



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 062

Thursday, April 20, 2023

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 62 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

The meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022.

Before we proceed, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

Please address all comments through the chair.

Screenshots and taking photos of your screen are not permitted.

The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

Finally, this is a reminder to all that the use of a House-approved headset is mandatory for remote participation in parliamentary proceedings.

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I am informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on January 18, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of the ecosystem impacts and management of pinniped populations.

I would like to welcome our first panel of witnesses. We have Morley Knight, former assistant deputy minister, fisheries policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, who is appearing in person as an individual. We have Mélanie Lemire, associate professor, Université Laval, by video conference. She is representing the Collectif Manger notre Saint-Laurent. We have Colombe Saint-Pierre, chef-owner, Restaurant Chez Saint-Pierre, by video conference. We have Mr. Bill Penney, business developer, representing Mi'kmaq Commercial Fisheries Inc.

Thanks for taking the time to appear today. You will each have up to five minutes for your opening statement, and I will invite Mr. Knight to start off, please.

Mr. Morley Knight (Former Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans (Retired), As an Individual): Thank you, Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. I'll start off by thanking you for the opportunity to appear before your committee again. In my opening remarks today, I'm going to talk about my direct experience with harp and hooded seals, as well as grey seals and other species.

In 1982, my first year with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, I was at the front off the northeast coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. I was there at the tail end of the season for the large vessels from Canada and Norway and at the start of the activities for the less-than-65-foot vessels that were harvesting seals about 100 miles east of St. Anthony. That was the last year of harvesting whitecoats. In the following years, markets and harvest levels declined dramatically to around 50,000 animals a year. During that same time, seal populations expanded to five times what they were before, and groundfish stocks collapsed across eastern Canada.

For years, prior to and including 1982, there was a quota of 186,000 harp seals. The herd was stable at that time at approximately two million animals. Thirty-five years later, in 2017, I had the opportunity to visit Sable Island, where grey seals were congregated for their annual pupping cycle. There were thousands of these huge animals and pups on the island. Seeing them there in such huge numbers was an eye-opening experience.

For centuries, both fish and seals were harvested, with the number of seals being kept at levels that were not having the impact on fish species that they are today. After 1982, markets and harvest levels dropped. About the same time, the bounty on grey seals ended. Over the following years, the number of seals increased about fivefold. I believe seals were a key factor in the collapse of groundfish stocks. They remain a key factor in preventing cod recovery and being major predators on lobster, crab, salmon, herring, etc.

If you add up all the seals in eastern Canada and the Davis Strait, I believe there are about nine million seals, including harp, hooded, grey and such other species as harbour, ringed and bearded seals. Based on an estimated consumption of 1.4 tonnes of fish per year for harp seals and as much as two tonnes per year for the larger animals, such as hooded, grey and bearded seals, they would consume around 13 million tonnes of fish annually.

In the same area, in the same ecosystem, there are fisheries in Greenland and Canada from the Scotian Shelf to the Davis Strait and foreign fisheries on the Grand Banks and Flemish Cap. When you add it all up, the removal from all fisheries is somewhere in the range of 500,000 tonnes to 600,000 tonnes. The consumption by seals is more than 20 times the total of all our commercial fisheries.

Based on my experience and observations, and after talking to thousands of fish harvesters and DFO employees, including fishery officers, scientists and fisheries managers, and others from all over eastern Canada, I believe seals are consuming a huge amount of commercial species of fish, including crab, lobster, salmon, cod, turbot and important prey species like herring and capelin. Unless some action is taken to mitigate the impact of seals, there is no way to effectively manage important fish species using the precautionary approach. The seals will continue to eat them before the stocks reach the level where they can be fished commercially.

Seals are everywhere in the ecosystem and are eating whatever they can find, whether it is the belly of a codfish or a crab. I have reviewed the recent testimony of MP Cormier about the seals visible from his house in Baie-des-Chaleurs. I can also see them from my house in northeast Newfoundland. They are there to feed. They can be found in every bay and inlet and cove all around our coast. Recently a seal was spotted in the Exploits River near the community of Grand Falls-Windsor, which is about 20 miles inland. It was probably eating salmon that were returning to the ocean.

Seals need to be effectively managed as part of an effective ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. The first step in that is to have a clear understanding of how much of each species of fish the seals are eating and what the impact is on each stock of fish.

• (1535)

There are many things that government can do to create the conditions for successful management and utilization of seal stocks. These include coordination, infrastructure, research and development, marketing and trade support, and vessel insurance, just to name a few.

In conclusion, I have two recommendations for you to consider putting to DFO.

One is to study the issue of seal consumption and determine how much of each species of fish each species of seal is consuming annually. The second is to implement an ecosystem-based approach with management strategies that include reducing the impact of predation by seals on key commercial and food chain species.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to your committee today. I'll try to answer your questions when we get to that.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Ms. Saint-Pierre and Ms. Lemire.

It's my understanding that you're doing a joint statement. I don't know who's starting, who's finishing or if it's just one of you speaking.

When you're ready, you have five minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Mélanie Lemire (Associate Professor, Université Laval, Collectif Manger notre Saint-Laurent): Good afternoon and thank you. It's a pleasure to be here with you today.

The Mange ton Saint-Laurent! collective was co-founded in 2018 by a group of researchers and scientists from various disciplines, along with a number of culinary chefs and artists. Its purpose is to promote well-known or lesser-known edible species from the St. Lawrence. I'm also a researcher in environmental and indigenous health at Université Laval. My projects focus on traditional cuisine and preventing exposure to contaminants.

We are here today to report on the most significant facts pertaining to the growing presence of seal products in Quebec markets and elsewhere in Canada. Our main contention is that diversifying St. Lawrence resources has many beneficial impacts, not only on the environment, but also public health, cuisine and the economy.

Here are a few facts. The Quebec fishery basically consists of three species: lobster, snow crab and northern shrimp. Marketing more seal products would help diversify the fishery economy and improve our resiliency to the ups and downs of climate change and international markets.

One of our studies shows that the grey seal is exceptionally rich in iron and all kinds of other good things. The meat is lean and less contaminated than the meat of bluefin tuna, and seal fat is remarkably rich in good fat, including omega-3 fatty acids. That means that it's possible to consume seal products responsibly, in a well-informed and safe manner, by adding them to a more diverse range of foods based on several St. Lawrence species.

Another of our studies demonstrated that public health stakeholders consider seal hunting to be sustainable and socially acceptable, and that it plays an important role in the economic development of coastal communities, which would like to be able to promote seal products to poorer families.

In the Magdalen Islands, seal has always played a key role in the local culture, diet and economy, and it still does. Seal hunting and seal products are a matter of local pride. Have you ever tasted "croxignoles", donuts fried in seal oil, or more recently, a seal burger or even seal tataki? You can find them in the Magdalen Islands and even, increasingly, in various restaurants in eastern Canada.

I'll now give the floor to Colombe Saint-Pierre, the collective's spokesperson.

• (1540)

Mrs. Colombe Saint-Pierre (Chef-Owner, Restaurant Chez Saint-Pierre, Collectif Manger notre Saint-Laurent): Good afternoon, everyone.

I feel truly honoured to be here this afternoon. I am the chef and owner of the Chez Saint-Pierre restaurant in Le Bic, Quebec, and the owner of the Cantine côtière.

I am here today mainly because I'm the spokesperson for the Mange ton Saint-Laurent! collective. Those who know me a little better are aware that I have been fighting on behalf of food self-sufficiency for 20 years, and this was central to our concerns during the recent pandemic. We heard a lot about it and realized that things had become a little more vulnerable over the years, which is why we are here today.

I believe that having a wider range of St. Lawrence products on our plates would provide our coastal communities with a sustainable future and contribute to our healthy culinary tradition. Demand for St. Lawrence products has been rising in Canada and abroad. Seal hunt products are part of the picture and provide an unprecedented opportunity that we need to seize right now. Independent restaurants like mine have a major role to play in familiarizing people with little known St. Lawrence species, and in combatting misleading information. We are, and will continue to be, a powerful vehicle for influencing trends and eating habits across the country, and seal is part of the picture.

Having given a few presentations internationally, I can tell you that our reputation is impeccable and that we have the power to help project a positive perception of Canadian seal products, with support from our governments, of course. Seal products are unfortunately not available in large enough quantities to meet current demand, which has been growing beyond the Magdalen Islands.

Please give some thought to the maxim that all of my own values are based upon: "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are." The quote is from Brillat Savarin's famous book on gastronomy, *The Physiology of Taste*.

On that note, I will tell you that seal is a part of our land. Its historical ties with the people of this country should be maintained and supported. We would like our gastronomy to rest on a diversity of resources, not only for the resilience of our establishments, but also of our environment and our communities. Seal is definitely a part of it.

We established the Mange ton Saint-Laurent! collective to provide support when the government has to make decisions, because we have information that can be extremely useful to it. I would

therefore like to thank you for your invitation to testify before the committee.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Mr. Penney for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Bill Penney (Business Developer, Mi'kmaq Commercial Fisheries Inc.): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me here today.

