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Chair

Mr. Gerald Keddy

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•(1425)

[English]

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

We have simultaneous interpretation for anyone who needs it.

I would like to just take a moment to welcome everyone to the committee, to welcome the members of the community and members who are in the audience. I'd certainly like to say how pleased we've been and how much we've enjoyed our trip to Îles-de-la-Madeleine. It's a beautiful, beautiful island with friendly people and with a great interest in sealing. I don't want to prejudge the committee, but I think it's an interest that our committee members share.

Before I go any further, I understand that we have seven presenters. If everyone is planning to speak, I would ask you to be as brief as you possibly can be. Those of us in political office are never brief, but I would ask you to be brief, if you possibly can be, because we have started a bit late, unfortunately. That was my fault, and I apologize for that. We started a bit late, and we do need to try to catch a plane. However, we are here for a very important issue. It's a subject that requires some further study and a subject that we want to make sure we hear your concerns about.

Before I go any further, this is Monsieur Blais's riding. I want to give him an opportunity to address you. I can tell you, as chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, that Monsieur Blais single-handedly got the committee out here. He deserves a lot of credit, and he has been a good supporter, not just of the sealing issue but of other fisheries and oceans issues for this area.

Thank you.

[Translation]

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

First of all, I would like to welcome you to our part of the country. I would also like to welcome all those in attendance here, as well as indicate that, only a few minutes ago, we had the opportunity to meet with Maxime Arseneau, the MNA for Îles-de-la-Madeleine and official opposition critic for fisheries in Quebec's National Assembly.

I want to indicate that the seal hunt in the Magdalen Islands is of vital importance to islanders, for a number of reasons. Simply put, it is a matter of dignity, respect and heritage, and not only a matter of selling seal pelts.

The committee is made up of members from British Columbia, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and elsewhere in Canada, and they all

agree on that point. I consider the committee as an ally in the battle we are currently waging. In my view, the second major battle is getting underway. Unfortunately, we lost the first one for all sorts of reasons. We cannot repeat the same mistakes, i.e., to take lightly what is currently happening. That is why the committee is dealing with the issue and will present its recommendations so that the Canadian government, the Canadian Parliament, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and all other departments can cooperate on fighting this second major battle.

We intend to take up this major challenge, because we are facing off against people using demagogic rhetoric and disinformation and appealing to people's emotions. This is not an easy situation. However, I know full well that the people here have seen all kinds of things. I am originally from the Gaspé and I know very well that we have learned things the hard way. And yet, today, we are rolling up our sleeves to take up the challenge.

In my view, committee members are allies, and I will do everything in my power to keep them on side. I will also see that we can make recommendations that force—if need be—the government to deal with the issue and assist us in the fight we are currently waging.

With that, I would like to thank the committee members for coming to the Magdalen Islands, and I hope we can have some good discussions.

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

[English]

Our first presenter is Mr. Joël Arseneau, mayor of Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Arseneau (Mayor, Îles-de-la-Madeleine, As an Individual): Good afternoon, and welcome to the Magdalen Islands. We are honoured to have you here.

[English]

It's a great honour to have the committee sitting here with us today.

[Translation]

We are very pleased to see that the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans finds it important to listen to the people of the Magdalen Islands who, throughout the debate on the seal hunt, have too often felt isolated, marginalized and attacked on all fronts. They were left alone to defend themselves against demagogic accusations of barbarism and other comments that I do not wish to repeat here, because that would grant them some credibility.

The industry representatives who are here today will best be able to testify to this. The hunters and members of the industry will be able to bring you all the arguments you will need to join us in defending this hunt which is part of our tradition and reflects our identity. It is also an issue of pride and heritage, as Mr. Blais was saying earlier on. I would also like to thank him for the fight he has been leading over the last few months, which allows us to express our feelings on the issue today.

The management of the resources is not being compromised. It is important for a people like ours, isolated in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, to be able to optimize and capitalize on the exploitation of the renewable resources that surround us. This is precisely the direction of government policies over the last few years, whether they be provincial or federal. They want people to take charge, to diversify their economy and take control of it.

If there is any aspect of economic diversification that cannot be ignored, it is indeed the seal hunt on the Magdalen Islands. This is a significant economic issue, more than just a question of tradition and of identity. The key aspect of the fight that Mr. Blais was alluding to is to obtain, from the elected officials here today and from the Canadian Parliament, unconditional support for the hunters, the industry, the hunting practices and the ways in which the herd has been managed over the years.

We have to have the courage of our convictions and respect the dignity of the people who do this job in conditions that are often extremely difficult. If there is one message that must be understood today, it is that the people here want to get clear support, from every forum available, from the members of Parliament and Parliament itself. This is the key element that we need in order to pursue this fight ourselves on the ground, and we will certainly see a commitment to giving us that support today.

Obviously, within the parameters of the hunt and the management of the herd, Quebec, and particularly the Magdalen Islands sector, must have its fair share. Recent decisions have led us to believe that the hunters and fishermen of the Magdalen Islands may not have been given their traditional share.

I was asked to be brief, and I will give the floor to the people from the industry who have been carrying the torch for years already, and who are committed to doing so once again today. They need the support of the Government of Canada.

• (1430)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Poirier.

[Translation]

Mr. Léonard Poirier (Member, Association des pêcheurs propriétaires des Îles-de-la-Madeleine): My name is Léonard Poirier and I am going to speak on behalf of the Association des pêcheurs propriétaires des Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

First of all, I would like to welcome you and to thank you for having come to the Magdalen Islands. We do not often have the opportunity to welcome the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. If memory serves me well, I would say this happens approximately every 10 years. It is all the more appreciated as a result. However, we would like once again to take advantage of your presence in order to discuss a broader range of subjects. The seal hunt is really very important, but we also have problems in other areas of the fishery. This is why we would like to take the time to review the situation of the fisheries in general with you.

As far as the seal hunt is concerned, we tabled a three-page document with you. We perhaps did not make the procedure quite clear at the outset. I know we do not have much time, but I think we have to make a reference to this. In terms of procedure, once our association's presentation is finished, we will move to the second association and then to the third. If you have any questions at that point, you will be able to address them directly to the hunters who are here with us.

You are certainly aware of the fact that here in the Magdalen Islands, our economy depends greatly on fishing and hunting. Currently, seal harvesting is quite a dynamic sector. Several projects are underway that have great potential. There are various avenues that could also be of interest. The Maritime regions have suffered the consequences of the collapse of the groundfish stocks. The seal hunt therefore provides important economic input for us. In the past, training programs were offered to the fishermen. The hunting methods used treat the animals with respect. They have nothing to do with the smear campaigns through which certain lobby groups try and make us look like the bad guys.

Certain factors affect fish species, including the predation of groundfish by seals, a subject that you know very well. You have heard a lot of talk about this, including during your trip. We share your perspective, that is, that seals are major predators of groundfish. What is equally important for us at this time is the effect of this predation on crustaceans and other pelagic species.

We know that the latest estimates of seal stocks indicate a very abundant level for all species. This population consumes an impressive quantity of fish, crustaceans and other pelagic species. In our case, we are talking particularly about herring and mackerel. Seal predation is a very significant cause of cod mortality. Its annual consumption is much greater than the commercial harvest in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. These facts are recognized by people who monitor this situation closely.

According to the latest scientific estimates, the annual consumption of cod could be between 19,000 and 39,000 tonnes in zone 4TVn. The situation is no doubt similar in zone 4RS3Pn. The annual consumption of cod by seals is several times greater than the commercial harvest. As you probably know, our fishing area, which affects us the most, is 4T. The total allowable catch over the last year for this area was 4,000 metric tonnes, which is very little.

