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Chair

Mr. Gerald Keddy

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• (1110)

[English]

Mr. Robin Anawak (Researcher, Department of Environment, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Greetings to all members of the committee. I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for providing Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami the opportunity to speak here today on the issue of sealing.

My name is Robin Anawak, and I work at ITK in—

The Chair (Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC)): Slow down just a little bit.

Mr. Robin Anawak: Okay. It's my first time here, so—

A voice: We have 10 minutes.

The Chair: Whatever you can do in 10 minutes is fine.

Mr. Robin Anawak: Okay, thank you.

I work at ITK in the environment department, largely on policy matters relating to wildlife as they affect Inuit in Canada.

I wish to express regrets today from our president, Ms. Mary Simon, who is unable to be here today as her very busy schedule did not make her presence here possible. As you mentioned, Rosemary Cooper, our political coordinator, is here as well.

To give a brief background on our organization, ITK was founded in 1971 and represents Inuit in Canada on issues and concerns of a national nature. Since its establishment some 36 years ago, ITK has continued to act as an advocate for Inuit and to provide an organized forum through which Inuit can press and raise issues of most pertinence at any given time.

From the early formation and negotiation of Inuit land claims to constitutional recognition and inclusion of Inuit to push for a greater role and place in Canada's social, economic, and political fabric, ITK endeavours to continue its tradition of representing Inuit, both those living in arctic regions as well as those in southern urban centres.

ITK works closely with and receives its governance and guidance from the four Inuit land claim groups, which in turn represent their land claim beneficiaries in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut—from which our Inuit colleagues are here—Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut.

Our organization is also closely associated with the Inuit Circumpolar Council on the international level and with the national Inuit Youth Council on issues most pertinent to Inuit youth in Canada.

I'd like to recognize that the vice-president of the National Inuit Youth Council is here among the students. One of her responsibilities also includes the environment portfolio. It's a good group here.

As part of its work, ITK also works with various departments, officials, and ministers of the federal government, with territorial and provincial counterparts, as well as with other national aboriginal organizations and leaders.

I would like now to speak about sealing issues within an Inuit context and within the context of concerns that ITK has become familiar with, especially in regard to seal import bans that are being pushed for in nation states within the European Union and in the European Union as a whole.

Inuit are wildlife harvesters. Inuit are traditionally subsistence consumers and users of various marine mammals that are native to arctic and northern Atlantic waters. These mammals are also, if you will, native to Inuit culture, or perhaps vice versa.

Marine mammals are well-respected, highly valued, and are still to this day much needed and sought after by Inuit across the north. Marine mammals form an important part of Inuit nutrition and diet that comes from generations of living off the land and sea. Despite changes in today's world, the importance of marine mammals to Inuit remains as true as it ever was: as a food source, a cultural source, a knowledge source, a spiritual and inspirational source, and a livelihood source.

The marine mammals of which I speak include narwhal, beluga whale, bowhead whale, walrus, polar bear, and different species of seals, such as the bearded seal, harp seal, and ringed seal.

If you ask Inuit what seal they hunt, consume, and use the most, they are most likely to tell you that it is the ringed seal. The taste is much better. That and its all-purpose uses are certainly reasons for this, including the observed understanding that it's the most abundant seal species in the waters of the Arctic and northern Canada. Estimates from Nunavut alone indicate that the ringed seal population is likely in the area of two million. Considering that the population of Nunavut is around 30,000, it's a pretty substantial population.

In combination with subsistence harvesting, Inuit also utilize a part of their catch for trade in pelts and for use in arts, crafts, and clothes making and design—which you can see all around you: there is a lot of beautiful sealskin clothing here. These are considered positive, supportive, and sustainable incentives for community livelihoods. This is important to us.

Whether we talk in terms of culture, tradition, knowledge, history, values, ethics, or modern practice, Inuit have not hunted and do not hunt their food and resource supply to depletion, or to a level that would be considered irreversible to the species population, or, as we would say today, to levels of "unsustainability". We just can't afford to do it. If this were our tradition, we would not be around long enough to call it a tradition or to tell others today of such a tradition.