My name is Bill Penney, and I am the lead at Bill Penney Sales and Marketing Consulting. I am the chair of the Seals and Sealing Network, and I have been working with Mi'kmaq Commercial Fisheries on their seal product file for almost three years.

I am not a scientist, a sealer or a processor; I'm not an expert in any of those areas. However, I have over 25 years of international sales and marketing experience.

I am here today representing Mi'kmaq Commercial Fisheries. MCF is an independent, arms-length indigenous company owned by Qalipu First Nation. Qalipu First Nation is one of the largest first nation bands in Canada, with 24,000 members spread throughout 67 traditional Newfoundland Mi'kmaq communities. Mi'kmaq Commercial Fisheries manages all fisheries activities on behalf of Qalipu First Nation.

I want to also clarify that I am not a member of Qalipu First Nation, nor am I indigenous.

Since I started working with MCF, I have learned that the hunting, consumption and diversified usage of seals is interwoven into the fabric of indigenous peoples' traditions and culture. Mi'kmaq Commercial Fisheries seeks to engage locally, nationally and internationally to advocate the humane harvesting, processing, marketing and use of seal products.

Just two and a half years ago, we launched an indigenous brand of seal oil capsules for human consumption called Waspu Oil. "Waspu" is the Mi'kmaq word for "seal". Waspu oil is currently being sold in retail stores across Canada and through our website, www.waspu.ca.

Our next product, Waspu Oil for Pets, will be launching in the next few weeks, having just received approval from Health Canada as a certified veterinary health product.

Additionally, MCF promotes the full utilization of seal and has been actively engaging with potential customers for seal meat products in Japan, the Philippines and China. In addition to the encapsulated oil, I have been working with customers in Japan to supply bulk liquid seal oil.

It's important to understand that the marketing challenge for seal products is not a lack of customers but rather the lack of access to those customers. In efforts to gain market access, I have been working with Global Affairs and the trade commission offices in Taiwan and other countries to open previously closed markets to indigenous-branded seal products.

We have also been actively engaged with the CFIA and the trade commissioner's office in China to identify the roadblocks for exporting to the Chinese market. We do currently have a customer who sells private-label seal oil capsules through their cross-border e-commerce site.

I am relatively new to this industry, compared to the expert witness testimonies you have already heard and will hear. My career has always focused on figuring out how people make decisions, and I have learned that not unlike the fur industry, oil and gas, and our energy sector, the seal industry is directly affected by public opinion.

Specific to seals, the public's view on the global stage has been shaped by an onslaught of celebrity reactions to the seal industry as it existed over 30 years ago. In fact, government policy around the management and regulation of the seal population is still being shaped by public perceptions that are created by activists and that have no connection to truth, facts or science.

The fact remains that the seal population we are discussing here today is not endangered and that the harvest itself is humane, sustainable and not only good for Canadians but also good for the world.

The current offering from Canadian seal harvests is diverse and innovative. Omega-3-rich seal oil supplements for health are good for everyone from children to seniors. Seal meat is being sold in gourmet restaurants, and it is being used as high-end feed, treats and supplements for pets. The sustainable, natural, warm and waterproof sealskin is used for garments and accessories. Full utilization shows respect and will maximize value for all levels of the value chain.

My ask for this committee and the government is threefold.

The first request is for financial support for marketing efforts, both domestically and globally. In 2006, the seal industry generated over \$30 million in revenue. Supporting our marketing and sales programs will have a positive impact on the Canadian economy. Focus on facts: Most Canadians do not know the facts about the seal, but they can repeat the misinformation and propaganda produced by organizations that use the seal industry for its fundraising efforts.

The second is for support for market access. Expand the Indigenous Peoples Economic and Trade Cooperation Arrangement, which includes Canada, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand, to include other countries. Supporting indigenous exports is important for reconciliation. There cannot be reconciliation without economic reconciliation.

● (1545)

Third is commitment to science. Our oceans generate over \$30 billion in the Canadian economy. Annual audits show Canadian fish

stocks continue to decline. With fish populations decreasing, why wouldn't we want to know what is happening?

I know one stock that is not declining: seals. This should also include the social science recommendation 5 of the Atlantic seal science task team. The report reads, "DFO should establish and permanently fund a social science research unit to complement the natural science research".

Thank you, and I look forward to any questions later.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now get to our questions, and we'll go first to Mr. Small for six minutes or less. I know he's on video conference looking at us.

I would remind members to try to identify who your question is for to make better use of your time.

Mr. Small, go ahead for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is to Mr. Knight.

Mr. Knight, what's the number one impediment, based on your vast experience in fisheries management, to the establishment of a viable pinniped harvest?

● (1550)

Mr. Morley Knight: Very clearly, the number one impediment is the lack of an effective market for the product.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Knight, what steps have been taken since 1982 to make the harvest more humane and more socially acceptable?

Mr. Morley Knight: That's a very good question.

Since 1982, all kinds of steps have been put in place to counter the accusations of animal rights groups and to make sure that the hunt is conducted in a very humane way and that animals are harvested in a professional manner that causes them minimal suffering.

These include requirements, for example, to have certain types of firearms, and many types of firearms have been banned because they wouldn't make an effective, immediate killing and might result in animals being wounded and getting away in a wounded state. There's been the ban of the killing of whitecoats. There have been measures around humane killing that included making sure the animal is dead before any skinning or processing of it occurs. That includes making sure the skull is crushed so that there is no life left.

There are other measures, such as training individuals engaged in the harvest. On top of that, there's been a significant amount of re-education and mitigative action taken by the sealing industry to make sure that only professional sealers are engaged, and a significant amount of activity engaged in by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to make sure that the seal harvest is effectively monitored and that when there is harvesting activity, it is conducted in a humane manner.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Knight, have we been successful in our attempts to modernize to make the industry more socially acceptable? What's been the success? Can you measure that success?

Mr. Morley Knight: It's difficult to measure the success. We've had veterinarians assess the measures that are in place, including a veterinarian from the University of P.E.I. who was involved for many years in the activities, to ensure that seals were being harvested in the most humane manner possible. I think that measures that are in place now meet a very high standard. I would consider that success.

At the same time, in terms of public opinion, I don't think we've made much progress in terms of making sure that the world understands that seals are being harvested in a humane manner and in a manner completely comparable to the harvest of other animals in processing facilities for farm animals, for example.

Mr. Clifford Small: We can say that the information campaign—or the misinformation campaign, whichever way you want to put it—by activists and NGOs has been quite successful. What needs to be done to address the approach that's being taken by activists and NGOs towards the seal hunt?

Mr. Morley Knight: That's a very difficult question to answer.

I've read some of the testimony you've had from other witnesses. I think some good ideas have been put forth. We've heard some ideas today about marketing. I've expressed that we need to demonstrate that the harvest is conducted in a humane manner and that it is a sustainable harvest, because that message is not getting through to people, in my opinion.

I think the governments in Canada—and I say governments collectively, so that includes the federal and provincial governments—need to work together to have an information campaign to illustrate and continually demonstrate that the seal harvest is a humane activity and a sustainable activity, and that we have the science to show that the herds are being managed in a sustainable manner. At the same time, I think a crucial part of that is the need to demonstrate to the world the impact that seals are having on our ecosystems and on our fish stocks. I think that without that piece of information to illustrate...

We have to do something. We have no choice other than to manage effectively, using an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. We have no choice but to manage the seal populations.

• (1555)

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Chair, how's my time?

The Chair: You had 28 seconds. You have 23 now.

Mr. Clifford Small: I heard you, Mr. Knight. You mentioned the issue of vessel insurance and high insurance. The deductibles are

up to \$100,000, prohibiting a lot of harvesters from taking part in the hunt. That's what I've heard from stakeholders.

What do you think the solution to that would be to help more people participate in the hunt?

The Chair: I'm going to have to interject here, Mr. Small, because your time has gone over. Hopefully, Mr. Knight can provide that answer along the way or provide it to the committee in writing.

We'll now go to Mr. Cormier for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for being here, Mr. Knight.

As I said, there are many seals in front of my house that I have never seen before. I think we need to do something about the seal population.

In the time you were ADM, in the discussions that you had with other ADMs at Fisheries and Oceans or with the DM, was there any will to solve the problem during your discussions? What was the reason for doing nothing for so many years?

Mr. Morley Knight: Thank you for the question. It's a very good question.

In my time in DFO, there was a lot of discussion. At various times, there was energy and a real interest in finding solutions, but I guess fatigue set in and people lost interest because it seems to be an insurmountable problem. I think there was interest, but there needs to be sustained interest, collaboration by all levels of government and a game plan that's going to work. It's taking steps in the right direction, steps that are going to build to a successful outcome.

Mr. Serge Cormier: When we talk to fisher associations, a lot of them also want us to act very quickly. As you said, seals are eating many species. Maybe they're eating some crab and lobster, as well as some mackerel and herring, and we're always talking about the impact that this could have on our exporting market.