The damage caused by seals is one of the main reasons for the poor state of the groundfish stocks and above all for the absence of any recovery. In this regard, you no doubt are aware that the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, or FRCC, which advises the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, is of the opinion that the recovery of the groundfish stocks is more or less impossible in the short or medium term, given the abundance of seals in the gulf. In one of its reports, the FRCC recommends in particular that the seal herds be reduced to levels that would ensure the long-term survival of the seal industry, and that would furthermore be consistent with the objectives of the recovery of the groundfish stocks. The Quebec fishing industry overall, like the FRCC, is convinced that seal predation is preventing the recovery of the two main cod stocks in the north and in the south of the gulf.

We also have a few recommendations to make. In the document we tabled, the recommendations are on one page and the conclusion is a half page long.

I will give the floor to Jérémie, who is a hunter, to speak to you about our group's recommendations.

• (1435)

Mr. Jérémie Cyr (Member, Association des pêcheurs propriétaires des Îles-de-la-Madeleine): My name is Jérémie Cyr, and I am a fisherman and a hunter. I thank you very much for coming to the Magdalen Islands and I welcome you to our beautiful islands, as the chairman said at the beginning.

I will now speak to the recommendations we wanted to make.

Given that the current state of the seal population shows us that these populations are under-harvested, we recommend a significant increase in the total allowable catch, the TAC, to a level that is higher than the total population growth rate, particularly for the harp seal.

We recommend the setting of a TAC, a total allowable catch, for the grey seal in the Gulf of St. Lawrence that is higher than the annual population growth rate in order to allow for the development of a potential market for this resource and also to decrease the predation of this species, particularly of the groundfish stocks.

Given that the winter survey was intended to determine the abundance of young seals and does not allow for a precise count of the adult population, we recommend that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans carry out a survey to determine the population numbers in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, to identify the scope of the predation of groundfish, particularly of cod, and its prey by grey seals, and, finally, to define a strategy for the sustainable harvest of this resource.

We also recommend the implementation, in the short term, of a rigorous training plan that would eventually become mandatory in order to obtain a hunting licence.

We recommend that the Canadian government create a real policy intended to lift the American embargo on marine mammal products.

We recommend that government authorities put forward support programs for research into seal products and their production.

Finally, we recommend that the Canadian government pursue and intensify its efforts to fight against the actions and propaganda campaigns of the anti-sealing groups.

I will now give the floor to Léonard to conclude.

• (1440)

Mr. Léonard Poirier: In conclusion, I would say that the Quebec fishing industry remains very concerned and very worried about the excessive predation of cod fish by the seals in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and as a result, of the absence of any signs of recovery of the groundfish stocks.

Within the current context, we cannot understand the attitude of the Canadian government regarding the management of the seal herd. The under-harvesting of this species has very serious consequences for fishery resources and Maritime communities. There is no longer any doubt about the imbalance in the ecosystem in favour of the seals. Whereas most animal species that have a high commercial potential are hunted by humans, seal continue to receive unjustified protection. The overpopulation of seals has taken a considerable toll on several fish stocks. If this trend continues, other species will also be affected and, obviously, the people who depend economically on these species will have difficulty coping with the consequences.

The situation is critical and requires major intervention and concrete action immediately by the federal government. Current management approaches have contributed to the imbalance I have just described.

Finally, we recommend, from the perspective of sustainable development, that there be a level of harvesting that targets the seals more, and a quota that is more representative of the socioeconomic situation and dynamic of the seal hunt in the Magdalen Islands.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: The next presenter is Monsieur Jean-Claude Lapierre.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre (President, Association des chasseurs de loup-marin des Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Good afternoon, everyone. I am pleased to see you here. Our association thanks you very much. We are very pleased to have the opportunity to chat with you.

The Association des chasseurs de loup-marin des Îles-de-la-Madeleine, which I represent, has 300 to 400 active members, and between 800 and 900 seal hunting licences are sold in our region every year.

Today, in light of the lobbying by European politicians, who want to enact legislation to completely ban the seal hunt, we are becoming aware of the scope of the damage that these false and manipulated images have caused to the seal hunting activities.

We believe we have almost arrived at a point of no return, and that worries us greatly. Public opinion is completely convinced by what has been said, although it is ungrounded and the facts have not been verified. There is a huge wave that has swept over all of Europe, and now the European government is telling our country that we have to cease this activity, or else they will boycott our marine products.

These political developments led Mr. Raynald Blais, the MP for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, to take action and Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette to make public statements. We thank them both.

As well, Mr. Blais visited Europe and European representatives were invited to Canada. There was also the visit of the representatives of the European Council on October 26, while they were in Quebec City, where they were able to take stock of the scope of the damage. Moreover, we are supposed to be hosting European members of Parliament November 23 and we are to meet with members of Parliament in Ottawa. Finally, today we are welcoming the members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, and there may be other efforts under way of which I am not aware.

Finally, something is happening! There is some action!

The hunters are happy about these political developments, but they are asking themselves some questions. Will these actions, as useful as they may be, counter all of the misinformation that has accumulated over the last 30 to 40 years, since the beginning of the white coat story?

Will we be able to convince the representatives of the European government so that they in turn can face public opinion in their own countries and tell the true story about this activity, and prevent the passing of legislation that will abolish the hunt for all time by closing the market?

The third question we have is the following: what other means can we use to argue for the truth and justice to which we have a right under this policy, which was established according to the rules and controls set out by our government, but which cannot counterbalance this public opinion that has been created by emotions and strong feelings? Even in my own country, there are far too many people who are not even aware. The other side of the story has not been told.

Fourthly, why have we allowed members of associations like Greenpeace, the Human Society of the United States and the International Fund for Animal Welfare, and people like Bardot, McCartney, Rebecca Aldworth, etc. to drag us through the mud and continue, year after year, to attack the seal hunters and at the same time the laws of the Canadian government? I must emphasize that: above all, Canadian laws.

We hunters are not in a position to defend ourselves alone. This false advertising designed is to appeal to people's emotions and it is very cleverly done, through false and manipulated images, and by providing information that will make people feel strongly about the issue.

To fight against that kind of a campaign requires a lot of money, and we do not have it. We are just a tiny association that was created in the spring time.

Before I conclude, I would like to talk to you about the film that was directed by Mr. Raoul Jomphe, who is from the North Shore and a descendant of the Magdalen Islands, and produced by Ms. Céline Chevrier, also from the islands.

• (1445)

We visited them last week. The documentary was produced by the Société Radio-Canada. The people of the Magdalen Islands will be invited to attend the official launch towards the end of January. I went to a screening of the film with Denis Arseneau, a hunter from the Magdalen Islands, who is here today.

We believe that this film must be shown to members at the meeting in Ottawa on November 23. The film can counter many of the falsehoods about the seal hunt. The film shows true images and contains relevant and unbiased information to counter false and fabricated images, sensationalistic information and emotional appeal.

Before concluding my presentation, I would like to touch upon the issue of quotas.

Under last year's management plan, the quota amounts to a total catch of 325,000. However, Quebec and the Magdalen Islands only received 25,000, whereas Newfoundland and Labrador are allowed to catch 300,000. We find that the quota sharing is completely unfair.

Our share comes out to 7,000 seals at Blanc-Sablon on the Lower North Shore and 18,000 on the Magdalen Islands. We have had to buy pelts from Newfoundland to keep our plant up and running. And even in Newfoundland, they want to process all their pelts. There will be no way out of this. What will we do about job creation and our plant? These are issues that we are currently addressing.

I thank you for your attention.

• (1450)

[English]

The Chair: Merci beaucoup.

