to everyone on this committee that this hunt is very humane. I have no reason to doubt what they were telling me. If they had said it was inhumane, I would have listened to them. They're veterinarians and I'm not. I'm not a sealer and I'm not a veterinarian. They categorically told this committee that this hunt is most humane. They talked about how they did brain tests and so on, with the way the seals were killed, and one thing and another. They said this is the most humane hunt in the world. Those are not our words.

You're out there. You're more trained at it than I am. Yet you come in here the way you are, when we've had expert witnesses, independent from us, in front of this committee who have told us this hunt is very humane. I guess the question is, why should we listen to you, because you're not trained any more than I am. You're trained at raising money, but you're not trained in killing animals.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** This I object to. I'm not a fundraiser.

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** No, maybe not directly, but you put this stuff up and it raises money.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I am not a fundraiser, and my organization spends far more to end the commercial seal hunt than we've ever raised on it, as would be the case for any organization campaigning to end it.

I would state that eight years of experience observing the seal hunt does give me some experience. No, I'm not a veterinarian. I would say I've observed the seal hunt by many times the amount Alice Crook ever has. I would also say that when Alice Crook and her colleagues have observed the commercial seal hunt, they've done so in the presence of DFO enforcement officers, when sealers knew they were being observed and knew what the purposes of the observation were. I've observed the hunt with enforcement officers as well, and they're two different hunts. Much as you would not speed if you're passing by a police car, sealers don't skin animals alive when the very people who can arrest them for doing so are standing there.

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** They don't skin them alive anyway.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I believe they do. I've seen it.

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** That's just pure nonsense.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I've seen it, year after year.

**The Chair:** The chair does need to interject here.

All of our members are going over their time.

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** I'm trying to be lenient with time. I'm also trying to let all of our witnesses certainly have time for rebuttal.

We do need to hear from David Lavigne, and we're two and a half minutes over right now. But I appreciate that this is a good, open discussion, as it needs to be.

Just quickly, Dr. Lavigne.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be very brief.

Alice Crook is in fact an author on two of the reports I referred to. I would simply refer you to her reports. You can see that her group of veterinarians, like every other veterinary group, has documented incidents of humane killing. She also participated in the veterinary panel that made eleven recommendations that need to be implemented to improve the killing associated with this hunt.

I am not privy to what she told you, but the written record is very clear.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Blais, it's your turn now.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Thank you. I had to leave for a few minutes because I had to make a phone call with regard to another subject. Please understand that it had nothing to do with your testimony. I have already heard a lot and I can take more.

Why is it that you are trying to convince us to reject outright the conclusions of the group of independent veterinarians who appeared before us? This group held work sessions in 2005 and produced a report which I have here and which you probably also have. I could name these veterinarians, but I don't think that is necessary, and in any case I do not have enough time to do so. They were not paid by anyone and did not get together to defend one position rather than another. These people are independent scientists. They were not paid by the department nor by any other organization. Now, perhaps a scientist might try to tell us stories, but when you have a group of scientists who have signed a report, it seems to me that we are dealing with certainties and not approximations. But you seem to rather easily question what these veterinarians have concluded.

I do not understand why you outright rejected the conclusion of this group of independent veterinarians, which is that the hunt, as it is practised under current conditions, is sustainable and humane.

How can you tell us that these veterinarians did not reach their conclusions scientifically?

• (1220)

[English]

**Dr. David Lavigne:** I think you misunderstand my intent. I quoted three veterinary reports because in fact they are entirely consistent with my own observations. What I'm criticizing, I guess, is the interpretation, if anything.

I'll give you one example. I've heard here that this is a very inhumane hunt, and recommendation four is that seals should not be shot in the water. The fact of the matter is that seals are shot in the water. The fact of the matter is that in open water hunts, one animal is landed for every animal that is struck and lost. So 50% of the animals that are hit are seriously, probably mortally, wounded, and sink to the bottom of the ocean.

That's the veterinary report. I'm not disputing their observations. It's just that....

I'll give you another example. DFO likes to say that 98% of the animals are killed humanely. That's not what the other Alice Crook report says at all. It says—in a bit of, I think, poor wording—“up to” 98%. But if you look at their various studies, some of the numbers are far below 98%. And the 98% comes from a peculiar observation of three live animals wandering around on the deck of a sealing vessel.

My point is that, as I indicated in my presentation, the veterinary studies support my claims that this hunt does not satisfy 21st century standards of humane killing.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Mr. Lavigne, I see that you have a doctorate in philosophy. Is that your background, namely a doctorate in philosophy?