How can we go past that? If I'm a fisherman right now, am I prepared to put everything on the table and say, "Yes, we have to go with the seal harvest. Lower its population as low as we can so that it doesn't have an impact." At the same time, what will the reaction of other countries be? How can we surpass that? How can we make sure that other countries or environmental groups understand that there is a real problem here?

We're not doing this just for fun. We're doing this because there's a real problem with the ecosystem of our species.

Mr. Morley Knight: That's a very good question. If there was an easy answer to it, we would have found it 30 years ago, when this was recognized as a real problem as far back as 1990, or in the following 10 or so years.

I believe there are various things we can do. I think the first thing we have to do is have information to present to the world about the impact the seals are having on our fish stocks. We have to present the compelling case that we have no choice but to manage the seal herds in an effective manner.

Second, we have to have an information campaign that demonstrates that our harvest is conducted in a humane manner.

Third, we need to use opportunities. For example, I believe there's an opportunity for indigenous organizations and companies to market seals into the European market. That needs some coordination. It may need some government support from the trade side. It may need some government support from the funding side. I think there's an opportunity that we're missing in having indigenous companies and individuals participate in the harvest and market it as indigenous. There is an exemption to the EU ban, for example. I think they could effectively market their products in Europe.

• (1600)

Mr. Serge Cormier: One of the officials we had on the panel a couple of weeks ago said that their mandate is to keep the seal population healthy. An official from DFO said that.

What do you think of that?

Mr. Morley Knight: I understand that answer. DFO has the mandate for conservation of fish, shellfish and marine mammals. However, “healthy” is a subjective term. If we're talking about the crab stocks, I think we want them at the highest possible level so we can maximize the return.

The other mantra of DFO today is “ecosystem-based fisheries management”. We cannot have an ecosystem-based fisheries management if we have top predators in the ecosystem eating potentially up to 13 million tonnes of fish.

I think they have a mandate to keep the various species of seal at a healthy level, but not at a level that's causing very serious negative impact on other stocks.

Mr. Serge Cormier: What is our option when it comes to lowering the seal population? If we do nothing, I think we all around this table know that it will damage other species. What would be your recommendation, if you have one to give us?

We have been talking about this issue for so many years, but it seems that it's never going to be solved, and I'm sorry to say that.

What is your recommendation? How do we solve this problem? Yes, a Canadian market will probably be something we can look at, and we are looking at it, but will it be enough to lower the seal population so that it doesn't have any impact on other species?

Mr. Morley Knight: I believe it's an opportunity that we're missing, but I don't believe in and of itself it will help us to solve the problem. It will help to reduce the numbers if we market seal products in Canada effectively, but the challenges of marketing seal products in Canada are nearly as great as they are in the rest of the world. We have to convince Canadians first, and then perhaps we can convince the rest of the world.

In my view, with the exception possibly of Quebec, the social acceptance of seal products or the investments in trying to market seal

as food in an effective manner.... Including in my home province, very few people consume seal anymore.

We have to start at home, but I think the same information can be used to help convince the world.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

We will now go to Madame Desbiens for six minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am very pleased to welcome our knowledgeable witnesses this afternoon. I'm particularly delighted to welcome friends from Quebec, and to pass on greetings from the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

Ms. St.-Pierre, I'm pleased to be meeting you for the first time, although I have previously heard you and your colleagues speak. As a former restaurant chef myself, I once have had the unfortunate experience of opening a box of cod fillets, which I had been told came from Canada, from Quebec in fact, only to experience disappointment when I realized it was cod from Russia.

I therefore fully understand your enthusiasm for dining on food from the St. Lawrence. How are you going to deal with the shortage of seal products, when you've been telling us that the demand appears to be there?

Mrs. Colombe Saint-Pierre: It's true that it can be rather difficult to gain access to most of our products, even those that are heavily fished, like crab, lobster or shrimp. Seals are of course among these products, but are rarely hunted. Crab and lobster are fished heavily, but unfortunately, much of it is exported.

These are among the things the Mange ton Saint-Laurent! collective has been wondering about. We are asking ourselves whether Canada will ever be able to boast that it is self-sufficient in food. I believe that would be a special moment for Canadians because we've seen the dangers of depending on other markets and other products.

There are a number of problems in gaining access to products. If we're talking about seals, then the hunt will have to be expanded. Right now...

• (1605)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Would that require training new hunters? Could recreational hunting be one way of regaining part of the market?

Mrs. Colombe Saint-Pierre: Yes it could. With seal, you have to get over the negative biases and properly train new seal hunters. The meat would then have to be processed to preserve it. That means having processing facilities for the meat, which is safe when processed properly. A distribution network would also be needed, and that's often a problem for our products. So there are access-related difficulties.

Not only that, but access means more than just product distribution and availability. There is also the matter of prices. We became very vulnerable because of the rising prices of crab last year. It became difficult even for us to get access to the resource, because the major markets had set prices beyond our capacity to pay for it. So it's true that there are many challenges.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Nutritional quality is another aspect that justifies consumption. I know that in Quebec, the demand is there and restaurants are prepared to get on side. Insofar as we want more food self-sufficiency and diversity, what's missing that would give us access to an adequate amount of seal meat to meet demand and convince a percentage of the population of its nutritional quality?

Perhaps your colleague, who works more on the scientific side of things, could answer this question.

Dr. Mélanie Lemire: On the issue of quality, I suggest that you read an article for the general public published in the online journal *The Conversation* about a study conducted by various scientists that demonstrated the nutritional quality of seal. There are sometimes contaminants, but at a much lower level than is found in the meat of bluefin tuna, for example, which is higher up in the food chain. Seal needs to be seen in the context of a diversified diet. The idea is to consume local products rather than something like a takeout or frozen pizza. Seal, the meat of which is rich in iron, offers all kinds of opportunities.

As for access, before coming to speak to you today, I called my colleagues in the Magdalen Islands to hear what they had to say about the challenges. I would suggest that you invite Mr Réjean Vigneau, an experienced seal hunter and the owner of the only seal abattoir that processes wild meat. He is having trouble getting access to the resource. I can tell you what he told me, if you...

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: My speaking time is limited, but we'll try to invite him to the committee.

Dr. Mélanie Lemire: Mr Vigneau could tell you about the challenges he has been encountering, not only in terms of hunting, but also slaughtering, and which limit the amount of seal meat that can be distributed in the network, at least in the Quebec network.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Training is also required.

Dr. Mélanie Lemire: There are no doubt structural measures that could be introduced to make these products more available in the relatively near future.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for Mr. Penney.

Mr. Penney, thank you for sharing the information you did and for the clear recommendations. They were very helpful and informative for me. We are seeing some themes among the things people are saying, and I want to see if you could expand a little bit.

You spoke about the lack of access to customers and the importance of economic reconciliation, which I think is a really important point for us to consider as we go through this study. I wonder if you can share a little bit more around what you, as a representative of Mi'kmaq Commercial Fisheries, are hearing around the importance of not only the science but also the socio-economic impacts of the current state of sustainable seal harvesting on Canadians and indigenous people.

● (1610)

Mr. Bill Penney: Thank you for your question.

I speak to customers day in and day out throughout all of Canada and in Asia. When I'm not speaking to customers, I'm thinking about speaking to customers.

I need to go back to one point, because it's sticking in my head. It's about marketing to Canadians. This ties back to the perception and the social licence around sealing. As I stated, I'm chair of Canadian Seal Products. Through Canadian Seal Products, in April of 2020 we used Abacus Data to do a national survey of Canadians to look at opinions with regard to the sealing industry. With the funding we had through the CFSOF program, the Canadian fish and seafood opportunities fund, we spent a year building marketing materials, and then we spent about six months marketing this to specific target markets in Montreal as an urban centre and in Toronto as another urban centre. With the budget we had, we had to really streamline and be very targeted on who we were messaging. About six months later, we did another survey, so we had two data sources to compare.

We saw a growth of 6% in the number of Canadians.... We moved from 23% of Canadians who were open to buying seal products to 29% of Canadians who were open to buying seal products just by explaining to them the sustainability of seals and the humane harvesting of seals, and also by focusing on the benefits of the actual products, whether it's fur, meat or oil.

With regard to the indigenous aspect, the EU has a ban on seal products, but they have an indigenous exemption. However, in order to access that exemption, we have to become a recognized body to the EU. The cost of doing that is incredible.

With regard to the social licence, obviously we need to make sure that the indigenous are at the front of this because, at the end of the day, this is culturally important to them. The sharing of the goodness that seals can bring to people is incredibly important. As for the products themselves, there's nothing like it in the market. When I have a product that is completely different from any product that exists in the world, it really gets the salesperson in me revved up to be able to speak to as many customers as I can.

The main issue that comes back from customers is not the fear of the product or sustainability; it's the fear of the animal rights groups. Again, some of the responses I've had historically include whether Canadians support this product. After two years of marketing and building marketing materials that focus on experts.... We originally started by trying to justify the harvest, but we realized that was not having the impact we wanted.