The next witness is Roger Simon.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Simon (Director, Îles-de-la-Madeleine Section, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Chair, I work at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and I am attending the meeting as a resource person. I will not be giving a presentation to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Paul Boudreau.

Mr. Paul Boudreau (Representative, Vice-President, produit du loup-marin de TAMASU, Association québécoise de l'industrie de la pêche): : Good afternoon to you all. I would like to thank you for having travelled all the way to the Magdalen Islands. That is greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank Raynald Blais for his excellent work in defending the seal industry, for all the meetings he has attended and all the efforts he has made to defend our industry.

First of all, I would like to inform you that a group is currently being formed with representatives of the Canadian seal and fur industries. I was told that you were given a presentation on that yesterday in Newfoundland and Labrador. That group is in great need of support.

I am the Vice-President of Produits du loup marin TAMASU, a company that processes furs and oil. A lot is being said about the seal fur industry, but there are many developments underway concerning oil, particularly biodiesel. In fact, seal oil has great potential for the future of biodiesel and omega 3 fatty acids. We produce very high quality oil that is rich in omega 3s. This year, the quality of our oil was recognized as being the best currently on the market with regard to omega 3 fatty acids.

I would like to come back to the association with the Canadian Fur Institute, which has already experienced problems similar to those we are currently facing in the seal industry. In recent years, the Institute has faced the same problem with the Europeans, in the fur sector, and has had success in meeting the challenge. The association therefore has expertise that can be very helpful to the seal industry in general. However, such an association needs financial support and other types of assistance from the Canadian government to win the battle it has to wage against those who want to abolish the hunt.

The other part of my presentation deals more with the demand for fair quotas. We in the Magdalen Islands do not feel that we have received fair treatment under the latest management plan. In fact, with regard to the sharing of resources, certain criteria were not taken into account, such as our past hunting quotas. In the 1980s, we had about two thirds or close to 75 % of seal landings in the gulf; today, we have 20 %. That accounts for some 5.6 % of total seal landings. We have not been treated fairly in this respect, because no thought was given to the fact that the seal industry was developed in large part by hunters from the Magdalen Islands.

The other criterion is adjacency. We know that much of the seal herd in the gulf comes to the Islands to calve. In all other resource industries where resources were allocated by quotas or regional quotas, adjacency was an extremely important criterion; in the case of seals, adjacency was given little or no consideration.

We know that, normally, regions that are closest to the resource should have the best access to that resource. In recent years, our industry processed from 30,000 to 35,000 seal pelts. That is a small business compared with the giants in Newfoundland and Labrador.

• (1455)

In addition, because our quota were insufficient to support an industry, we had to obtain part of our raw materials from Newfoundland and Labrador. Currently, the government of Newfoundland has legislation prohibiting the export of seal pelts. There is even a bill intended to increase the restriction and to ensure that pelts are processed in Newfoundland and Labrador as of 2008. By forcing the industry to undergo a complete transformation, Newfoundland and Labrador is simply intent on controlling the entire seal industry.

We find that completely unfair. Our quota should be at least 30,000 hides, which would allow us to develop a true industry here, in the Magdalen Islands.

Thank you for your attention.

[English]

The Chair: Merci beaucoup.

Thank you to all our presenters for some excellent presentations. Thank you very much for remaining as brief as you did. It's difficult when you feel passionate about a subject.

We'll start our first round of questioning. I think my colleagues would agree that since this is Monsieur Blais' riding, we will allow him to go first.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I would like for you to clarify certain things, which will also help committee members better understand the issue. For one, with regard to the means used to counterbalance the current campaign of disinformation, someone said that it was necessary for the Canadian government to make efforts, be available and support your industry. That can be done by various means.

Are we talking about financial means, and the engagement of a number of departments? The issue comes up on occasion. The seal hunt is a responsibility of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, but the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade is also responsible for what is happening and can take action.

I would like you to talk to us about how to organize, structure and carry out the counteroffensive.

Mr. Paul Boudreau: Well, on that issue, the Canadian fur industry sent a letter six weeks ago to David Emerson, the Minister of International Trade.

• (1500)

The industry has received neither a response nor an acknowledgement.

The file has to go to the Department of International Trade, because this is more a matter of international trade than of fishing. Of course, Fisheries and Oceans Canada regulates hunting, but the current problem is one of trade not of hunting. We have a problem of perception, and the Department of International Trade has to step in. It has to commit the necessary funding and energy to defend our industry.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Cyr.

Mr. Jérémie Cyr: There is also the fact that the Canadian government is there to represent all Canadians. The threats from abroad to Canadian hunters are ridiculous. We are being labelled as barbarians. That is why we are calling on the government to act through its various departments. We have to do this, because it is the right and the duty of the government to project a good impression. As we have indicated, we are professional hunters and use the best methods available. This is a conviction we share. Because we Canadians are being skinned alive — pardon the pun — by other countries, it is the government's duty to...

Mr. Raynald Blais: Do you believe, like I do, that the Department of Foreign Affairs is not doing enough? We recently had the opportunity to meet with people from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Well, they said that their work was to hold briefing sessions for ambassadors and their staff, so that they could answer questions asked by people in close contact with embassies.

In my opinion, that does not add up to a whole lot. Anyone can do that. A 1-800-number could be set up to answer questions. What we need is a more energetic effort.

Mr. Jérémie Cyr: It really undermines the credibility of the department because, from what we have heard, it is as though we have carte blanche to kill. And yet we have specific regulations, the hunt is orderly and there is monitoring.

To come back to those who want to abolish the hunt and the Humane Society, there is something that I find disastrous. As these people come and provoke us on the ice, the managers and the monitors are more or less obliged to divide their time between monitoring the abolitionists in the Gulf and the hunters, instead of devoting all of their time to monitoring the hunters in order to ensure that they are doing their job professionally. In our opinion, the government's image is tarnished as a result, and it must become involved. The people who are organizing these ad campaigns have a lot of money. We hunters do not have the means to respond effectively.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre.

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: We are discussing international trade. Earlier on, we made a short presentation. I always wonder whether or not the politician who is going to represent me supports the hunt or not. It has gotten to that point. In Ottawa, when Céline Hervieux-Payette spoke out, she was reprimanded. We have to face reality.

This disinformation is being put out everywhere. There is a flood of it in all countries. That is why I find the fight so arduous and why we will have to be courageous and provide the right information, even here in our own country, to those who represent us.

I went to Quebec City. I had gone to buy a sports jacket because we had a meeting. One person I was chatting with was quite surprised to learn that baby seals were hunted here in our own backyard.

Our politicians are not well informed. That is the problem. It's one of the biggest problems. Our politicians are not really well informed of the validity of the hunt. We see it because it shows. This is a very irritating factor for the Canadian government when spring time arrives. We feel it in our gut. We do not dare stand up or say anything at all, and we are anxious for those three weeks to be behind us. It is tiresome for the Canadian government, because the propaganda has reached that level.

I talked about a flood. What they did was serious. They paid our people here to skin seals alive. That was done, it served its purpose and because it paid off. They continued to do it. Everyone swallowed what was said about the white coats. I went to the open air base. Later on, I will ask you what your impressions were. This morning we went to the outdoor centre, where the hunt and the tools were

explained a bit. There was discussion of hakapiks, etc. Then, we went to see a slide presentation. I would be curious to know how, over all, you felt after that show. Did you come away with the idea that the white coat is very cute?

These are the kinds of factors that can always come into play. We want to hunt. The little white coat and the visitors with their cameras are all very nice; we saw that this morning. I would like to hear what your impressions are on this issue. What impression did you get? There is the hunt, and there are the white coats. The observers are Japanese tourists, people from IFAW and the humane society.