[English]

**Dr. David Lavigne:** No, my PhD is in zoology. I have worked with marine mammals. In fact I've worked with seals. I also have a doctor of philosophy in biology, from the University of Oslo. All advanced degrees in most parts of the world are called doctor of philosophy.

My specialization in one PhD was zoology, in particular seals, and my specialization in the other was biology, particularly seals.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Are you a volunteer or do you work for IFAW?

[English]

**Dr. David Lavigne:** No, I am employed—paid—as a scientific adviser to the International Fund for Animal Welfare.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Do I have any time left? is it over?

[English]

**The Chair:** No, we have to....

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** If you do not speak up, you do not object. Ms. Aldworth...

[English]

**The Chair:** You have five seconds.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Thank you very much. I know that you are very generous.

Ms. Aldworth, do the conclusions of the independent veterinarians cast any doubt on your opinion? Don't they give you pause?

[English]

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** The author of the report, Pierre-Yves Daoust, is a board member and a director of the Fur Institute of Canada, which is a fur lobby group. I don't trust the report or the people who've been involved in it.

What you haven't heard from is a veterinary group that also attended the seal hunt in the same year, 2001. They observed the hunt when sealers didn't know they were being observed. They conducted post-mortems on seal carcasses on the ice, and their report concluded that the seal hunt results in considerable and unacceptable suffering. They also found that in 42% of the cases they studied, there wasn't enough cranial injury in the seals that had been clubbed to even guarantee unconsciousness at the time of skinning.

I note that none of the authors of that report have been invited to present to this committee. I believe there are several who would be happy to present to you.

I have observed the seal hunt far more than any of the authors of that report. Veterinarians have been attending and observing the commercial hunt for four decades. And to this day, the latest report, if you will, on the commercial seal hunt still contains recommendation after recommendation after recommendation about how to make this hunt more humane.

The fact is that we go up there and film this each and every year because it has never been made humane, despite 40 years of trying. It never will be made humane because of where it operates, how it operates, and how fast it operates.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Since I've let both of you go considerably over time, I just have to take some time for a point of clarification, but first a statement.

There was a veterinarian report back in the 1960s and 1970s by two American veterinarians who observed the hunt for years. I'm struggling to remember their names; I have the literature at home, and I can certainly get it. Back in the days when the hunt wasn't as regulated as it is now, they said that 99% of the seals were killed instantly and humanely, and died, I believe—I'm not a veterinarian—of severe cranial brain hemorrhage. That would have been in the days when the hunt was much more wide open than it is today.



On the question of a humane hunt, obviously part of the issue for the humaneness of the hunt is the short window of time that sealers have to actually capture their seals. Would you agree, then, just simply based on the humaneness of the hunt, that we could improve the hunt—and I'm not saying I agree with your statements at all—if we had more time, if we had a larger window of time for sealers to actually fill their quotas, instead of having this rush to fill their quota?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I think it would be a small step in the right direction.

What I would argue is that the sealers themselves don't want to be out there for longer than they're out there. There's a deductible of a quarter of a million dollars from the insurance companies on the boats that go up into that ice. They don't want to have their boats up there for longer.

Crab opens up on the back of the sealing industry. No one who's crab fishing wants to be out getting seals when the crab fishery opens. So they have to do it in a couple of days. That's the only way it's economically viable for them.

**The Chair:** Well, that's not my question. My question is whether your organization would support—

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Oh, I would definitely—

**The Chair:** —an extension of the hunt, so it would give the sealers more time to take their quota.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** We would not support an extension of the hunt, but we would definitely support some way of changing the quota so that the hunt slowed down. Would that make it humane? No. Would it make it more humane? I think, maybe, yes.

**The Chair:** I'm trying to figure out what we're talking about here, and I apologize to the committee for taking some of the committee's time here, because I know I'm going to suffer grief for this later.

I'm going to go to Monsieur Blais.

Do you have a very quick answer to that? But I'd ask you to be quick.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Yes, I would point out that the latest veterinary panel made exactly the point you're making, that this competitive rush in killing animals over a very short period of time leads to some of the problems. I think you'll find that in their report. I can point it out to you.

**The Chair:** Yes, but—

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Of course, improvement of any of these aspects—

**The Chair:** Of course, you're going to hurry up with your answer, because I'm taking someone else's time. So I ask you to hurry up, please.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Okay. Improvement is an incremental thing. So, of course, anybody who is opposed to inhumane killing would support recommendations that would reduce the amount of suffering.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Stoffer.

I almost gave you another round, Monsieur Blais.