• (1115)

I have learned and heard much of my own culture about the lessons and values of harvesting and use of our sources of life, such as to respect wildlife, to avoid unnecessary suffering of the animal, to utilize the animal and its different parts as much as possible, to take as much as is needed but not to take out of whim and waste, and to hunt responsibly with expertise and knowledge.

Inuit continue to harvest seals on a year-round basis well below the sustainable yields of estimated seal populations. Inuit know this by their own traditional knowledge, accumulated over time and through continued harvesting and use of the species. It offers a seamless observation of conditions in the environment, whether it's over a period of a year or a decade or is generation upon generation. These culture-based parameters are still applicable when Inuit use modern tools such as snowmobiles and rifles. There are, at times, greater distances to travel, more fuel that is required with increased prices, costs of maintenance and repair, ammunition to purchase, and so forth. There is also the fact of an increased population of people who do still need country food from the land and the sea.

What is important to note in this instance is that the Inuit subsistence diet is not solely dependent on seal, but also on other marine, freshwater, and terrestrial species, so while we are focused on the discussion of the seal here today, the seal itself is only one among a number of very important food and livelihood sources for Inuit. I think the context that is important to get across to the committee here is that the issue of seals and sealing for Inuit is part of a larger holistic view of our way of life. The seal is one irreplaceable part of our perspective; we are here today to talk about our connection to it as a marine mammal and as a link to our way of life, both in traditional and in modern terms. If it were about other important species such as walrus, caribou, or polar bears, we would no doubt be here to do the same.

In relation to the seal ban issues, Inuit have stated their concerns time and again about the threat posed to Inuit interests by bans and arbitrary trade restrictions on seal products. The actions taken by the anti-sealing lobby to try to get bans established on seal imports in Europe aim to end seal hunting altogether and are not intended to better manage or improve the sustainable practices of harvesters. We see this as a slippery slope, whereby the demise of one hunt will lead to the demise of another: the Inuit hunt.

Inuit are involved in the management and co-management process when it comes to wildlife. Our land claims agreements and established regimes ensure that conservation, harvesting, and subsistence are realities that must go hand in hand on an ongoing basis. We have federal, provincial, and territorial regulations, processes, and regimes that are intended to respond to a situation such that if and when needed, a species is addressed by parties should the species face a decline to unsustainable levels for one

reason or another. These processes include the input of Inuit communities as parties to agreements and holders of their rights in Canada.

We are also involved internationally with the IUCN, an international organization I'm sure many of you are familiar with. I'd like to point out that in Amman, Jordan, in 2000, the IUCN passed a resolution, resolution 2.92. I'll read out some important parts here. This resolution of the World Conservation Congress

urges all national governments, without prejudice to their obligations under international law, to put their sustainable use principles into action in order to improve the viability of indigenous and local communities, which depend on the harvesting of renewable resources, by eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers which discourage the sustainable use of natural products derived from non-endangered species.

• (1120)

Many of the European states that are considering a seal ban are party to the IUCN. So you can imagine that we're a little bit puzzled, considering the IUCN is urging responsible and sustainable use of seals and other populations when applicable.

I would also like to cite IUCN resolution number 3.092, from the 2004 conference in Bangkok. The resolution

urges in particular IUCN members to put their sustainable use principles into action by not introducing new legislation that bans the importation and commercialization of seal products stemming from abundant seal populations, provided that obligations and requirements under other international conventions such as the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species] are met.

Inuit participation in these international forums proves that we do not operate in isolation. We are involved in regional, territorial, national, and international discussions governing the sustainable use of seals.

We are also taking the lead in the international humane trapping standards processes, primarily because we respect animals and understand that no animal should have to suffer unnecessarily.

Another threat seen by Inuit regarding arbitrary import bans is one where the economic and trade component of Inuit livelihood becomes undermined, if not by a direct ban, then by a wider propagandized bias against any seal product. In other words, a culture and products traded by the culture gets a maliciously intended dose of bad publicity by others who have an ideological or for that matter a financial objective in mind for their own interests, with the intended result of undermining another interest within a market environment.