When it comes to creating and having—I'm trying to think of the word here—protocols or management items in place to make sure things are being done properly and humanely, we as Canadians look at it in terms of knowing we're going to follow them. We always go over and above what the recommendations are to make sure we have a sustainable and humane harvest. This is one of the messages we got back.

If we can grow the Canadian market, that's great, but we do need to get market access to countries where it's currently banned. The United States has a ban under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. It's hard.

In regard to pet food companies, we can't get certain seal meat-based pet products made because they also have customers in the U.S., which means they can't have any seal in their value chain.

I don't know if that answered your question, but for some of the stuff that was going on before, I needed to get it out. I think it's important to know that the more we educate Canadians, the more we're going to be able to make seals a Canadian product.

• (1615)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much.

Normally I would have cut you off and gone to the next person, but you were providing such helpful information for us to be able to provide clear recommendations to the government moving forward.

My time is up, so I want to say thank you to Mr. Penney and all the other witnesses. Hopefully I will get a couple more questions in the next round.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

We'll now go to Mr. Calkins—welcome back to FOPO—for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think I'm going to be up a couple of times. I don't know why I don't just go on a five-minute rant, but I'm not going to do that. The witnesses who are here today are exceptional, and you've all heard my rants before on this.

Mr. Knight, it's a pleasure to have you here at the committee.

I want to ask you a couple of questions. You obviously have a career's worth of experience at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Are the marine mammal protection regulations in Canada a barrier to or an enabler of ecosystem-based management, in your opinion?

Mr. Morley Knight: Can you repeat the tail end of your question? Is it a barrier or...?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You talked about ecosystem-based management.

Mr. Morley Knight: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'm asking you specifically if marine mammal protection regulations are an enabler or a barrier to ecosystem management, in your opinion?

Mr. Morley Knight: I don't think they're a barrier. I think they're an enabler to demonstrate that we do have the necessary tools in place for effective management.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You would say, then, that the marine mammal protection regulations would allow the ability to effectively manage populations of seals.

Mr. Morley Knight: I would, yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Do the regulations allow for predator control by anybody other than somebody authorized by the government?

Mr. Morley Knight: I believe there are some new provisions and policies that have been brought into place since my departure from DFO, so I'm not sure that I can totally be confident in giving you the correct answer to that question in saying yes, but I don't believe that the regulations are necessarily the impediment in and of themselves. It may be the application of them.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You talked about the bounty ending on seals. You talked about the explosive growth in the population of seals. We talked about the collapse of the cod stocks and the moratorium back in the early 1990s. As a matter of fact, ironically, I think the marine mammal protection regulations came into force in 1993—the original version of them, if I have my facts right.

I grew up on a farm in Alberta. I'm not a coastal guy in any way, shape or form, but I love fishing. I also love hunting. Growing up on a farm as a farmer or a landowner, we didn't need the permission of the government to do predator control if a bear, a wolf or a coyote on our farm posed a threat to our livelihood. If you're a forestry company with a forest management agreement anywhere in the country and you have pine beetles threatening your livelihood, you're allowed to take out the beetles without necessarily getting permission from the government in order to do so, because it directly affects the livelihood.

Is a commercial fisherman allowed to shoot a seal to protect the viability of their fishing quota?

Mr. Morley Knight: The simple answer to your question, I think, is no.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay.

I think the simple solution to the problem is if we turn that “no” into a “yes”. That’s just my humble opinion.

The reality is that I don’t think, as wonderful as the testimony is today from everybody who’s here, and despite the admiration and respect I have for people who are willing to push a piano up the stairs with a rope to try to create an industry and create a demand for seal and seal products in the face of insurmountable pressure on the international stage, and even domestically in certain parts of our country.... I have nothing but admiration and respect for everybody involved in this, but it is pushing a piano up the stairs with a rope. We have to, I think, come to the inevitable conclusion that we have to manage these things. These things are the wolves of the sea.

You’ve said that we need to study seal consumption so that we can actually accurately determine this—I have no idea why the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which is responsible for science, wouldn’t have a better understanding of that question—and that we have to have an “ecosystem-based approach”. If we’re going to do that, we need to use the tools that are available to us.

Hunting is a very valuable part of wildlife management, and fishing is a part of wildlife management. It’s a tool that can be used. As a matter of fact, it’s not only a tool that can be used to help the Department of Fisheries and Oceans manage the population, but it actually generates revenue, generates income and creates tax revenue for the Government of Canada.

In fact, a hunter in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador—no different than a hunter in Alberta—would actually pay the government for the privilege of helping the government through the purchases of licences and tags. We would actually pay the government to help the government manage its wildlife population. I think we have a lot of work to do, not only when it comes to the seal industry but to hunting and fishing writ large, against the animal rights movement and those who pander to them, whether they do so all the time or even some of the time. I’m very frustrated by this.

I have another question for you. In your experience and knowledge, you’re aware that there is a strike on right now in certain parts of the Government of Canada. Are the conservation and protection officers or the fisheries officers on strike right now?

• (1620)

Mr. Morley Knight: I’m no longer an employee of the department, but my knowledge of that process is that a significant number of the conservation officers would be designated as essential, and therefore.... That’s my past experience. Whether that’s currently the case or not, I’m not 100% certain, but I’d suspect that somewhere in the range of 50% of the uniformed officers are designated as essential because they’re so widely dispersed across Canada. I suspect that probably 50% are working.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Do the fisheries—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins. You’ve gone a little bit over time. Your five minutes are five minutes and 30 seconds at this point.

We’ll now go to Mr. Hanley for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I agree with Mr. Calkins’ observations on the very informative witnesses today. Thank you very much to all of you.

I hope to maybe get to each of you on the theme of increasing marketability, let’s say, of seal harvesting and various approaches.

Mr. Knight, going back to the ecosystem approach, one thing you mentioned before that is going on two fronts. You said that we need to present better information to prove to Canadians what’s going on, yet we have been here for 30 years and presumably we have been accumulating information. Do we not yet have enough of the type of information that will convince Canadians?

I’m going to ask you to be fairly short.

Mr. Morley Knight: Unfortunately, we don’t. We have been accumulating information, but it was only about seven years ago that we were able to determine in the Gulf of St. Lawrence that grey seals were a heavy predator on the cod stocks there. Where the huge herd of harp seals are, we know they consume maybe 1.4 tonnes per year each, but we don’t know what they consume, and there are seven million of them.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Regarding an ecosystem approach, presumably some of that includes managing seals, as you said. Can you be more precise on what that would look like, particularly the “managing seals” part?

Mr. Morley Knight: I think if we knew how much crab, turbot, cod or other valuable commercial species that seals were eating, we could develop an approach. It may be like pushing a piano upstairs or it may be that we will take an effective management strategy that includes the elimination, where possible, of an adequate number of the top predators.

The next challenge is to make sure that we effectively use what we remove from the ecosystem to the extent possible. However, we cannot not do step two because we can’t accomplish step one.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: In other words, we can apply both steps simultaneously.

Mr. Morley Knight: Exactly, but we can’t fail to act in either case.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Could part of step two be starting at a fairly small scale and evaluating what is being done, with a view to perhaps increasing it according to the results of the evaluation?

Mr. Morley Knight: I think it could. I think some effective strategy to help reduce the predators in key locations could help. I think other countries have done that more effectively than we have, and I think we need to stand up and do the right thing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Knight.

Ms. Saint-Pierre, you said that the best way of influencing client demand was to serve these products in restaurants. Have you seen progress since your restaurant began serving seal?

Mrs. Colombe Saint-Pierre: I'll begin by saying that awareness and education are extremely important. That's what has to be done first before focusing our efforts on growing a market, or saying that we have access to a product. Our Mange ton Saint-Laurent! collective does considerable awareness-raising among consumers.

We've seen some changes. For example, my restaurant has sea urchin on the menu, and we sometimes even give customers free samples. I came to the realization that nine out of ten people have never eaten sea urchin. Having people try them for the first time can change some preconceptions. People have to be better informed about seal hunting and the amount of seal in our markets has to increase. It's also important to work together on awareness and education with respect to the consumption of seal meat.

• (1625)

[*English*]

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

I think I have 20 more seconds.

The Chair: You have 22 seconds.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Mr. Penney, I think you said that developing social science research capacity with DFO would be an important part of helping Canadians understand and would encourage an increase in the market.

Am I correct in that? It might have to be a yes or a no.

Mr. Bill Penney: Yes, that actually came out of the Atlantic seal science task team report.

I also need to point out that when we're trying to make comparisons to market, a seal has meat—blubber, which gets turned into omega-3 seal oil—and fur and leather. Seals have three different product lines. We need to market to each individual product line differently. People who take seal oil capsules could be athletes, because it's incredible for maximizing oxygen levels in their blood. It's incredible for inflammation and for seniors.

I'm also the chair of Canadian Seal Products. We're also doing a study with Université Laval to look at the impact on arthritis. As part of Canadian Seal Products, we have a website called canadiansealproducts.com through the Seals and Sealing Network. We also have Proudly Indigenous Crafts & Designs, which sells seal fur products from crafters.