● (1230)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Over the years we've heard that an adult seal consumes about a tonne of seafood per year. Would you figure that statement is accurate?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** The amount of food a seal eats, when you weigh it, depends very much on the energy content. So if you're eating a very fat, rich fish, you consume less of it than if you're eating something that doesn't have a whole lot of calories in it. But yes, that's in the correct order of magnitude, but it can vary by a factor of three.

The other point I would make is that just estimating how much an animal eats tells you nothing about the potential impact on fisheries. The way we tend to think about things is to have this simple view of the world in which seals eat fish, so obviously more seals mean fewer fish. But the marine environment's more complicated than that, so let's just make it a little bit more complicated and put in a three-step system whereby seals eat the predator of a commercially important fish. When you have that situation, fewer seals mean fewer fish for fishermen. I think that's the complication that people tend not to understand, and that's one of the real problems in explaining to people just how complicated marine systems really are.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I understand. In fact, I believe in your 1999 presentation you showed us a map of the complexity of the interconnectivity, and it looked like a Spirograph gone out of control. DFO scientists, in my view, have never said that the seals would increase the recovery of other commercial species, and they never said they were the cause of it. What they said is that there's a possibility that the increased number of seals from 1982 to present day, along with all the other factors of overfishing, climate change, and environment, may have an impact on the recovery of cod and other stocks.

They've never said conclusively that if you wiped out all the seals, the cod would come back tomorrow. They've never said that. They've said that there is a possibility that one of the factors that may hinder the recovery of the cod stocks is the abundance of seals out there. They've said that is a possibility.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Yes. I can translate that into the science. Everything you said, I agree with. If you translate that into the science, they have generated a hypothesis, which they have yet to test. In fact, they've tried to test it, and they have yet to get any evidence that the seals are impeding the recovery, or indeed any evidence that the seals are benefiting the recovery. So the emphasis has to be on the idea that if this were true, then this might happen. I agree.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you.

If I may say, Rebecca, when you talked about the stopping of the fur—that this is a fur kill and not necessarily.... I have concerns with that. I lived in the Yukon for nine years and watched various groups around the world try to put an end to the leghold trap and to fur trapping and all of that. That had quite a devastating effect on first nations people in the Yukon and those in other areas, such as the Inuit and the Innu in Labrador. That's just taking them, and not including our northern provinces with the Métis and everybody else.

Do you not feel, then, that with those types of comments, you are including or absorbing.... I know your intention is not to hurt their livelihood, but the reality is first nations people, as you're aware, have been doing this traditionally for thousands of years. By saying you're anti-fur, period—you're not just talking about seals, you're talking about all animals—do you not feel that you could be damaging their traditional lifestyle? You're basically saying, as they've said to me, you want them to assimilate into the white man's culture, when they believe that their traditional forms of trapping and hunting are what they've always done and they'll continue to do so, and they just want various groups to get off their backs and allow them to do what they do best.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** If you do the math, today the average aboriginal trapper brings home approximately \$350 Canadian a year. That's according to the Canadian government's own statistics. I'm not laughing at the small amount of money, because it is some money.

On the assimilation of native cultures, the worst player in that has been the Hudson's Bay Company. Traditional native subsistence killing of any animal is not opposed by any animal protection group. International trade bans on harp and hooded seal products do not affect subsistence hunting of any animal, because the nature of subsistence involves local consumption of the product.

As to native sealing, the commercial seal hunt in Nunavut, if you want to call it that, brings in approximately \$500,000 per year to Nunavut. It's a very small industry. When I went to NAMMCO and spoke to seal hunters from Nunavut, most of them do it for subsistence purposes. They don't actually sell the skins. Most of them believe the commercial seal hunt in Canada is cruel, should be ended, and has done more to destroy aboriginal native sealing in Canada than any animal protection group.

So if you actually speak to the people who are doing the hunting, the people in Nunavut, they believe the worst thing that's ever happened to native sealing has been the commercial seal hunt off the east coast of Canada, which is conducted by non-native people for commercial reasons, to produce fur coats.

I guess that answers your question. I don't want to rattle on.

•(1235)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you.

Do you not fear then that you would be including hunters of marten, beaver, or anything else? They could be trapped in this vortex and thus lose their traditional way of life.

**The Chair:** Mr. Stoffer, once again, when I talked to someone else for a second you went overtime by a minute.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Yes, sir. You were not paying attention.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I would not say that the commercial fur trade is part of the traditional native lifestyle in this country, but there are aboriginal and native people involved in commercial trapping and hunting of animals for fur. Does it decimate their communities when global markets for fur products shut? I don't believe so. I don't believe the evidence is there.