I would really like to know what your impressions were following this morning's meeting.

• (1505)

[English]

The Chair: Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of time. We had a terrific visit. We learned a lot. It was an excellent idea that I think, quite frankly, other areas could emulate.

Monsieur Arseneau, we are very short on time here, and Mr. Cormier. Both wanted to comment.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Arseneau: On that issue, the federal government will, through the various departments, have to recognize its responsibility to defend the hunt as a legitimate activity and also the hunters who are accredited to participate in it. It will also have to recognize that it has a responsibility to defend its own methods and policies for managing the seal herds.

As soon as the government recognizes that it has this responsibility, it will have to participate as much as possible in the local efforts to justify the hunt in the eyes of national and international public opinion.

We have seen over the years that the government is almost entirely absent every time a predictable event happens, like the autumn winds in the Magdalen Islands. Every March, someone arrives in a helicopter and sullies the reputation of the hunters and, by that very fact, that of the Canadian government. Every time, we turn to the government, which is nowhere to be found. It is so predictable.

We wonder why the Canadian government does not make the necessary efforts or does not have the means to counter the disinformation by using the same methods as these anti-hunt or animal rights activist groups who have an organized and coordinated strategy. This is a long-term strategy. We can proceed one step at a time. Once the government has recognized its responsibilities, it should be easy, with the means it has at its disposal, to take the necessary action.

• (1510)

[English]

Mr. Léonard Poirier: It's another kind of surprise for the terrorists and others.

The Chair: I think most of my colleagues would agree with that.

I'm going to ask Mr. Cormier for a quick comment, and then we need to go to our next questioner.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Cormier (Administrator, Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels des Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Good afternoon.

I have been wondering something for a long time. If we leave aside the hunters from Newfoundland, the Magdalen Islands and the North Shore, are the rest of the people in Canada, from Ontario to British Columbia, for or against the hunt? It seems to me as though there is nothing beyond the Rideau Canal.

[English]

The Chair: This is the opportunity for us to ask you questions.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: It's a legitimate question, and I'll try to paraphrase it for the rest of the committee members. It's safe to say that for those of us who represent fisheries ridings—and the majority of us do—and for those of us who live in rural or coastal or remote areas of Canada—and many of us do—there is a disconnect between rural and urban. We understand that. More and more, we have a difficult time getting our message across, living in rural Canada, to people in urban Canada, that fish don't come from the store, that milk doesn't come from a box, and that it's okay to carry on traditional hunting and fishing and farming practices. That's a big job. We have a big job to meet those challenges in the future. We recognize that. So your point is fairly considered.

We have to go to Mr. Matthews, our next questioner.

Very quickly, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Boudreau: The best way for the Canadian government to take a stand in defence of the hunt would be for the prime minister to make a clear and unequivocal statement at the time of the hunt. The prime minister could clearly state that the Canadian government stands behind the hunters and that the hunt is properly carried out.

[English]

The Chair: I will pass that message on, and to the Minister of Fisheries as well.

Mr. Matthews, please.

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, gentlemen, for appearing. It's a real pleasure to be here with your member of Parliament, Mr. Blais. I think he's trying to kill us with kindness, because we've done a lot of eating—and some seal, which is good.

I don't want to make too much of a statement, but I want to say to you that the reason we're here is that we share your frustration. We recognize that successive federal governments have really failed to advance the cause and have mishandled the situation. That's why you as participants in the seal hunt are so frustrated and wondering where your federal government is.

That's the reason we're here. We're very sincere about the job we're trying to do, but we have to be sure we do it right, because we haven't done it right in the past. That's why we're in the difficulty we're in today. That's what this visit here is about, and to Newfoundland yesterday and to Nova Scotia later today.

I have a couple of quick questions, in the interest of time, because I know my colleagues want to ask some questions.

You would really like to see an increase in the harp seal TAC. One of you said that; I don't know which one of you. Can the marketplace sustain an increase in seals, an increase in the hunt? Is there a market for more seals?

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Boudreau: Yes, there certainly exists a market for an increase in the total allowable catch, the TAC. We are not talking about a very significant increase. Instead of allowing 325,000 catches, we could authorize up to 375,000. At that level, there would be no problem in the markets.

• (1515)

[English]

Mr. Bill Matthews: The other thing that was mentioned was grey seals. Is there an identified market for grey seals?

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Boudreau: As far as grey seals are concerned, the market is building slowly. There is currently a problem, because the market for pelts or grey seal oil is very weak. There is a very small market. There could not be a big increase at this time. But the TAC should increase a little.

As far as the oil is concerned, the market is much more concerned with biodiesel. We are not talking about human consumption. Up until now, studies on biodiesel made with seal oil have shown excellent results. The Montreal Urban Community and biodiesel companies, amongst others, have carried out tests using seal oil and these have given excellent results.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Arseneau is next, and then Mr. Cyr.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Arseneau: Regarding the increase of the total allowable catch, we need a minimal critical mass in order to sustain the industry, particularly in the Magdalen Islands sector. That is what we are discussing now. The industry should be allowed to reach a certain level of profitability. That is impossible with 18,000 pelts. We have to go find pelts elsewhere.

That is why we are saying that it is unfair. We cannot leave the industry struggling to survive. We are not greedy; we are talking about some 30,000 pelts out of a total quota. That is not an unreasonable amount.

Mr. Jérémie Cyr: Harp seals travel through the gulf. They cause a lot of damage and eat a lot of fish. You have to be aware that we cannot just deal with harp seals; we also have to deal with grey seals. There is market potential for harp seals, but also for grey seals.

Grey seals stay within the gulf of St. Lawrence throughout the year. The Sable Island population is about 300,000 seals, based on the most recent estimates. These animals live around Sable Island and travel throughout the gulf.

It is clear that the current market for grey seals is not very developed, and we have to address this issue immediately. We have to find a way to control the grey seal population before the situation becomes irreversible, because these animals eat fish throughout the year. This is becoming more and more obvious. You could be fishing for cod with a hook at the end of your line and when you have caught one, a seal will come up and snatch it away. Similarly, you cannot keep an Atlantic halibut which has been half eaten. So grey seals represent a huge problem.

We need to invest money to find new markets or to find ways of using every single part of the seal. I know that the government looked into the matter, but the project was shelved.

You cannot deal with harp seals without also dealing with grey seals. Otherwise, the entire fishing industry will suffer and the situation will become irreversible.

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Lapierre, did you want to comment?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: I agree with the fact that the quota should be increased, as long as [Editor's note: inaudible] as far as managing the hunt is concerned. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has a management plan, but we always have to be extremely careful because IFAW might file a complaint and the Humane Society always has us in its sights. We do not really want to increase the quota—because we are under pressure—to 360,000 or 375,000 seals, as Paul was saying. We know there is a market for these products, because some pelts were sold for \$105 a piece in Newfoundland.

Last week, I heard a chemist make a presentation about collagen, which is used to treat severe burn victims and other conditions. This caught my attention, because it could drive up the price of seal's pelts skin tenfold. Collagen sells for between \$30,000 and \$40,000 per kilo. The product exists, but to research and to take advantage of this market, we will need government help.

We want to use every part of the seal. People criticize us because we leave behind the meat. We tried to create small businesses to sell the meat, but because these businesses received so little support from the provincial government, they had to close their operations.

I think that Canadians should get together and work together to find ways of using every part of the seal. No part should be left behind, not even the claws, which could perhaps be used to make small necklaces. It is true that there is a lot of waste.

• (1520)

[English]

The Chair: Merci beaucoup, Monsieur Lapierre.

I'm going to move over to Mr. Manning, who will be our next questioner.