There are three different product lines we need to be thinking about—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Penney. I have to interrupt because we've gone over time for Mr. Hanley.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Lemire and Ms. Saint-Pierre, it's all about education. It would appear that there's not much missing for seal meat to become a positive, innovative trend that would attract consumers interested in discovering new types of food. Your collective plays an important role in encouraging this new trend.

What's missing? Could the Department of Fisheries and Oceans do something to support your promotional work and encourage people to taste seal meat for the first time and to view it positively? Are there programs to help you do that? Could a program be introduced that would create organizations like yours across Canada to boost your efforts and promote this trend?

Dr. Mélanie Lemire: First and foremost, young people are the drivers of future change. The Mange ton Saint-Laurent! collective organizes workshops with young people. Dietary trends also affect families. We expect that working with these young people will be very stimulating.

You can also rely on us as researchers for sound data, on nutrition, as Mr. Knight proposed, or the social sciences, and even with respect to its cultural role. It's also important not to forget the important role played by culture in eating habits.

To answer your question, we could definitely launch similar projects elsewhere in Canada. However, it will be important for these projects to be organized jointly with the people who live in the areas concerned, including our first nations and Inuit colleagues. And we can also learn a lot from the Micmac and Inuit who have been hunting seal forever. They know how to prepare and process the meat, which is not easy to cook. This knowledge sharing is desirable.

Earlier, Mr. Penney spoke about economic reconciliation through food, which is also a good thing. When there's food on the table, it's always more pleasant. It's all very well to develop projects, but they need to be rooted regionally.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That takes money.

Dr. Mélanie Lemire: Yes, it's quite an undertaking.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron to close out the first hour. You have two and a half minutes or less, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

My question is for Mr. Knight.

A previous witness who spoke on this study—I'm sorry, but I can't remember her name—was talking about how one of the number one needs was for professionals in the workforce to understand sealing in order to pass on the information.

Are you seeing anything around that, around capacity or training needs? Could you speak to that?

• (1630)

Mr. Morley Knight: I see some efforts. In fairness, I see fewer efforts now than I saw 10 or 20 years ago. There needs to be a renewed effort, because we see, 30 years into the decline of the seal harvest, that our problems in managing a number of our fish stocks are continuing, and that the efforts we saw by various levels of government, including provincial governments, particularly Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, and by the federal government, have declined significantly, so there needs to be a re-engagement.

There needs to be training and support. There needs to be an information campaign. There needs to be a collaborative effort that brings parties together—indigenous groups, companies and provinces. We need to bring people together to have a sustained effort to help reduce the population to manageable levels.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: How about the gear in the boats? What do we need to be able to do a sustainable seal hunt? If everything changed in an ideal world and we went ahead tomorrow with a sustainable seal hunt, what do we need the government to provide for supports? What needs to be done?

Mr. Morley Knight: I mentioned earlier on that one thing that occurred over the years was the elimination of the large vessels from the harvest, and that's not necessarily a good thing, because they're more capable. They're safer platforms to operate and they are more efficient.

Another thing that happened around the mid-1990s was the elimination of the fishing vessel insurance program, which provided a reasonable cost level of insurance to fishing vessels. It wasn't funded by government. It was administered by government, but it was pretty well cost-neutral. That was eliminated in the mid-90s, and now the only option is to go to commercial insurers. As MP Small mentioned, the deductible is up as high as \$100,000. One thing that causes an ineffective hunt because of that factor is that seal harvesters are using smaller vessels or older, worn-out vessels to harvest seals. They can't use their main vessels because they just can't afford to take the risks. Bringing back something like the fishing vessel insurance program would be a very great benefit to increasing the capacity to harvest seals.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

That closes out our first hour of testimony. I want to thank Mr. Knight, Mr. Penney, Madame Lemire and Madame Saint-Pierre for their participation here today and sharing their knowledge with the committee on this very important topic.

We'll suspend for a couple of moments while we change to our next panel.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: We're back.

I have a few comments for the benefit of our new witnesses.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Finally, I remind you that the use of a House-approved headset is mandatory for all virtual participants in parliamentary proceedings.

I would now like to welcome our next set of witnesses.

Representing Ár n-oileán Resources Ltd., we have Mr. Kendal Flood, chief executive officer. Representing the Halifax East Fisheries Association by video conference is Mr. Christopher Jones, director. We have Madame Stéphanie Pieddesaux, industrial researcher, by video conference, representing Merinov.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today. We have five minutes for opening statements. We'll start off with Mr. Jones, please.

Mr. Christopher Jones (Director, Halifax East Fisheries Association): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to both present and participate in your session.

I'm a retired DFO senior federal fisheries policy and operations manager. I've participated in multilateral and bilateral discussions throughout the last 25 to 30 years and I've also led delegations in Japan and led bilateral herring discussions with the U.S.

What I'd like to do quickly is make a brief presentation and then leave you with some brief questions.

Going back to the point that we see seals off the coast, I'm calling you from Chester, Nova Scotia. At one time, I was able to take my daughters fishing off the coast, and now I take my granddaughters seal watching, because there are no fish. The distinction has not been lost on the preceding generations.

The first of my points that I'd like to go into—and I'll read from them and leave them with a question—is that DFO has indicated that they're applying ecosystem-based management approaches to stock assessments. In the abundance of a formal seal stock assessment, concerns exist as to whether DFO has, currently is, or will restrict commercial allocations of traditional fish stocks like cod, capelin, mackerel, etc., to support seal populations.

As many of you are aware, many commercial fish stocks are becoming threatened or endangered despite tighter efforts, controls, and increased monitoring and enforcement, and in many cases seemingly lower allocations are set, to the point where many fisheries are either closed or subject to a sentinel fishery status, yet many of these stocks are not indicating stability or increasing in stock abundance.

As many of us know, there are limited data on seal diets, at least within the Canadian zone, which has led to surmising that seals consume an insignificant amount of fish. In recent discussions with DFO, it was suggested that seals eat few mackerel, but it's unknown where this diet study was conducted and whether it was during the mackerel migration or off season.

The question that this leaves me with, and it's presented to the committee and to DFO, is this: How can DFO apply an ecosystem-based management without applying the impact of seals on fish stocks?

The second point I'd like to raise is that the Atlantic seal science task team provided a series of recommendations in their report of April 2022. Those recommendations included opportunities to increase the fishing industry's involvement in seal science projects and ways to better communicate scientific findings to the fishing industry. They also included identifying seal impacts on fish stock rebuilding plans and included integrated fisheries management plans where appropriate. A key recommendation was to initiate a seal summit, which was convened in St. John's in the fall of 2022 and was intended to include collaboration and discussions among scientists, commercial harvesters, indigenous groups, and federal, provincial and territorial representatives.

The Baltic Sea is known as a sea basin under ecological stress, and the seal-fishery conflict in the Baltic expanded over the whole region, becoming increasingly more difficult to solve. Solutions to mitigate the conflict have not been adequate, and the impact of seals on coastal capture fisheries and aquaculture has been distressing for the fishery sector. Seal populations have been growing fast during the last 35 years, and opportunities for direct management of the populations remain limited.

As a result, regional solutions for mitigating the seal-fishery conflict in the Baltic Sea, an interdisciplinary synthesis project called RESOCO, funded by the Nordic council of ministers fisheries co-operation program, was convened during August 22-23 of 2022. The core aim of this program was to build an interdisciplinary synthesis and up-to-date Nordic knowledge and best practices and set the stage for alternative solutions on how to effectively reconcile seal-fishery conflict in the Baltic Sea. It sounds familiar.

The project was coordinated by Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Estonia, and the proceedings were published in January 2023. I at-

tached, when I sent the information in, the publication in PDF form for that, and contacts if you need them.

• (1640)

The purpose of referencing the Atlantic seal science task Team report and the RESOCO report is that they had a similar theme—namely, a substantive increase in seal populations that is negatively impacting the social and economic viability of coastal communities.

To that point, the Baltic conference proceedings were published and widely distributed, as well as the Atlantic seal science task team report—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jones. It's gone over the five-minute mark, and I want to make sure that we have time for questions. If there's anything you didn't get out, hopefully you'll get to it in the questioning round.

We'll now go to Madame Pieddesaux for five minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux (Industrial researcher, Merinov): My name is Stéphanie Pieddesaux. I work at Merinov, Canada's largest sea-to-market industrial research centre that specializes in technology specific to fisheries, aquaculture, processing and marine bioresources.

We are focused mainly on pinnipeds, but have concentrated on seals in the northwestern Atlantic. There were six species, grey seals...

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. We have no translation. Hang on one second and we'll get that straightened out.

We'll try again. I would remind the witness to try to speak slowly, because the people interpreting have to try to keep up. If you could talk a little more slowly, it would make it a lot easier on our interpretation team.

Start again, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux: Thank you.

I work at Merinov, Canada's largest sea-to-market industrial research centre that specializes in technology specific to fisheries, aquaculture, processing and marine bioresources.