There have been a lot of statements made by the federal government, some self-serving statements. When you speak to the people in those communities, I don't believe they will agree that the thing they do best is kill animals for fur. I don't think they will agree that the closure of any market around the world for fur products is going to mean the end of their communities. Their communities have lived on subsistence hunting for generations, for thousands of years. I don't believe that the global market for fur products, which is fickle and cyclical and depends on the whims of the fashion industry, promises a sustainable future for any native person in this country.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Lunney.

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

Just for starters, Ms. Aldworth, I'd like to say for the record that, boy, you come in here with guns blazing, attacking the integrity of the members of this committee, referring to myths that have been perpetrated, you say, by this committee, and bias in this committee. You come in with an adversarial approach from the beginning.

On behalf of my colleagues around the table here, I have to say I find that very offensive. I'm glad that Mr. Matthews addressed that, because you actually impugn the integrity of all the members around the table, and that is somewhat reprehensible and unhelpful.

I don't come from Newfoundland. I come from Vancouver Island. I also have an interest in matters related to biology. My undergraduate degree is also in zoology. I listened very carefully to the presentation by the veterinarians who appeared here about the kill, about the hakapik in particular, and the evidence produced from their studies, dissections, and analyses of the brains of seals that had been killed. Their conclusion was in fact that the hakapik is a very effective tool and very humane in use.

Maybe you'd be happier if somehow you could round these animals up.... Perhaps you wouldn't, but you were saying that if they were slaughtered in an abattoir, in a closed building somewhere like cattle, sheep, and lambs for human consumption, somehow that would be more palatable. I suspect your group wouldn't support that either.

For the record, I find your attack on the integrity of members around this table is certainly unhelpful and somewhat reprehensible.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Is that a question? May I respond to it?

**Mr. James Lunney:** I'd like to pose a question.

Going over to Dr. Lavigne, you mentioned your PhD is in physiology and zoology and that you taught at the University of Guelph. Are you still teaching at the University of Guelph?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** I am not on the faculty. I did participate in the teaching of a course this past semester, but I'm not on the faculty.

**Mr. James Lunney:** So is your work with the IFAW full-time for you?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Yes, it is.

**Mr. James Lunney:** You said you found the harvest TAC of 335,000 is unsustainable.

•(1240)

**Dr. David Lavigne:** I said it's higher than the sustainable yield and in that sense it is unsustainable.

**Mr. James Lunney:** You state on the website that as many seals are killed today as during the 1950s and 1960s, when significant overhunting pushed seals down the road to extinction. And yet the harp seal population has grown significantly, from under two million in the early seventies to over 5.8 million in 2004.

Moreover, DFO says the multi-annual total allowable catch is established based on scientific surveys designed to ensure that the harp seal population does not fall below 70% of the maximum observed population.

It would seem, therefore, that increases in annual harvests have led to a stabilization in population and not a reduction. So do you agree or disagree with the population estimates released by the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat at DFO?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Which website are you reading from?

**Mr. James Lunney:** I believe that would be the IFAW website.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** I'm not aware of that.

But the reason the seal population increased was that there was a drastic reduction in the hunt beginning about 1982 or 1983 that stayed in place until about 1995. These seals live for 30 years or so, so during that period of reduced hunting when catches probably averaged somewhere between 50,000 and 60,000—and in one year you may remember it got down as low as about 20,000—the population was given time to recover. And that's where the real growth of the population occurred.

Then, beginning in 1995, there was an increase in the total allowable catch, an increase in the landed catch that has continued every year since, with perhaps one exception. That increased catch has stabilized the growth of the population and is now causing it to decline.

So it is totally consistent with what you are saying, except that there is a time lag in there.

**Mr. James Lunney:** If over 5.8 million, that was—

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Plus or minus two million.

**Mr. James Lunney:** Plus or minus two million. If you don't have better numbers—

**Dr. David Lavigne:** No, I'm not arguing with your numbers. I'm just saying that—

**Mr. James Lunney:** And if the numbers back in 1970 were two million, then obviously there's been an increase in that herd and not a decrease. So in terms of being sustainable, your comments about it being unsustainable are somewhat suspect.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** No, no. I tried to clarify that in answer to Mr. Stoffer's question.

**Mr. James Lunney:** Let me come back to the comment about the World Wildlife Fund, because I don't think that was clearly stated. I think most of us around the table respect the World Wildlife Fund, and I think you indicated you agree with a lot of their assessments, and you know they recently appeared here.