For instance, if a country is convinced by lobbyists that any seal product is an unethical product and should not be purchased or imported, then I would think that Inuit seal products would rank the same. An attempt to put in an Inuit exemption, as was the case in the European Commission ban of 1983, would not be a guaranteed method of safeguarding Inuit economic and trade interests.

To this day, Inuit have never seen any proof or development, consulted or otherwise, of an exemption that would work in an Inuit seal product trade arrangement with countries in the European Union. We remain well guarded on this point and do not support any arbitrary trade bans on seal products, whether it's within a specific European trading country or European Union-wide.

If you'll bear with me—I'm almost done—I'd also like to cite the European Parliament's written declaration of May 2006. This declaration

considers that this regulation should not have an impact on traditional Inuit seal hunting which, however, only accounts for 3% of the current hunt.

This language is nice, and it is suggested that this regulation should not have an impact; however, there is no legislation or language in here to guarantee that it will not have an impact.

I'd like to thank this committee for hearing me. I'll hand it over to NTI.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll ask our next witness to speak.

Mr. Ningeocheak.

• (1125)

Ms. Martha Flaherty (Interpreter, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated): He wants to know if we can do simultaneous interpreting, because it's going to take too long if it's consecutive. He wants to know if it's okay.

The Chair: Of course, if it works.

Ms. Martha Flaherty: He does not like speaking and stopping in between; he's used to using simultaneous interpreters, which we usually do. We don't have that here today, so he'll do it consecutively.

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Second Vice-President, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated) (Interpretation): Thank you very much for inviting us here, for recognizing my letter and bringing us here. I really appreciate that.

First of all, I'd like to welcome the Inuit Sivuniksavut students who are all here. They have been our big supporters when we're dealing with the seal issues. A lot of them are from coastal areas, and it's great that they can come here and actually show you what our issues are by bringing what they're wearing.

I shall proceed.

I'm quite tired, because I've been travelling for 15 hours because of the weather. I had to take another route. So I'm not exactly at my best.

The Chair: We understand.

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Interpretation): So I will be happy if you could let me finish what I have to present.

Just to add to Robin's presentation, for thousands of years, Inuit and seals have had a special relationship. Seals feed Inuit and help keep our dogs alive. We use their skins as clothing.

I myself am 65 years old and I have lived by surviving on the land, so I know what I'm talking about.

Oil and seal fat keep Inuit warm and light our dwellings. We also use seal bones and seal fur for arts and crafts. I know, because I've lived through this kind of life in our communities.

As part of Canadian society, we go to the Canadian government for your support to keep our livelihood going. It's the way we've always lived. We depend on sealing for our economy, and we appeal to you as our government to support us to keep this activity going.

Speaking from my own experience as an Inuit hunter who has hunted and lived by eating and living on seal, if it weren't for the seal that brought me up to this day, I would not be speaking to you today. Otherwise, I would not have really bothered to travel all this way here, to come to this committee meeting, but I feel that when we talk about banning the seal hunt, it affects my livelihood very much and the livelihood of the Inuit. It means a lot to me, so I am here to appeal to you today.

• (1130)

Seals are very nutritious and very important in the Inuit diet, in the past and also in the present, today. It is a very important source of vitamins, proteins, and minerals for our diet. In the olden days, Inuit lived on seal meat, as well as our dogs, which we fed, and the Inuit and their dog teams co-existed. We did that because we relied on seal meat for our nutrition. It is one of the best meat products that you can get from the land.

The skin, which is a byproduct, now has added value for the hunter because we can sell the seals on the market. I myself also have experience. In 1965 I bought myself a Ski-Doo just from sealskins. The selling of the skins from the hunt means the ability to purchase gas, ammunition, oil, parts for my snowmobile, and other items for my family. For these real reasons, the seal is most sought after, all year round.

Good jobs are limited in Nunavut, especially in the smaller communities, and the unemployment rate is very high. Unless a person has a high school education or post-secondary education, it is very difficult to find a good job. For myself, in my age group, that is so true. A lot of us didn't have a chance to be educated, so we're sort of left out. Education is the answer these days. If you have education, you have more chance of getting jobs. For our age group, that doesn't work.