We are focused mainly on the six species of seals in Canada, more specifically those on the east coast, in the northwestern Atlantic, where we mainly work. They are the grey seal, harbour seal, hooded seal, ringed seal, harp seal and bearded seal.

What we have generally found in the oscillatory behaviour of the prey-predator relationship is that the decline in prey always precedes the decline of predators. We have also frequently found a major gap prior to the decline in predators and following the decline of prey. This would appear to be the case for the harp seal, the grey seal and the hooded seal, which are predators of fish stocks. We therefore anticipate a decline in some of the species, and in most of the prey in all biological populations.

We can also expect that repercussions from climate change, like the ice melt, will result in drowning and hypothermia among young harp seals, as well as changes in water masses and in the distribution of primary production densities, and areas and distribution of prey. This will lead to changes in diet for a number of species and changes in distribution for others. There will be energy losses causing mortality owing to the eventual shortage of resources for certain species, and there will be pandemics.

We know that all of these situations, which will occur over the coming years, could have an impact on seal populations. We can't predict things solely on the basis of the current circumstances, and we anticipate other changes.

There are currently three seal species of interest to hunters: the harp seal, whose population is around 7.4 million individuals, the grey seal, with a population of around 424,300 individuals; and the hooded seal, whose population is around 593,500 individuals.

However, ecosystem issues must also be factored in. For example, an adult grey seal eats 1.5 to 2 tonnes of fish per year, half of which is cod. In the southern part of the Gulf of St. Lawrence there is a problem with cod stock restoration, and there is a moratorium on cod fishing. The harp seal does not appear to be a threat to the cod population in the southern part of the Gulf. However, we don't have a very clear picture of this species' diet, or for species other than the grey seal.

Many fishers have been complaining, particularly in Gaspé, of the grey seal diet, which isn't necessarily limited to fish in open water. Some seals, which are more intelligent than others, go and eat food directly from the traps. There are quite a few little-known problems involving seals. Seals are very opportunistic and can change their diet when the occasion arises.

With respect to the seal hunt, we wouldn't recommend a large scale hunt because of potential changes and their possible impact on the balance of the ecosystem. We believe that the hunt could be recommended only if corporations are prepared to make use of all seal products. We believe that seals are potentially 100% recoverable. The skin, oil, omegas, meat, viscera and organs can all be used. Our organization has conducted several studies on this.

On the other hand, we have also identified a number of challenges in terms of social acceptability, the marketing of seal products, the processing of waste, and the recovery of by-products. Before doing anything for the seal industry, it's really important to look at these challenges, because they are considerable. After that,

the hunt would only be recommended if best practices were adopted for management, and if studies conducted were to use robust predictive models.

As I was saying earlier, climate upheavals are coming, and these will affect populations. Prey-predator oscillation also needs to be taken into account. All these issues are going to have an impact on seal and fish populations. And it just so happens that to date, human management of biological populations has not always been exemplary. We therefore need to approach the situation with caution.

• (1645)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Mr. Flood for the final opening statement of five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Kendall Flood (Chief Executive Officer, Ár n-óileán Resources Ltd.): Good day, Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the invitation to speak before this committee.

I listened to much of the testimony already provided to the committee and to those who spoke or presented at the seal summit in St. John's last fall. It seems to me that most everybody is in agreement that there are too many seals in the water. The current quota for harp seals in Newfoundland is 400,000, and DFO tells us that we need to harvest a minimum of 425,000 just to maintain the current population.

The real question would be that if we are currently only harvesting between 5% and 10% of the total allowable catch, how do we get the seals out of the water? Some people call for a cull, but most people are against one, as it could completely collapse the existing sealing industry and darken Canada's image. Other businesses in other industries could feel those repercussions.

Then it falls on the seal markets. Are the markets there? How big are they? Can they sustain 400,000 to 500,000 seals harvested each year? Do we have the infrastructure to handle the volume?

The markets are there, but there are two very different markets. There is the local and domestic market, which has line-ups for days for seal flippers at fish trucks and seal oil capsules sold in drug-stores and grocery stores. However, these flippers are secondary to the valuable parts of the seal, and the volume of capsules that could be sold domestically could never handle a 400,000-seal harvest, so then we look to international markets.

There are large markets in China, Japan, Korea and the GCC countries, just to name a few. There are markets for skins, oil, meat and organs.

I've heard the questions asked during these committee meetings multiple times: What is the disconnect? What are we missing that we can't move these products into these markets that everybody keeps talking about?

For an economic market to thrive and grow, especially internationally, it needs three major components: It has to have a consistent supply of a consistent quality for a consistent price.

A consistent supply we can do. The infrastructure is there, both in the vessels and in the processing plants, to handle great volumes of seals. It's already there. I can provide you with more details at any time you want.

Quality is a big one. The markets demand quality. Our international pharmaceutical customers tell us that our oil naturally needs to be pharmaceutical grade, and in the case of China, encapsulated, bottled and with the legal paperwork to export there.

If we are to sell seal meat on the global market, then we need to treat it like we do crab or salmon. The meat needs to be processed to a value-added level. Again, please feel free to ask me to give you more detail on that.

Seal fur has long been the backbone of the seal industry. Its fur has been sought out and sold across the world. As a previous guest to this committee, Merv Wiseman, pointed out, the fur industry as a whole has suffered of late. However, the fur is not the only viable part of the skin; there is currently a sizable demand for seal leather. It has a very attractive, unique pattern, but also has the second-strongest tensile strength of any leather, behind only wallaby.

If the supply is there and the quality is there, there has to be a consistent price in order to get buyers to build their own sales networks. That's largely what happened in the early 2000s, when over 300,000 seals were harvested every year, and then levels fell to where they are now. The prices exploded, and the market collapsed.

It is imperative that everybody in the industry work together, which includes processors, harvesters and government. I can provide examples on how some of this collaboration has already begun.

Full utilization is another point that's repeated and questioned during these meetings. Perhaps "increased" utilization is a better way to put it. However, the answer is yes, far more of the seal can be utilized than just the fur. Exactly what and how largely depends on the age of the seal.

The last question should be, how can the Government of Canada help?

If we're going to continue to have these meetings to discuss what to do with the seal industry, then let's create a small strategic trade group with Global Affairs, DFO and processors—small and precise. The government can also fund and promote clinical trails on the benefits of seal oil. The vast majority of current omega-3 studies are on fish oils.

We have ideas, which we have spoken to members of DFO about, on how processors and harvesters can collaborate with DFO to collect data more efficiently. That will give a broader picture of what is happening, and with an eye to climate change to stay ahead of what will happen.

Thank you for listening. I look forward to your questions.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Flood. That was right on time.

We'll go to our questions now, and for the first round we'll go to Mr. Small for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming out today.

My first question is for Mr. Flood.

The sealing industry has expressed concerns about activists and NGOs being able to gain too much access to the harvest.

What are your thoughts on this? Do you think that activists can get into where the harvest is taking place too readily?

• (1655)

Mr. Kendall Flood: I think nowadays everybody recognizes the need to have a workplace where you're not constantly harassed. That's the same for sealers, especially in such a dangerous environment. This is not sitting in an office; they're out on the ice. Imagine slipping on the pavement in a parking lot. They're working on ice with eight-inch knives, with machines moving around and with rifles. If they're distracted by a drone or a helicopter that's literally there to harass them, it's quite dangerous. These guys are a long way from home.

Speaking from the concerns of the harvesters, they should be 25 to 30 kilometres away. Otherwise, it's literally life and death.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you think there should be a much better-defined and larger exclusion zone than exists?

Mr. Kendall Flood: I would say it should be at least 25 to 30 kilometres away.

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay.

I heard you mention your experience with other government agencies, such as Global Affairs, the trade department, CFIA and whatnot. What's been your experience with the level of support for the sealing industry from government departments other than DFO?

Mr. Kendall Flood: I know you said “other than”, but federally, DFO has been fantastic to work with from start to finish. CFIA has been fantastic to work with. They've helped us tremendously. We are nine years in the making, but we're brand new to getting going. CFIA has been extremely helpful.

Honestly, our headaches have been more on a provincial level.

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay.

Can you explain some of the red tape that your group has had to deal with in developing your new seal processing venture?

Mr. Kendall Flood: It would take longer than this meeting to get through all of it.

The one that is the most painful and is happening at this exact second is that as of now, over 38,000 beater seals have been landed. The existing processor only asked for about 35,000, but they ended up taking 38,000 seals. Then they had to call the hunt off and the boats came home half empty. Some of them did not go out at all. Meanwhile, I have a customer in Canada that wants to buy 10,000 beater skins, but I'm not allowed to sell them. The provincial government has legislated a monopoly to one company, and the rest of us have to throw ours in the landfill or not collect them at all. I have two boats in the water right now that are bringing in adult seals, and the 10,000 beater seals are going to stay at sea.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Flood.

I have a question for Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones, based on your vast fishery management experience and working with DFO, has DFO been overly cautious or protective in its approach to the threats of sanctions against our seafood exports related to the Marine Mammal Protection Act?