They are a body with certainly as much concern for animal welfare and certainly for conservation and are well respected around the world, and for them the hunt is not a conservation issue. Having looked at the same figures you're concerned about and having examined the hunt and being aware of it year after year, they don't see it as a concern for the future of the seals themselves.

So you disagree with their position, obviously.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** I would point out that the World Wildlife Fund does no science on harp seals. They do not do scientific assessments of harp seals, or at least I'm not aware of any.

**Mr. James Lunney:** Does IFAW do science?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Yes.

**Mr. James Lunney:** And what studies have you—

**Dr. David Lavigne:** I referred to the 2000 paper we published in *Conservation Biology*. I could refer to our most recent effort, which is a book on the pursuit of ecological sustainability, which is largely what we are talking about. This was published in June of this year. We do, in fact, do original science.

The paper I referred to by Leaper and Matthews in my presentation that's now been submitted to a scientific journal is an original piece of science.

So yes, there is this a difference between how we deal with the seal hunt and how WWF deals with it.

**Mr. James Lunney:** We are interested in science around this table. We had the scientists here at our last meeting and we'd like to see more money. There is a lot about the oceans on which we agree. We do not know fully about ecosystems and how they interrelate.

I want to come back to you on a question about your organization. How many full-time and part-time staff do you employ in the campaign against the Canadian seal hunt?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** I'm the science adviser. I couldn't tell you. We have offices in 15 countries. We do work on a whole variety of issues, from elephants to seals. We work in about 50 countries right now.

•(1245)

**Mr. James Lunney:** How many would be engaged in the campaign against the Canadian seal hunt?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** On a full-time basis? I'm not sure, maybe 15, 10 to 15.

**Mr. James Lunney:** Okay.

I wonder if Rebecca would care to answer that question.

**The Chair:** Very quickly. Everyone is going over time, and I'm trying to be lenient.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Okay.

You made some pretty strong statements, and I'd like to respond to them.

**Mr. James Lunney:** I'd like you to answer the question I asked, though, first, directed to you, about the number of people you employ full-time—

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** The number of people we employ full-time?

**Mr. James Lunney:** —in the campaign against the Canadian seal hunt.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Full-time, there is myself... I don't know. Fewer than IFAW, I would say.

I couldn't possibly hazard a guess as to how many people there are full-time. There is no full-time person working on this issue in our organization. Like IFAW, we have campaigners who work on many issues, public relations people who work on many issues. Combined, I couldn't even begin to hazard a guess, but not as many as I would assume you're thinking.

Could I just respond...?

**The Chair:** No. I'll tell you what, we're going to have to work it into an answer. We have gone severely over time. I have a number of other members who want to ask questions.

You can certainly reply, Ms. Aldworth, on anything that I've cut you off on, in writing to the committee, but we do have to allow the rest of our members an opportunity to ask questions.

Mr. Cuzner.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Thanks very much, and thanks for your appearance here today.

I certainly can't challenge any of the science—

**The Chair:** Or the math.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** —or the math. That's a good point.

There are two things, though. Ms. Aldworth, you did make two statements that I can absolutely and unequivocally challenge.

My family is in the fishery, my friends are in the fishery, I live in the fishing community, and my riding is a coastal community. I have never, not once—and I'll swear this on my kids' health—ever heard a fisherman say they don't believe that the seals have had an impact on the fish stocks. To fishermen, they believe that there is an impact. They know those other factors are out there—overfishing, the whole list of factors—but they believe the seals are a significant factor.

The other small point was that you said the sealing was not a hunt for food. In fact, it is. What I know is about the economics of my community. It's easy to dismiss \$1,500. I have families in my community who would feed their families for two months on \$1,500; it's significant.

You've stated that there are three components to your concern around the fishery: where it takes place, how it operates, and over the period of time.

As to where it takes place, we're not able to control that. We could invite the seals to the parking lot of Mile One Centre, but I don't know how many would show up. I'm just being cute with it. We have to go to where the seal population is.

As to how it operates, that's what we're talking about here, because we want to look at best practices and we want to look at what we can do.

And on the period of time, you've had the exchange already about the period of time.

Let's get right down to the nub of the issue. In your view, can seals be hunted humanely?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** No, not in the commercial seal hunt in Canada. No, not in the environment that, as you already pointed out, it has to operate in, and not in the time scale it also, I know, has to operate in.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** No, but you're qualifying it now. What you're saying is there's absolutely no way we can have a humane hunt in Canada.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** In the commercial seal hunt, no.