I have a quick point on the grey seal. There's a serious problem with grey seals in Nova Scotia, in *la Nouvelle-Écosse*. We have heard that now there is a resident herd there. It's not just the Sable Island herd; it's a resident herd. They whelp on the islands on the shore of Nova Scotia. They come up the rivers. They chase the salmon. They chase the gaspereau. They chase the smelts. Whatever is there to eat, they will eat. They open the lobster traps. They're seen as far offshore as 150 miles off the edge of Georges Bank.

I know a fisherman, a friend of mine, who set two tubs of trawl down there, with 400 hooks. When he hauled them in, about one-third of them had fish on them, and not one single fish could be kept. So you are right about grey seals: they're a serious problem and they're getting worse.

Sorry for that, gentlemen.

Mr. Manning.

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

The Chair: A chair is not supposed to speak.

Mr. Fabian Manning: I'll never say.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses, and I'm certainly delighted with the opportunity to come and visit your community and for the invitation from Mr. Blais. He has given us a great initiation into your home and your cuisine, and we've enjoyed it tremendously.

As Mr. Matthews touched on, coming from Newfoundland and Labrador, I know how important the seal hunt is to you people here, as much as it is to our own province.

I would just like to take a slightly different edge to some of my questions, which relate to protesters on the ice interfering with your place of work and your work. I'd like to know if you have some experience with that and what your views are on whether government should be permitting these people to be on the ice or issuing permits for them to be on the ice.

Also, I would like someone to comment on the hakapik, which has been in the news lately. Some comments have been made about the use of it—its future use. It may become an issue.

My last question.... You decide who wants to answer. I think it was Mr. Boudreau who commented on the system in Newfoundland by 2008. There was some discussion on that in our Newfoundland meetings in regard to processing. Could you elaborate on the concerns you have there? Because there are also concerns in Newfoundland and Labrador about what may happen in 2008 in relation to processing.

So whoever wants to can take those couple of questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérémie Cyr: As far as the protesters are concerned, during the last hunting season, last spring—in any case, charges will be laid—the officers responsible for overseeing the situation lost complete control of it. On the one hand, you have a person who is trying to do his job as a hunter, a job he has been doing for many decades, and who is a victim—last year, it was even worse than in the past—of repeated provocations on the part of the protesters. On the other hand, you have a 65-foot boat and inflatable vessels with two people onboard who have brought cameras to take pictures, or two people who have cameras which transmit directly live images by satellite. There are no words to describe what hunters in general had to endure here around the Magdalen Islands when the protesters arrived in the gulf.

If the protesters had come to simply observe the hunt, that would not have been an issue, but some conditions would have had to have been respected, namely that they could not provoke the hunters or even put pressure on them, which might lead them to make mistakes. The hunters are at work, and they sometimes have to work in dangerous conditions. One of these days, there will be a catastrophe: an inflatable boat might sink or there might be another such accident. The hunters are at work, there are men on the ice, and there is a person in charge of monitoring the hunters. Then you have an inflatable craft which comes close in order to provoke the hunters. But since this boat cannot break the ice to get to where it wants, it follows the trail which has been broken by the hunters, the boat moves up directly behind the hunters and the person in charge of monitoring the situation has to keep an eye on both the protesters and the hunters. This does not make any sense from a security point of view. Last year, the situation became critical. The protesters were supposed to stay 30 feet away from the hunters, but they came closer.

It is all right to observe the hunt. There are organized tours to the Magdalen Islands for people who wish to observe the whitecoats. It is illegal to kill a whitecoat and people are there to observe the situation. There is a set period of time in which to do this, namely from March 1 to March 15. The observation is done from a helicopter. We don't agree with that approach, because it stresses the seals, but at least the people who observe the seals don't bother the hunters at work beginning March 20.

We have never had any problems with people who are on an observation tour; however, we always have problems with the people who want the seal hunt to be abolished. They come and endlessly provoke us, and each year, they organize a huge media event. For instance, someone said that a hunter had threatened a protesters with a knife. Imagine that! Our every move is monitored, they accuse us of being barbarians, but we are not; we are basically prisoners when we are out on a hunt. We have to watch our every move because we are being watched from all sides. And this doesn't just last for 5 or 10 minutes. Last year, protesters stayed with me for three hours. Other hunters were also surrounded for three or four hours. It is unconscionable for this type thing to be tolerated.

•(1525)

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: In the spring, whelping happens 35 miles north-west of the islands. The abolitionists fly over the area by helicopter to find the mothers. No one ever talks about this, and it

is something I want to denounce today. At one point, they will go down and see a herd of 100 females to find out whether they are ready to whelp. Since there isn't much ice left today, the herd is very concentrated. The seals are not used to seeing helicopters. When I hunted in a rowboat, there were no helicopters. Fishing was done on the ice. I am talking about respect for the environment, for the seals and for the females when they whelped; this issue is very dear to my heart. But these people will take the whitecoats away from their mothers, bring them some place else and take pictures of them. All this happens with the infernal noise of the helicopters in the background. By the way, the fuel used in these helicopters is the most polluting kind; I think you know that. But no one says anything. I've been going out on the ice floes for 55 years. I knew the ice floes before Bardot showed up, when everything was perfectly still and quiet, but now, I look at the ice floes and see that the life of the female seals is not respected any more. As you saw this morning, when a helicopter shows up, the females are in a certain position. There's a reason for that. When you look at pictures of seals in the water, those are the mothers. Observers take pictures and work on the ice: but that land is ours and we live off the land. I want to denounce what is happening today.

I would be curious to find out which biologist would contradict me by saying that the seals eat immediately after having heard the infernal noise and felt the vibrations of the helicopters when they land on the ice. People say that the boat propellers make noise, but no one ever mentions the noise from the helicopter rotor. I would like the Canadian government to look into this issue. We developed our tourism market when the market for whitecoats disappeared. It was a matter of survival. Today, I am wondering about its *raison d'être*. I do not want to cause controversy in the Magdalen Islands, because those who work in the tourism industry will be very upset with me, but we all have to get real.

If the herd is frightened and the young seals are not well fed, the ice will be gone by the time they reach their maximum growth. The seals will be in the Strait of Belle Isle, 250 miles away from the Magdalen Islands. That's what's happening today. The hunt will be held more and more often in the Strait of Belle Isle because the ice will have disappeared from the gulf. We have to protect the herd from noise. As Jérémie said a little earlier, they fly so close to the ice floes that they scare the beaters into the water, so that it's not possible to hunt them anymore. Just imagine how frustrated we are when we try to exercise our rights. You might have a herd of 500 or 600 seals, but then they are scared into the water and we cannot hunt them.

•(1530)

[*English*]

The Chair: Merci, Monsieur Lapierre.

Monsieur Arseneau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Arseneau: There are legal limits to how closely a person can observe the hunt. It would be better if the government was on the side of the hunt and the hunters, and reviewed its legislation to tighten the criteria for observing seals. If you follow the news, you will realize that in almost every area, when the courts, be it at the civil, criminal or international level, have a case before them, the activity in question continues until a ruling is made.

But what we are dealing with is rather unique. It is as if people took for granted the fact that observation is a necessary evil and that we have to live with its consequences, rather than take the opposite approach. In fact, we should begin by saying that observation is useless, and that if there is no way around it, it should be allowed under extremely strict conditions. But the opposite is happening today. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans should act on a policy to strictly limit observation for all the reasons we mentioned before, including security. We are convinced that we could defend this approach in court and win.

[English]

The Chair: Merci beaucoup.

Monsieur Boudreau.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Boudreau: In any case, if we don't have laws to regulate and legislate the observation, we have parliamentarians to change the laws. It's up to you to pass the legislation we need to make sure that the hunt is respected and regulated.