•(1135)

Hunting continues to be an important part of the economy of the Inuit society, and it helps to offset the high cost of living in the north. This is so true for hunters at this time. Hunting is a costly subsistence activity, with few economic opportunities. Hunting allows us to be independent as a people. However, when you have a weak sealskin market, it forces Inuit to rely on social assistance, which takes away the Inuit pride.

With the world market of oil and gasoline going through the roof today, Nunavut is heavily affected, more than any other region. There are no road links to the south. If we had a road, it would reduce the high cost of transportation, but we don't have roads. The cost of living is much higher in the north than anywhere else in Canada.

Last year, over 6,000 raw sealskins were exported from Nunavut. This amounts to \$530,000 in income for Inuit hunters in Nunavut alone.

•(1140)

When I was talking about the price of sealskins, the generated income for the Inuit seal hunters in Nunavut, I was referring to raw sealskins only, not the garments that you see the students wearing.

I also wanted to show you my hunting gear that I have worn for most of my life. They're all made out of sealskin products, traditionally tanned so that they're waterproof.

I have shown you my boot liners, which are waterproof, and two pairs of mitts. The gauntlets with the high tops I use when I'm building an igloo. With those, snow doesn't go into your arms. The shorter cuffs, the mittens that I showed you, are for butchering caribou or when I'm working around camp. These I use for my work when I go out hunting, when I'm out on the land. This is some of our survival hunting gear today, and we rely on those. I also have a pair of pants and a parka, which are also waterproof, that I use when I go hunting.

When we talk about clothing and the sealskins that we rely on for our traditional warm clothes when we're out hunting, I'm not talking about the pretty jackets and coats that you see around this building today. I'm talking about the functional hunting gear that has also kept us warm.

The value I was talking about does not reflect the added value earned by making the skins into garments worn by the students here in the audience. This industry generates millions of dollars and is starting to bring back the independence that Inuit once knew.

Unfortunately, animal rights activists have brought negative emotions to this issue. During the 1980s, anti-fur and animal rights activists lobbied primarily in Europe against the harp seal hunt taking place on the east coast, and it resulted in a European ban on young harp seal products in 1983.

The anti-fur and animal rights activity devastated the seal industry in Nunavut for Inuit. Inuit experienced a significant loss in income and could not finance their harvesting activities. This gave rise to a number of social problems that we still live with today. Whenever we've had animal rights groups lobbying in Ottawa, we have been

very fortunate to have the Nunavut Sivuniksavut students lobbying on our behalf and speaking out for the Inuit.

The hunting of seals has been portrayed by animal rights activists as inhumane, but this is not true. How Inuit kill seals is to use all the parts of the seal for food, clothing, and other products. Inuit have always been very much into conservation, taking what they needed and not exceeding what their needs are.

•(1145)

The killing of seals appears, as portrayed by the activists, to be perceived in a different light than the slaughter of domestic livestock, but it is not different.

Mr. Chairman, please understand that Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the Government of Nunavut are working on policy in the sealing industry in Nunavut. Their key principles are the following four points.

Number one, the harvest must be sustainable. The resource must be protected from overharvesting and managed with a view to maintaining the place of seals within the ecosystem, which also includes good management of seals and seal hunting.

Number two, the whole animal must be used. All parts of the seal have a specific use and all of it should be utilized.

Number three, the harvest must be humane. All kills must be done cleanly and quickly.

Number four, the safety of the hunter must be taken into account.

Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated is involved with the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission's specific committees in providing a comprehensive look at the information on ringed seal populations and harvest statistics.

•(1150)

The seal hunt in Nunavut is very sustainable. There are more than two million ringed seals in Nunavut. It is estimated that about 80,000 animals are harvested annually. It is lower than historical harvesting numbers.

Ringed seals are distributed across the north and do not migrate south. Ringed seals have never been endangered, and Inuit do not have any concerns about the seal population. Inuit have never depleted the stock.