On another comment you made, about the incomes of people living in rural communities in Canada, in Newfoundland we do have poverty in the outports, and that poverty will not be addressed by the commercial seal hunt. That poverty could be addressed by a better distribution of wealth in the fishery. It could be addressed by not building \$60-million cultural centres in St. John's when you have, supposedly, people starving to death around the bay. It could be addressed by better labour union practices. It could be addressed by a lot of things. One thing that will not address it is expanding or continuing the commercial seal hunt.

Yes, it is a tiny bit of money. There is a lot more money that is not going to the right places in Newfoundland, and that's something this committee might want to look at, if you're really genuinely concerned about the impact on people around the bay.

•(1250)

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Well, I am genuinely concerned.

And again, coming back to my colleague Mr. Lunney, I'm offended that you would think I'm anything but concerned about the well-being of the people I represent. That is offensive.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I have not said that. What I have said is that I think the outcome of this panel is predetermined.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** You asked if we were genuinely concerned about the people who are involved in this fishery.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I said that if you are, then this is one thing you should look at.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Well, we are concerned about this.

But what we're talking about is whether—

**The Chair:** We can only have one speaker at a time.

Mr. Cuzner.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** All we're talking about is whether we can do this humanely. We have testimony from veterinarians who have said that at least for the killing, the hakapik is the best.

We recognize that this is an abattoir on the ice. We know it's not a picnic out there. It's not a Sunday school picnic; we recognize that. But I think where we want to get to, if there are infractions taking place and you're submitting this film to DFO, is to know why these people who contravene those best practices are not being taken.... That's serious—

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** Because it's all of them.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** —and it's something we want to know, as a committee.

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** It's because you'd have to shut down the hunt, if you were going to shut that down, and DFO knows it too.

In terms of what I've said when I've come in here, I want to make the point that I was observing this committee when the European delegation appeared. And excuse me for being cynical, but members of this committee informed the European delegation that the seal hunt accounts for 50% of the income of the people who do it and that the footage we show is 20 years out of date.

You embarrassed the Canadian government in front of that delegation. I had to explain to a committee of European parliamentarians how the footage I was showing them was in fact not 20 years out of date, and that this was a PR talking point for the Canadian government, because they have no way to defend what appears in those images.

Excuse me for being cynical, but HSUS and IFAW are the two groups you've had come in. Notably absent are the Animal Alliance of Canada, Environment Voters, the Nova Scotia humane society, the Animal Rights Collective of Halifax, the Atlantic Canadian Anti-Sealing Coalition, the Vancouver Humane Society, the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, the World Society for the Protection of Animals, and the Green Party of Canada—all organizations that oppose the commercial seal hunt and support its being phased out.

And you're hearing from two. You've heard from dozens of sealing industry spokespeople, government scientists—

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** We've heard from others as well.

How much time do I have left?

**The Chair:** I am sorry, but you have no time left. I allowed Ms. Aldworth to go overtime because she needed time to answer your question, which you took too much time for.

Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** And then Monsieur Blais.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** And Monsieur Asselin.

**The Chair:** Yes. And Mr. Lavigne had his hand up. I didn't allow him to interject the last time, so I need to allow him to do so this time.

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Very briefly, Dr. Alice Crook, who you've referred to several times this morning, in their latest report says, in answer to your question, "The Canadian...seal hunt has the potential to be a humane hunt". That's what they've put in writing.

I've been working on this since 1969, and the only observation I would make is that since that time, report after report—which the chair might have referred to—has said it has the potential. We have not, in the last 35 years, achieved that potential.

Certainly my organization would support anything your committee can do to help this hunt achieve the potential that is recognized by veterinarians, that's recognized by people who have been observing this hunt for 30 years or more.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Asselin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I represent a riding on the North Shore of the St. Lawrence River. A large part of my riding is located between Kegaska and Blanc-Sablon and reaches up to the border of Labrador. The villages there live exclusively off of the only industry in the area, which is fishing. The families living in these villages along the coast went there for the sole reason that they could fish.

Seals are marine mammals which live in the water and feed on fish at the seabed level. One can only conclude that seals are a major predator of cod or any other ground fish. These same fishermen today must deal with a cod moratorium. They are not allowed to fish cod because of this moratorium, which is in place so that the cod can regenerate.

Because of dwindling numbers of ground fish, these fishermen must also deal with lower fishing quotas. Indeed, some species are on their way to extinction. However, the seal population has increased considerably, but fishermen cannot exercise their profession, namely fishing, because of the growing number of seals, which eat ground fish. As you can understand, this has created a certain degree of frustration.

Some fishermen are even asking for sports licences to hunt seals for their own survival.