I would like to respond to what Mr. Manning said. The province of Newfoundland can adopt regulations and legislations to protect its industry. I acknowledge that the province wants the processing to take place on its territory, but the department does not have the right to suffocate our industry because there are not enough quotas for the industry in Newfoundland to survive. It is not the industry on the Magdalen Islands, nor is it the fact that we buy some of the product in Newfoundland, that are causing problems in that province. Newfoundland's problem is the skins that are exported to other countries, not the skins that go from Newfoundland to the Magdalen Islands. That's not an issue for Newfoundlanders.

Further, we would need a quota of at least 30,000 skins to have an integrated industry. That quota would mean that hunters would have enough work and we would have an industry which could live off of the hunt. That figure does not even represent 10% of the global quota. People living on the Magdalen Islands have fought for many years to save the hunt. Hunters from the Magdalen Islands have always been under much more pressure during the hunt than hunters elsewhere. The abolitionists come here because it is not so far away and easier for them. So our hunters always have to deal with the protesters and they are forced to hunt surrounded by these people.

Historically, it has also had an impact on landings. As Mr. Cyr said earlier, the hunt only lasts two or three days, and when you spend half a day with the protesters on your back, the hunt really does not go as quickly. The hunt cannot be carried out under the same conditions. I think that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans should take that fact into account and give us a fair quota. If that happens, Newfoundland can adopt whatever regulations it wants to retain its own industry.

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I know other members have questions, so please ask one or two questions each so everyone has an opportunity.

Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Gentlemen, first off I want to say how deeply impressed each and every one of us was on our visit to the Magdalen Islands, in particular by the infrastructure you've built up in terms of not only promoting seals and sealing but also of promoting education, good solid education, as to exactly what this resource is to this island and to you as people who live on a fully renewable natural resource.

What really struck me this morning as we went to Club Vacances and went to the seal interpretation centre was how you've really been able to promote what this industry is, what it means, and how it can be done sustainably, and you're getting that message out. I think this committee needed to hear that, because it will be an integral part of our report. In fact, I took it very seriously that the work you've done needs to be brought to other areas of Canada—even my own home province, where, amazingly enough, a survey that was done showed that with the increasing urbanization of Canada, including Newfoundland and Labrador, young people in our own region are starting to get a somewhat cynical view about the impact of seals and sealing and whether sealing is an appropriate activity. I don't think that's a product of the merits of the issue; it's just simply that they too are hearing the constant messages from others. From my point of view, this committee took that very seriously, and I've no doubt we'll incorporate it into our final report.

I want to get into the economics and have a look at exactly what the sealing industry means to the Magdalen Islands. How many sealers are involved in the industry here? What's the average value that you received per pelt, per animal? What really struck me were some comments made about research and development and maximizing the value of the resource. It just seems to me that if somebody actually came up with some ability to assist burn survivors, as with the example of the collagen, and then heart ailments with the omega-3 oils.... The best way to fight this issue, in my opinion, is not to simply fight emotion with facts, because unfortunately the facts will be the first casualty; it's really to fight emotion with emotion, emotion with good substantive counter-balance and counterproduct. The research and development aspect of this industry—developing new products—seems to be the best offence we could possibly muster in terms of getting this together.

Taking it from a grassroots point of view, how many sealers are on the Magdalen Islands? What was the average annual value of the pelts for the animals you got last year? Where could we see this industry going, with the right applications?

• (1540)

Mr. Roger Simon: To answer your question, Mr. Byrne, there are about 700 licences, on average, issued per year. Out of those, we qualify about 350 as commercially active; they earn a significant part of their annual salary from sealing. There are no accurate numbers on this, but this estimate is fairly good, I think. The other 300-odd sealers we could qualify as people who will go when the seals are very close or accessible. The Newfoundlanders, I think, have a good expression for it: they call it “for the pot”. A lot of people do eat seal here, and some will get a licence only to harvest seals for personal use, but we figure there are about 350 who are commercially active. The landed value is about \$1.5 million.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: What was the average landed value per animal last year?

Mr. Roger Simon: A good estimate is maybe \$70.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Jean-Claude, that's one of the things about tourism. I'm not here to stir up the pot either, and it seems to me you've done a very solid job of balancing the consumptive aspects of the industry with the non-consumptive aspects of the industry. There have been proposals put forward by the IFAW and others to comb seals and manufacture products out of the fur that comes from the comb—absolute nonsense. The Magdalen Islands have built up a tourism industry in many respects, in the pre-season, but then by graphically showing these non-factual images of a whitecoat hunt, they're the ones that actually are the cause of the demise of the tourism aspect.

This area is the same as my area. It always enjoyed the economic and social benefits of sealing. We've had the protesters come in. They marginalized the economic benefits of sealing. Then we went increasingly to tourism. Now they're trying to marginalize the tourism aspects of the industry. The truth is—believe me, in my own riding, tourism is very important and I'm a big supporter of it—if tourism was the best industry around, the richest places on the planet should be Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, but it's not, because you need a balance of many industries in order to make a solid economy.

Where do we go from here in terms of counterbalancing the impact of groups like the IFAW? How do we actually continue to stimulate the industry? Do we fight fire with fire? Do we fight with emotion? Give us, for our report, how we do this in terms of taking on this issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: This is a battle for the hearts of people; we therefore have to fight for the hearts as well. It's another approach. We are dealing with tourism. We need tourism on the Magdalen Islands, but we are at the point where we have to review everything to see whether, in fact, tourism is indeed a good thing. It's an irritant. That even holds true for the slide show I saw this morning at the open air centre. The first time I saw it, I wasn't really sure about it. Someone from the other group talked to me about it and told me that it felt strange to him to see images of the hunt and whitecoats. For the hunters, the whitecoats have become something like a tumour which they must drag around. This tumour has already become a cancer.

That is why I question the idea of tourism. We have to look at the situation all together to see whether the hunt should be conducted and presented differently, so we can save it. As I said in my presentation, it is five minutes to midnight and we must act. We are pleased that you are here to talk about this situation and to examine every aspect of it. In fact, that is something I have already done. I have asked myself why I am still a hunter at 66 years of age. I tried to determine what impact tourism has had on the herd. Today, I take a holistic approach to nature, which includes the hunt and tourism. Everyone has their rights, but there also has to be a balance.

The IFAW and the Humane Society have made millions of dollars off of the hunt. We nearly lost a generation of hunters because of those who wish to abolish the hunt. My three sons hunt with me. They are 34, 36 and 42 years old. Three years ago, I had to show them where they could not go on the ice because otherwise they would fall into the water. I started hunting at the age of 12. I grew up doing this. I would be curious to find out at what age people begin hunting these days. It certainly won't be 14 or 15 years. These are all things I wonder about today.

As for tourism, are we doing the right thing? Perhaps, but the question has to be asked. Is tourism a good thing or a bad thing? The issue should be studied, but it will not be a small association made up of people with only a Grade 7 education who will be able to analyze all the ins and outs of the situation. We need a committee created specifically to study this matter, and with government support, to examine the situation from every point of view. There is work to be done, and it must be done by competent people.

I am a hunter, a professional whitecoat hunter. I do not think that I should sit on such a committee, but there are competent people who could.

• (1545)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Lapierre.

Mr. Arseneau, and then Mr. Boudreau. I'm going to again ask you both to be very brief, because Monsieur Byrne was very long.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Joël Arseneau: Long question, short answer. Part of the answer was in the question, so that's all right.

[Translation]

We were wondering whether we should fight fire with fire. Personally, I think we should fight emotions with facts. Every time you dissect the arguments of the abolitionists, you realize that they just don't make sense.