Mr. Christopher Jones: The feedback that I've received from my contacts in the industry in both provinces and throughout Atlantic Canada has been in regard to the introduction of the nuisance seal policy and also a recent response to the product being put in processing for bait products. It would appear that they have been very cautious. We're not sure—there are anecdotal references—of how it may impact trade with the U.S. We're looking at whether there were formal communications from the U.S. on that, rather than interpretative ones, but we haven't seen it.

Mr. Clifford Small: I know that Bait Masters from P.E.I were attempting to use some seal by-products for lobster bait.

Do you think that the concerns are unfounded? Do you think that government officials are reacting to threats from animal rights activists and not basing their decisions on fact?

• (1700)

Mr. Christopher Jones: I'm now outside of government, but to answer that, I would say that lack of consultation with the fishing industry before the introduction of those policies suggests that the department is being cautious. As to why, I'm not sure I can allude to or give you any kind of direct response. I expect that overall it's the combination of ENGOs and also their reticence to want to enact any response from the U.S.

As to what we're seeing, we haven't seen consultations with the industry on the nuisance seal policy in particular. We haven't seen

any tangible evidence from discussions or dialogue or communications with the U.S.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

We'll now go to Mr. Kelloway for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm handing off my questions to Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you.

Mr. Jones, I think maybe you're in about the best position to answer this one. It's a mystery that has confounded this committee for a few years. When we were chatting with a chap from Norway and we asked him about the seal problem they used to have there, he kind of smiled a mysterious little smile and said, “Well, they just went away.”

Do you know what happened to make them go away in Norway?

Mr. Christopher Jones: I think in the Scandinavian countries they have a little different philosophy in their approach on ecosystem management, and yet I think they are one of the most substantial exporters of fish products to the U.S. Combined, the groups probably rival what Canada's exports are.

They are being very coy. As I think I mentioned earlier, in the Baltic Sea they are having the same problem we're experiencing. I think Norway realized it some years ago and put in a program whereby they started to balance the ecosystems.

Mr. Ken Hardie: That's a little cryptic: Balancing the ecosystem—that kind of sounds like we're taking some seals out. How did they do it? Do we know?

Mr. Christopher Jones: To my understanding, they first went about determining the seal population. They had methodologies to determine the population. They were able to determine—they do have a limited seal hunt—how they would best balance the combination of predator and prey between seals and their fish stocks. As you know, they have some of the most substantial cod and haddock stocks in the world at this point, whereas at one time we did.

I think they're cautious about wanting to tell us what they've done, but if you look at the evidence, it's clear that they've done this gradually over a long period of time. As I mentioned earlier, their philosophy, from my experience of having been there and talking to some of these people, is a recognition of balance. It goes back to determining the population dynamics and the methodologies to determine how many seals they actually have.

That goes back to my point earlier, that until Canada has a management plan in terms of determining the number of seals there are, and using established methodologies that the Scandinavians have developed... I think it will go a long way toward legitimizing any hunting or sealing activities when we can rely on a substantive plan based on facts.

• (1705)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Jones, can you tell us that whatever Norway did didn't seem to run afoul of the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act?

Mr. Christopher Jones: For some reason or other, it didn't.

You may recall that not only does Norway harvest seals, but it also has a whale hunt. How that isn't impacted by U.S. policy and acts is something... I expect that either the U.S. worked out a bilateral agreement with Norway or that the U.S. has an understanding that if there is a proper stock status established, based on methodologies, it meets a standard that would enable imports of fish products, notwithstanding a seal and whale hunt.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We talk about trying to rationalize or justify hunting seals in order to reduce their number. As Mr. Calkins noted, it's like pushing a piano up the stairs with a rope to get that justification in place. It's mainly because of a public perception, and the threat from the United States that it could cut off the importation of other seafood products that we definitely want to sell to the United States.

If the idea is to reduce the number of seals out there, are there other ways? Maybe Madame Pieddesaux could comment. Is there birth control? Could we shoot a dart full of something into them so that there are no more little seals? Are there predators that could be introduced, although that's never worked out well for us?

We'll let you answer that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux: The introduction of predators has already been done in the past to control other populations, and the evidence shows that it's not usually a good idea. The idea of sterilization campaigns was also floated, but at the moment, humans are short of proteins. So if the reduction of a particular species' population is desired, it would be ridiculous not to hunt it in order to use it. That, we feel, would be wasteful. If you're going to reduce the seal population, you might as well do so in a way that benefits from the protein and everything else that can be used to good effect, given that all parts of the animal are recoverable, including by-products.

We are therefore in favour of a hunt. Why not avail ourselves of being able to use the resource rather than waste energy to sterilize seals? It would amount to a straightforward loss of energy and funds, when it could otherwise be used to feed people and supply

protein or other value-added items. As for the introduction of a predator...

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for that. We've gone way over time.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for six minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Ms. Pieddesaux, please feel free to continue.

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux: The introduction of a predator or of other factors is not recommended. However, as I was saying earlier in my address in connection with the prey-predator relationship, it often begins with a decline in prey, followed by a decline in predators. That being the case, we are expecting the decline phase for predators, meaning seals, to begin soon.

However, we are also entering a new climate change phase. That's where studies and models become really important for accurate forecasts of seal populations. We are expecting a lot of changes. I am in Gaspé at the moment, and we have been observing changes in water masses, temperatures and even stocks on an every day basis. We are concerned about lobster and fish stocks. When we pull lobsters out of the water, they are sluggish, and not as energetic as usual, because the temperature changes have led to a different sort of response.

So there will probably be changes in years to come, and they will have an impact on all populations; not just seals, but also fish and shellfish, among others. One thing is certain, and that is that we can expect the dynamics of animal populations in the Gulf of St. Lawrence to change. Unless there is a predictive model for this, we risk being surprised by the resulting scenarios, for seals and all fish species.

• (1710)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Does Fisheries and Oceans Canada have an important role to play in terms of predicting these major changes?

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux: In consultations, the work being done by all organizations and institutions attempting to make predictions should be linked to what people working on production models are doing, in all the provinces. It's very important to work with industry. Fishers can see when lobster is not thriving. They see the signs right away because they are out there fishing and they can see the status of crab and lobster.

In terms of traceability, Quebec is lagging behind compared to the west coast, particularly for things like digital data on fisheries monitoring. There are gaps in the information we are receiving because it's not up-to-date. This lack of information on seafood traceability means ocean environment information that is out of date.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: You have fewer tools to respond effectively.

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux: That's right.

This shortage of information leads to a delay. Having to wait 10 years before having access to information is much too long, particularly for climate changes. Over a 10 year period, water masses will have changed and the organisms will have already evolved.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I hope that Fisheries and Oceans Canada is hearing what you are asking for. We are in direct contact with the department, and will make recommendations.

What's your top recommendation?

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux: Funding for projects to digitize and modernize the industry! The certification process also needs to be improved, along with the communication process for authorizations in order to speed up the system. Seafood traceability needs to be done more quickly. Digitization needs to be speeded up. We're lagging too far behind.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That, of course, means a little more money.

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux: It's not just the money. Enhanced communication is also required.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: So it's important to improve communication with local industry stakeholders.

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux: That's right, communication between the various departments and levels of government needs to be improved.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Does the United States' view of things impede you in your development and innovation work? Are you still working in accordance with the United States' position? Or are you going to forge ahead no matter what?

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux: It was recently found that the American Marine Mammal Protection Act, the MMPA, was having a major impact on certifications from the Marine Stewardship Council, the MSC. International decisions and decisions made under the MMPA are affecting MSC decisions. It's a vicious circle.

Norway, for example, had all its MSC certifications withdrawn. The Norwegian government is now considering changing all of its standards for whales. Norwegian clients are approaching us, because we are accustomed to dealing with the whole issue of whales. A form of globalization is making everyone feel hindered by these regulations.

My view is that the problem is not so much one of regulation but rather discrepancies and incompatibilities between the regulations at different levels of government and the various certifications. Fishers and the industries are struggling with that, and it could prevent the industry from moving forward.

• (1715)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. That's just a couple of seconds over.

We'll go to Ms. Barron now, for six minutes or less, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

My first question is for Mr. Flood.

When you were talking about the local and domestic market that had lineups for days for seal flippers at fish trucks, I was thinking about how my grandparents had a restaurant. I won't go on too long because I want to make sure you get your questions, but when I was a kid, they had a restaurant called Mr. B's. They sold specialty Newfoundland dishes, and one of their most popular dishes was seal flipper pie. I just wanted to acknowledge that.

In your opening statement, you talked about the vessels, processing plants and the infrastructure being there. Could you expand on that?

Mr. Kendall Flood: There's a lot, so I'll talk quickly and see what I can do.

The three processors that are there right now can very easily, between them, handle 400,000 seals. In the heyday back in the early 2000s they were doing over 300,000 regularly, with space to spare. It's easy to keep going.

In terms of the harvesters, they go out in the boats—inshore harvesters in speedboats—up to 40-foot and 60-foot longliners. They're no longer allowed to use any boats larger than a 65-footer.