So since these villages live exclusively off fishing—which is the only industry on the lower North Shore—it is only normal for them to ask us to regulate the seal hunt and to provide them with more seal hunting licences in order to protect the ground fish.

A little earlier, I was watching your video on cruelty to animals. For people who are sensitive to the killing of animals, you presented several scenarios. In one, you showed the seal hunt with an image of red blood on white ice. You then showed an image of a pig being bled and crying out, squealing for 15 or 20 minutes until it bled to death. You also showed images of a chicken with its head cut off, which was thrown into boiling water, and then put on a conveyor belt, and was plucked but still moving. You also showed a sheep being led to the slaughterhouse with tears in its eyes and which meekly obeyed because it could not defend itself. A child or a person sensitive to this type of situation would of course be sensitive to the killing of any animal.

You show the seal hunt, but I also want to let you know what happens when a pig, a chicken or a sheep are killed. Please rest assured that people are also sensitive to those types of situations.

• (1255)

[English]

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** We do that. The largest program area of the Humane Society of the United States, as I said earlier, is factory farming. We work in factory farms to improve conditions for animals and stop cruel factory farming practices. I could go on and on, but you can see it all on our website.

We do talk about cruelty to all animals, but this is a hunt for fur coats for the fashion industry. It brings in very little money for the people involved and could be replaced by the federal government in a heartbeat, if it wanted to do so. This hunt does not need to occur. It should have been ended half a century ago.

Global markets for seal products are closing fast. The European Union is going to shut down. The Council of Europe has just passed a recommendation for all of its 46 member countries, including Russia and Turkey, to ban seal products. We are seeing markets shutting. There is no future in the commercial sealing industry, just as in 1972 there was no future in commercial whaling in Canada. The government reacted then; it paid the whalers for their licenses, and whalers were able to reinvest in other opportunities. That's what we're asking for, for the people of Atlantic Canada. There is no future in the commercial seal hunt; those licenses are worth something today to those people, but they won't be in ten years.

We believe the government should act now for the people involved in the seal hunt, for the seals, and because Canada's international reputation is suffering every day it continues.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Excuse me, the time is up. I'm sorry. You make statements before the questions, and you have to give them a chance to answer. You're over five minutes.

Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Rebecca, I'm just going to read this out as I have it:

After the 1982 collapse of the international sealskin market, Inuit hunters were no longer able to support their families by selling sealskins. This led to a measurable dramatic rise in alcoholism, suicides, and family violence as the role of the father became obsolete.

Do you really think that the killing of the international sealskin market does not affect Inuit hunters?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** I do not believe the closing of international markets for seal products will affect native communities in Canada. I think that is one of the most offensive pieces of text I have ever read—and I've read it too.

We live in a nation where so many injustices have been committed against native people. For the Canadian government, or for any person claiming to represent native people in this country, to blame native suicide rates on the closure of global sealskin markets is offensive to an extreme that I can't even begin to sum up in this hearing. It is offensive to the people who have lived in those communities, who have dealt with being transplanted from their homes, who have dealt with their land being taken away from them,

the erosion of their heritage and traditions—which is subsistence hunting, not commercial hunting. Those things are very real.

To blame suicide rates on any factor involving the closure of seal product markets is trivializing the very real problems that are facing native communities today, just as it is trivializing the poverty that is faced in rural outposts in Newfoundland.

• (1300)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I'll just say I got that comment from someone who represents the national Inuit organization. I didn't make this up.

Has your group, the HSUS, had a chance to speak to Phil Fontaine, the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations?

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** We haven't spoken to Phil Fontaine, but we have spoken to the head of the Greenland seal hunters association. We've spoken to the head of the Nunavut seal hunters association. I met with a very large number of industry people out at the NAMMCO meeting in Denmark. We're very committed to working with those communities.

One thing native people can do is label native seal products. That is a very obvious thing that they can do in the wake of closing markets. When we work on international trade bans, we are always very clear that those pieces of legislation will exempt native products. So if you look back to the 1980s ban of whitecoat and blueback seal products, you'll see it clearly exempted native products. Those particular seals were not actually hunted by native communities.

So, no, I don't believe the impact was as high as people try to make it seem. Today, the piece of legislation that is being considered by the European Union specifically exempts products caught by traditional native hunters.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I have another question.

Dr. Lavigne, if the seal hunt were stopped tomorrow... And for Mr. Byrne, who was here earlier, there was a women's organization in the States that last February offered \$25.5 million to the Canadian government to buy off all the sealers, and that was turned down. So there was an offer at one time. But the reality is, sir, if the seal hunt stopped tomorrow, as your organization would like done, the fear is that the seals themselves would increase to a point where they would implode. There's a risk that there would be too many animals out in the ocean, and they would implode—either through disease or something else—that they would die with a fairly high mortality.