You said earlier that the hunt respected the balance of the ecosystem. We are talking about a renewable resource. We cannot stop repeating that the hunt is conducted in an orderly manner, that it is done in the best conditions and that the killing is done in a respectful manner, in accordance with our principles. Further, I think we should stop pitting tourism against hunting or fishing activities.

We can give you a copy of our policy framework on tourism development. The policy states that, at the local level, tourism is important for the economy, but that fishing activities truly represent the backbone of our industry. This includes the seal hunt. As a tourist destination, we would only be the shadow of our former selves if we lost that which makes up our identity, that is, hunting and fishing. Attracting tourists by selling them a product which is not authentic is something that we cannot even image.

As for striking a balance between hunting seals and observing them, in my opinion we have managed, in the last 10 years, despite the blackmail we were subject to over a certain period of time, to strike a certain balance. Those who come or keep coming to observe the seals a few weeks before the hunt might be closing their eyes to the situation, but they always have to contend with the people who have been described as barbarians. But when they leave, they have a different image of the hunters.

It's a long process, because the observers don't all come at the same time, and there are only about a few hundred of them each year. I think that these people are then forced to admit, even when they talk about the situation with the guides on the ice, that the two activities are not incompatible, that the animals they have come to photograph can also be hunted, and that these activities take place during two distinct periods. These two realities have coexisted for 10 years. It is, to a certain extent, a delicate balance, but it is nevertheless a balance which we have been able to keep over the last few years.

• (1550)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boudreau.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Boudreau: I would like to begin by talking about training. We have developed a guide and a video to train the hunters. In fact, it is the hunter's handbook. It was distributed during the training course, once the hunt had started, to attract young people to the hunt. The best way to sell the hunt is probably by talking about the training hunters receive. When we met with European parliamentarians and senators from the European Council, what probably struck and impressed them the most was when we told them that our hunters are trained and are closely monitored, and that the hunt is conducted in a professional manner.

The first recommendation of your committee should probably be to make training mandatory to ensure that the hunt is carried out as it should be. If a couple of hunters somewhere remain isolated and do not hunt properly, that will affect the entire hunt and all hunters. So we have to make sure that this does not happen again.

The second point has to do with research and development. It's another way for us to convince the public of the benefits of the hunt. Today, there is a fair amount of research and development with regard to the seal industry. We are in the process of conducting research to separate the omega-3 fatty acids found in seal oil in order to sell each of them as an active ingredient.

There is a lot of research and development happening in Newfoundland, but it is not concentrated anywhere. The research

is spread out all over the place. There should be an umbrella organization to identify exactly who is doing what and produce research reports. A lot of academic reports have been written the benefits of seal oil. Other reports have been produced on the advantages of biodiesel, and so on. However, the information is still very diluted. It would be much easier to export omega-3s to the American market than fur. We have to keep this in mind. The day when Americans want omega-3s from seal oil, they will be more inclined to amend their legislation than they have been for fur imports.

[English]

The Chair: They'll need seal oil when they run out of heavy crude.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Monsieur Blais.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I have a two-pronged question or a double question.

First, I will talk about the fact that information is one of the weapons at our disposal. I think that the Seal Interpretive Centre on the Magdalen Islands is a good start, but more needs to be done. For instance, would you support the committee if it recommended that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans provide support for the Seal Interpretive Centre, and perhaps support opening another such centre in Newfoundland? Fisheries and Oceans could provide more financial support to the centre so that it could modernize its exhibits, and the travelling exhibits of the centre would also be an added benefit.

The travelling exhibits can be shown almost anywhere. As you said earlier, we need to convince other Canadians of this, and Ottawa is a good place to start. The 308 members of Parliament are in Ottawa, and embassies are also located there. So that would be something to do. Would you support such an initiative?

My next question is specifically for Mr. Lapierre.

I would like you to tell us more about the film you saw and which you mentioned a little earlier. What is it about? How long is it? What exactly does it show?

• (1555)

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: I saw the film with Mr. Arseneau. Its aim is to counterbalance the disinformation. The documentary is not in favour of the hunt, but even a remotely intelligent person can come to their own conclusions.

We finally have what we wanted.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Does this film show the handling?

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: Yes. You even see a little beater being tormented 45 minutes to make the last video. The scene takes place on the ice. The producer then asks Rebecca Aldworth why she let the seal suffer for 45 minutes and why they did not kill it. You can see that she is ill at ease. I know her, but someone who does not know her and who sees her on the ice can see how she is feeling. She is stuck, she has no way out.

Perhaps someone thought that it would be okay [*Editor's note: Inaudible*] to happen here. Perhaps someone would have taken it to the vet. That is not credible. You see the truth. You see chemists talking about collagen; the story of the hakapik, with a skull of a seal, captive bolt pistols, etc. It is presented by Mr. Daoust. It also shows how seals are skinned. You hear the truth about the seal hunt. You can clearly see the pros and cons.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Is it in French or English?

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: The film is in French. It is not out yet, but Europe and the United States are asking for it.

Mr. Raynald Blais: It would be important for committee members to see it.

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: It is very important.

Mr. Raynald Blais: It would be important for committee members to see it.

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: You cannot see it.

Mr. Raynald Blais: But will we be able to see it eventually?

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: The film will début on January 15. It could serve as an information tool, as a documentary. It shows how the hunt takes place and abolitionists on the ice. Foreigners who know nothing about the seal hunt will be able to get a good idea of the situation.

Denis and I watched the film that evening as hunters, then the next day, we put ourselves in the shoes of an abolitionist, of a European, or someone who does not know anything about the seal hunt. I could clearly see the scheming. Someone who does not know anything about the hunt forgets that.

Mr. Raynald Blais: It is impossible for you to put yourself in the shoes of someone who does not know anything, as I know full-well that you are capable of working all of that out.

You have minimized the importance of your contribution. The seal hunt is not a question of instruction, but a question of education. That is not the same thing. Some people have PhDs and do not understand anything, whereas others, who have never gone to school, are much more knowledgeable. Be it in the Magdalen Islands or Newfoundland and Labrador, seal hunters talk about the animal with respect.

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: That is true.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Just because a hunter kills a deer does not automatically make him barbaric. The same is true for a seal hunter.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Cyr, maybe you could make the final comment on this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérémie Cyr: We talked about dis-information and about information, Mr. Blais. We also said that the government had declared it was up to its embassies, which represent it, to get the information out. During our visit to Quebec City, at the Parliament, a representative of another country tried to raise our awareness. He asked us if there was a way of abolishing the hunt and turning us towards something else. I find that point of view quite stupid. It makes no sense. If we abolish the hunt, we might as well close down all of the coastal regions, be it around the Gulf of St. Lawrence, in

Newfoundland or elsewhere. The reality is such that seals eat fish. The ecosystem that Mr. Arseaneau talked about must follow its course.

We have reached the point where a representative from another country tells us that it would be better for us to leave the food for the seals and to move on to something else. However, we know that our main industry is the fishing industry.

• (1600)

Mr. Raynald Blais: We can talk about the issue of financial assistance for the Seal Interpretation Centre.

Mr. Jérémie Cyr: I fully agree with the idea. The Seal Interpretation Centre works with what it has. It does not receive much government assistance. This is therefore a very good opportunity. The traveling exhibit has covered considerable ground within Quebec, but I do not know if it has gone elsewhere. It would be a very good initiative, if only to inform or educate our fellow Canadians. After that, it could go elsewhere.

Mr. Léonard Poirier: The plan was to keep it around for some time. We could use the opportunity to do what Jean-Claude was talking about in Ottawa.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lapierre, last comment, please. Then we'll go to another questioner.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Lapierre: Just for your information, Radio-Canada does in fact own the film that I went to see.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lunney is the next questioner.