A voice: Why?

Mr. Kendall Flood: The question was why. A DFO regulation was put in. When everybody was harvesting 300,000 seals, they wanted to make sure that there were enough seals for the inshore harvesters to get as well, and not just for the people who had all the money for a big boat. That was the reasoning.

On a 65-footer, there are three main age groups of seals that you can get. You can get the beaters, which are the young ones. They're the ones used in the garment industry. That's 99% of all the seals, or more. On a 65-footer, you can get up to 5,000 beaters. They don't take the entire seal. They skin the seal on the ice and they take the skin with the fat, and some flippers for flipper pie.

At the next stage are the one- to two-year-olds, which are the bedlamer seals. You can fit approximately 2,500 of those on a boat. Bedlamer seals have very good backstraps, a loin that runs down the back. There's no fat and no bones; it's pure meat. There's not even a grain like a steak. If you're going to sell to a restaurant, that's the roast that you want to sell. On a beater it's too small, so it's not economically viable for the fishermen to take out. On a beater you're getting about 10 kilograms of fat per seal, and on a bedlamer, let's say about 25 kilograms.

Then there are the adult seals. A big adult seal can have 50 kilograms of fat and a much larger backstrap. The backstraps will range anywhere from two and a half to five kilograms. Again, this is huge meat. It's not quite as tender as a bedlamer for the restaurants, but if you were going to make jerky en masse, for instance, or if you were going to make stews or pet food, then that's the one you want to go to. That's the most economically viable one for a fisherman. If he was going to take an adult seal off the ice for full utilization, he'd take the pelt with the large fat and then he'd cut off the backstraps. We also have markets for hearts and for kidneys, and of course the penises are always viable from the adult seals.

You can get 800 to 1,000 adult harp seals on a boat. Again, the numbers all start changing if you start talking about hooded seals, which are two or three times the size, or grey seals, which are a couple of times the size as well.

How they bring these in is, again, by shooting them and skinning them. Holes for the flippers are cut off on the pelts. They run a rope through five or six of these. They pull it in with the crab hauler, bring it up with the boom and bring it down. They have all the infrastructure they need.

If the weather and the ice allow it, a single sealer can make six trips. If you're talking about adults to bedlamer to beater, they can start in December and they can go all the way into May and June. They can easily make six trips each, weather and ice permitting. That's where climate change makes a big difference.

For this year in particular, the ice was completely unpredictable. There would be no ice coming in, and then it would come in heavily. The wind would all of a sudden push it against the shore and break it up. It would disappear and then come back. It was very difficult.

Right now, one of our sealers just had to stop sealing and go all the way up to Bonavista so that his 65-footer wouldn't get crushed by the ice that was being blown towards him. He has to land in Bonavista, and we have to truck it up to the plant in Fleur de Lys, because the ice is blocking his way and he can't make it to our plant. It's very weather- and ice-dependent.

• (1720)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I only have 30 seconds left. Perhaps you can expand a little bit more on the importance of value-added presentation for the global market.

Mr. Kendall Flood: For the value-added, if you cut off rough chunks of meat and you throw it in a box, it looks terrible and it's not going to sell. If you take bedlamer ribs and you vacuum-pack them and put them in a box in the same way that you see your pork ribs at the grocery store, everybody wants them. That goes for every single part of it. Forget trying to sell a great big roast when you can turn that into high-quality jerky. It's all about the secondary processing. That's where the money is and that's where the desire is.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

We have pretty well seven minutes left, I guess, so we'll go to Mr. Calkins for five minutes or less. You're next on the list.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'll try to be as judicious as I can so others can talk.

Mr. Flood, could you clarify this monopoly issue, this provincial monopoly thing? Could you give me some clarification? I'm not following it.

Mr. Kendall Flood: I'll try to make this as fast as possible, which means that I'll skip some details.

In 2006, there were three existing processors. Combined, they were doing over 300,000 seals a year. Two of the processors were sending their skins abroad to be tanned, and in 2006, a law was passed such that all skins leaving Newfoundland had to be tanned first. That was to keep jobs in Newfoundland, and no problem: They did that. Shortly thereafter, when it collapsed, there was only one processor. That law hasn't changed. Then the government enacted another law that said you weren't allowed to use brine in curing seals—the primary step to tanning the seals—except for that one processor, which they grandfathered in, so when the new processors come along, they're not allowed.

In our case, we have 10,000 seals that we could sell tomorrow—the beater seals—but we're not allowed to harvest them. Adults are being brought to shore as we speak, and we could sell the skins for leather, but we're not allowed. We're not allowed to tan them. We're not allowed to sell them. I have customers in Canada and we have customers abroad, but we are not allowed to sell to them.

One of the other processors that is currently in operation started to tan, because they had customers. Their whole reason for starting was to sell skins. After they started, they were told that they weren't allowed to, and they're struggling to survive because they're not allowed to sell skins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You did miss some details there.

Mr. Kendall Flood: I missed a lot of details there.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: If you want to follow up with us, I think this committee would actually like to know about that. In the context of the way we talk to each other these days, I want to put it on the record that cod lives matter.

How many excess seals are there, actually, on the east coast, compared to historical numbers? I've heard that the historical numbers used to be two million. Now there are seven million, and I think we're just talking about the harp seals. How many actual excess...?

The quotas that have been allocated over time, whether they've been filled or not, in my opinion don't seem to be enough to actually create or move us back into some semblance of balance, regardless of whether we're able to even get to the quota. What would the quota need to be in order to, in a reasonable time frame, get back to historical levels of seals?

Mr. Kendall Flood: The quota hasn't changed in many years, and DFO has been perfectly open that they'll move the quota. If we hit 4,000, they'll move it to 5,000 or to 6,000.

There's no point in moving it if we take out just 25,000 or 30,000 seals a year. DFO says that just to maintain the population now, it's 425,000 to 450,000, and to start bringing it down, the number is about 600,000. There's no point in moving the quota if we don't take them out.

That's the processors. We have to take it out, and there's no question on that, but to get that out of the water, we have to focus on quality, so we need secondary processing.

Yes, there are market issues, but there is a huge demand in these countries. Sometimes there's the typical red tape. Sometimes it's a lot harder. Are there places where government can help on red tape? Absolutely, without question, and not just in the U.S.—everywhere.

You guys missed a huge opportunity on Monday when Romy was here. Romy herself didn't get asked any questions. She's been working for literally years on doing the paperwork and the red tape and stuff that she's been hit with on getting seal products into China through the Seals and Sealing Network. We're all working in that group, all the processors in Newfoundland and Total Océan, and trying to get things....

Romy is probably the biggest expert on that, so I highly recommend that you bring her back or at least reach out for information. She has been in this industry for years and she knows far more about that than I can speak on.

• (1725)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you.

My last question is for Madame Pieddesaux.

There are farmers in Thailand right now who are growing crickets for human-consumption protein with tremendous success. How would you advise this committee? It seems odd to me that we can convince human beings to eat crickets but we can't convince human beings to eat seals, so what are we missing? What do we need to do to correct this bizarre scenario?

Mrs. Stéphanie Pieddesaux: I don't want to eat crickets.

It's a question of balance. It has been a question of management. It's not that easy. It's ecosystem management, and it's not that simple.

It's easier to manage terrestrial animals than marine animals, first of all, because in marine management, everything is moving more

than in terrestrial management. As I said earlier, we are entering a period when everything will move because of climate change, and we can already observe a lot of change.

Ten years ago, it would have been easier to take a decision like that. It would have been easier to take a decision to manage the population of seals 10 years ago, but now it's more delicate. It's more touchy to do something like that today, because we know that we are at a point where the harbour seal, as an example, is at the top of the predatory curve, and we know that the fish population is going down, so we are at the step where there is a gap and the population is supposed to go down.

Now we have to evaluate the risk of putting important pressure on the harp seal while knowing that there are changes that are coming, whereas we could have done something 10 years ago to manage the population.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Calkins. I'm so glad you were so generous with your five minutes.

I promised Mr. Morrissey one question before we end at 5:30 p.m.

Mr. Morrissey, go ahead quickly, please.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you.

First, are those vessel restrictions, which seem to be counterproductive, still in place?

Second, you're telling me that we have to start by getting our own house in order provincially and federally because a lot of the frustration you experienced. Is that because of provincial regulations on the tanning and allowing things to go away?

Mr. Kendall Flood: Absolutely. I don't mind throwing them under the boat, either.

I sat down with the provincial fisheries minister and said I could pay the sealers an extra \$25 or \$30 a skin, or I could throw the skins into the landfill. I said it's an extra \$250,000 to each sealer, or I could throw them into the landfill. His response was that I could give them to the other processor. That's just insane.

He has been refusing to discuss it. I brought it up to him multiple times.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you to our witnesses who have shared their knowledge with us this afternoon.

I want to thank Mr. Calkins for coming back to FOPO and Mr. Kmiec for being such a valued member for today's participation.

On Monday we will continue with our study as we were doing today.

The meeting is adjourned.

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