The final question for you is how many seals should there be to have a balance in the ecosystem in our oceans on the east coast?

**Dr. David Lavigne:** That question is frequently asked, and no scientist can answer it. There is no ideal level. There is in ecology no balance of nature. That was rejected by ecologists about 70 years ago. So this is one of these things that kind of carries on. We can see it today; you just have to look at the Arctic and what's happening to polar bears. There is no balance. The world is in constant flux, sometimes because that's what the earth does and sometimes because of our activities.

If there were no seal hunt tomorrow, what we know about the biology of seals is that they would in fact eventually limit their numbers through the availability of food and competition between individuals. Technically, it's called a density-dependent response. We would never predict that a seal population would simply explode.

There's just one more brief point. I would like to refer to density dependent. What it basically means is that as the population goes up, individuals have to compete more for food, they get less food, their birth rate does down, their mortality rate goes up, etc.

In response to a question earlier and to your question, I'd like to refer you to a paper that was recently published, co-authored by a person at UBC and by two Canadian government scientists in Mont-Joli. It's called "The Trophic Role of Marine Mammals in the Northern Gulf of St. Lawrence", and it talks about the role that marine mammals play in marine ecosystems. The last line talks about—this is the last line in the paper—"This beneficial predation effect is even greater than the predation itself, leading to an overall positive impact of the predator on the system."

In other words, this complex system, which I did show and I actually referred to in this year's presentation, is structured and ordered by the feeding interactions that occur in it, and harp seals eat all sorts of prey, as you noted in that figure. The end result is a positive impact on the system. If you start to remove predators, it reminds me of what Victor B. Scheffer, one of the grand old fathers of American pinniped biology, said in 1972: "If you remove seals from the system, what sorts of holes are left?" We can't answer that question.

Thank you.

•(1305)

**The Chair:** I would like to thank our witnesses for appearing here today. I think everyone had a chance to ask questions.

I would ask if you could follow up in writing on a couple of points that were made, and I have one comment before we close.

You held up a book there. Could you follow up with the peer review of the scientific community on that book, on what other—

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Every chapter in this book was reviewed by a peer, as with most books. I was the editor of the book.

**The Chair:** I appreciate that.

If you could just give us the names of the organizations, we could follow up on that.

•(1310)

**Dr. David Lavigne:** Mr. Chair, may I present you with a copy?

**The Chair:** You may, as a matter of fact.

The other issue is the aboriginal hunt. I think the record has been corrected a couple of times today. I don't pretend to be the expert on every aboriginal community in northern Canada, but I've been in a number of them. The truth has to be told about when the fur moratorium came into place and the leg-hold trap was nearly banned totally in the country. The aboriginal first nations suicides went up 250% and alcoholism increased dramatically. There was a lack of a sense of place and self-worth. Anyone who has been around the aboriginal culture at all would understand that. It was a terrible thing that happened. When you shut down the sale of fur, you don't just shut down the sale of fur for non-aboriginals, you shut it down for everybody. You close off a marketplace.

I have a real concern. You mentioned whaling. We have a huge first nations whale hunt. It's a huge hunt, probably the largest whale hunt in the world. Are narwhal and porpoises and belugas next on the list? And then what happens?

I don't think, on the one hand, you can hold the aboriginal community up and say we're going to protect this interesting group of Canadian society, when, quite frankly—and this needs to be said—I think they're simply next on the list. When it's more convenient and they have no one else standing with them and they're standing alone.... It's a very, very difficult life in northern communities for people who are not attached to a southern lifeline. There are all kinds of people who have that southern lifeline and who travel south and live south, but they don't have to subsist in that environment.

I think there are some recommendations made here today that we'll follow up on: lengthening the hunt and making sure there are more observers out there. There are other recommendations for which I think the record, especially with first nations, needs to be corrected.

Again, I apologize for taking too much time for my comments.

I appreciate both our witnesses coming.

The other comment I wanted to ask you to follow up on.... You made a comment. This is important. You said your fundraising doesn't come from anti-sealing, that it was a very, very small portion —

**Ms. Rebecca Aldworth:** We spend more than we raise on it, yes.

**The Chair:** We'll check the record. We'll ask you in writing to support that with documentation if you would. It would be appreciated.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I just want to say Merry Christmas to everyone.

**The Chair:** That's a great point of order. We'll accept that.

The meeting is adjourned











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