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

The Chair: We'll try to be brief here, gentlemen. I know our witnesses have a lot to say, and it's important, and the questions sometimes get lengthy.

Mr. James Lunney: Why would you lay that on me, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: I want to say thank you to everybody for your presentations. I think it's been very helpful. I appreciated the visit to the interpretive centre.

I want to agree with comments made by Mr. Byrne about use of the whole animal. I'm sure there's more value that can be obtained from the animal that would help the case. The more we can generate positive uses—the omega-3 is great. If there's a positive use for collagen...all of that is good.

I noticed that no one would believe Mr. Lapierre when he mentioned his age here. No one would believe this is possible, so maybe there's tremendous vitality or long life here in the Magdalen Islands. And look at the head of hair! I have to say—

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Get some seal oil.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. James Lunney: Look at the end of the table here. I think there might be evidence that it really helps with hair growth. We can look into this; it might save the whole industry, with the possible exception here of the mayor. Perhaps we had better see how much seal he's been eating.

Putting that aside, on a serious note, use of the animal is one thing, but there's another issue I want to come back to, and that is fishing activities, obviously. We visit here, and it's so beautiful that I think we all want to come back as tourists. But all the boats that are here... it's part of the history of this area; it's a fishing area like Newfoundland. Fishing is a heritage. It is your culture. It's obvious that it's part of what makes this the most beautiful, attractive, and ambient area and all of that.

And you call this, and I think this is interesting, *loup marine*. We've been hearing about *phoque* all week during our studies here, but *loup marine* predation.... I want to bring this back to the issue of predation. I think it was Mr. Poirier who raised the issue of predation. I understand that in establishing the total allowable catch, the TAC, that predation is not an issue, and perhaps, Roger, you can answer some of this in a minute, but predation is not considered in establishing the total allowable catch.

Now, you people have evidence or have seen first-hand what seals are doing to the cod and the other fish in the area, with the tremendous numbers that are out here now. I want to ask whether you feel we could do more talking about the predation or the damage these fish are doing in preventing cod stocks and other fisheries from coming back, so you can maintain the fishing heritage that is important here in the Magdalen Islands.

Would you like to comment on that?

The Chair: He's still thinking about the hair.

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Cyr?

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mr. Jérémie Cyr: As I told you, there are harp seals and grey seals. If we deal with the problem of harp seals but leave the grey seals alone, we will never rebuild the fish stocks in the Gulf. So we must rule that out. It is not a solution.

We are on the right track. Now we need to inform our friends on the other side of the ocean, the Europeans. We must hope the message gets across. That would be a good thing. Regardless of what happens, you must understand that in the Gulf and along the east and west coast of Newfoundland, grey seals are a major problem. We must stay on track as regards the harp seals. Grey seals, however, are of concern. We must come up with a solution.

Mr. Joël Arseneau: In reality, the total allowable catch must be based on scientific data, not fear over public opinion. It is quite simple. We know from that point of view that science is on our side.

Mr. Paul Boudreau: As for predation by grey seals on fish stocks, scientists sometimes shy away from precisely identifying the impact on the biomass. According to a person I spoke to, scientists apparently said that seals did not eat large quantities of cod and other fish. Regardless of what people say, a seal eats a ton of fish each year.

According to one of my friends, it is simple: one thing he knows for sure is that seals do not eat strawberries. They eat fish and there are a lot of them. So it is clear that one way or another, there is an impact on the biomass.

Mr. Roger Simon: Tomorrow, in Shelburne, you are going to meet Dr. Mike Hammill. He is the one who conducted and published the recent studies on fish consumption in the Gulf by harp and grey seals. So you will have an opportunity to raise that tomorrow. You will be talking to the expert in the field.

Mr. Léonard Poirier: In terms of consumption, when you talk about a certain amount of cod, for example, you must not forget that it is part of a food chain. If the overabundance of seals is detrimental to another species, you must bear in mind that that species feeds other species, which feed other species, which feed other species, and so on. Biologists do not always measure that impact.

Biologists have often been criticized for adopting a point of view that is not comprehensive enough. In recent years, they have attempted to adopt a much more ecosystemic approach, in other words, more comprehensive. Clearly, that is not easy to measure. Nevertheless, we must not forget about the effect on the food chain.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

I don't know if there are further questions, gentlemen. We do have another set of presenters, on stability tests for boats.

I would like to take a second and thank all of our witnesses here today. It was, again, very informative, and we've quite enjoyed the entire trip here to Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

I would just make one observation. Prior to this job I was a farmer, and I can tell you, I've sold hundreds of lambs over the years, and I don't think one customer would want to butcher their own. So I really struggle with the issue of observers on the ice. It may seem to be the right thing to allow people out there who want to observe, but if they're not a qualified veterinarian, then I would question whether or not we should allow them on the ice at all. They're not out there to be helpful. They're not out there to be factual, and they're certainly not out there to support the hunt. So I think we have to ask the question of why they are there, and then how we have to deal with them. That's my last observation.

Thank you very much. It has been a very good meeting.

Sorry, Mr. Kamp, you've been waiting patiently.

• (1610)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): I know we are pressed for time. I also want to thank you for your good presentations and echo my colleague's comments that it has been great to be here. It has been too short a time, and we need to come back.

Let me just conclude by saying, so there's no confusion on this, that as the parliamentary secretary to the minister, I can assure you that our current Minister of Fisheries and Oceans—and I think the ones before him, but the current one, I know, for sure—is a very enthusiastic supporter of the seal hunt. There shouldn't be any confusion about that, and we're going to wrestle with some of the ways in which we can support you, in the best way and in the ways that are also legal, and I think we will be wrestling with the issue of observers.

I had a question or two about that, but I don't think I need to take time for those. But I did want to thank you as well.

The Chair: We have one more hand. I can't believe it, but we have another person who wants to ask us another question. I'm going to allow, that Mr. Manning.

But before I do, Mr. Boudreau, you mentioned a letter from the Fur Institute of Canada. I think it was sent to the Minister of International Trade, Minister Emerson. I was just wondering if it would be possible for the committee to get a copy of that letter. That's all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Boudreau: The letter was sent to the Honourable David Emerson six weeks ago, to ask him for his support. The council would appreciate receiving a reply as quickly as possible to get the ball rolling so that we can be effective during the next hunting season.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. Can we get a copy of that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Boudreau: I will send a copy to Mr. Blais, who can give it to you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Merci.

Very quickly, please, Mr. Manning.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Very quickly, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for allowing me to do this.

To Mr. Cyr, could you tell us how much of your income percentage-wise you obtained from the sealing part of the fishery, and was that insurable earnings? Under EI, is that insurable earnings, and how much was your percentage?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérémie Cyr: Yes. They are insurable earnings.

[*English*]

Mr. Fabian Manning: Okay.

The income from sealing in Newfoundland and Labrador is not insurable. That's something I wanted to clarify; it's not insurable in our province.

The Chair: Thank you very much to our witnesses.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Could we just explore that question?

The Chair: Boys, the Newfoundlanders, I'm telling you!

Very quickly, to get a clear answer here, I think the question was on employment insurance.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: There are self-employed fishers. Of course, in the EI system, there's a labour stamp, a labour claim, and a fisher's claim. Can you use sealing income for the purposes of making a fishing claim?

The Chair: Mr. Boudreau, can you shed some light on this?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérémie Cyr: It depends on the fishers. For owners, the answer is no; for employees, the fishermen's helpers who work on the boats, the answer is yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

I'm going to adjourn this quickly and ask our next group of presenters to come forward.

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