Regarding the climate that is changing, we are beginning to notice that the ice formation now is changing, and therefore it changes the behaviour of the seals. This winter alone, there are places where we normally had seals, but because the ice has been very slow to change in that area, we notice that they have moved to another area. That's something that we also have to keep in mind, that the population is flexible and it does migrate. It moves around.

To Inuit, seal hunting means fresh, healthy meat on the table. It means an earned income. It re-establishes the pride of hunters. It means new mitts, new boots, a new parka, among other things that we survive by.

We are pleased that the price of seal has gone up slightly, and it gives us hope that it may be sustainable for us to hunt seal again. When we talk about hunting seal for the skin, I want to reassure you that we do eat the meat. We do use the bones and all parts of the seal for other things as well. We're not just killing it for the seal skin to sell. We do conserve, and because the price of seal skin is going up, it doesn't mean that Inuit will go out and hunt double what they're killing now for their own sustenance. We believe in good management, and we have never overkilled because the price was right.

• (1155)

Lastly, Mr. Chairperson, I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk to the committee. As Canadians we believe that the Canadian government will listen to our concerns, attempt to get to know our culture—the way we live—and come to appreciate us as a people living in Canada.

Also, Mr. Chairperson, I invite you to come north to see how the rest of Canada lives. You are most welcome to visit Nunavut.

When you come to the northern part of Canada you will see that we are a different people, separate from other Canadians. We live differently; we have our own language and our own culture; we live in a different geographic region than you do. We also hunt differently from what you perceive seal hunting to be. We do not use clubs when we hunt seals. Nowadays we have rifles, and sometimes we use the traditional harpoon to hunt seals.

Again, you are welcome to come to Nunavut to visit with us. We'll be very happy to help you out with some of the questions you may have about Inuit and seals.

These boots I am showing you are tanned sealskin waterproof “kamiks”, as we call them. In fact, they are really too hot to wear in this building right now.

Any questions you may have are welcome.

Thank you very much.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

We appreciate our witnesses appearing. We realize you came a long way. We very much appreciate and understand your message.

I expect some of the students may find it a bit warm in some of those fur coats as well.

Speaking as chair of the committee, I find it reassuring—and I'm sure our questioners will bring a number of these points up—that you understand the “divide and conquer” plan of the Europeans, of the non-governmental officials and the humane groups around the world, who very much would like to separate all seal hunters into separate components and, once they're divided, conquer them all. There's no such thing as an exemption for aboriginal peoples or Inuit peoples. That's not the intent. The intent is to stop sealing.

It's unfortunate that some of these individuals have no understanding of living off the land. They've never hunted, they've never fished, and they have no understanding.

I've been in the high north, in the eastern Arctic, many times. It's a beautiful area, and I would be more than pleased to come again. I would expect to have some ringed seal when I get there. The grey seals that we eat off southwestern Nova Scotia are okay, but they're not nearly as tasty as the ringed seal; it's much better.

We'll go to our first questioner, Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to our guests. Welcome to all guests, as a matter of fact. I've never seen such a big turnout for a committee. It's not bad, eh?

I would like to say, in addition to what you have said, that all parties here—and I hate to speak on behalf of other parties, but I think I'd be safe in saying this—are really unified on this issue. Past governments, the current government, as well as future governments: we've all been as one.

My colleague Mr. Blais and I have been to Europe. We've talked to the animal rights groups. We talked to the politicians over there. We made our case and put it forward. I think what is necessary is for you as well to go to Europe, because when they start talking about things like exemptions, we look at it as just a passing glance, a politically correct thing to say, without any heed to the fact that you have a harvest as well—a commercial, viable harvest—just like many other jurisdictions around the globe.

That being said, I have a few questions concerning Mr. Anawak. Earlier, you mentioned exemptions for traditional hunt. I want you to touch on that again. I'm assuming from what you have said that you have disdain for it. You find it, I guess, as I do, in a sense not really legitimate.

How would the ban on importation of seal products affect you?

• (1205)

Mr. Robin Anawak: I'll speak to this briefly, and then I'd like to hand it over to my colleagues. In the 1983 sealskin ban that Europe implemented, there was an exemption. There was an exemption that said that Inuit products that were traditionally harvested were exempted and would be allowed to be traded with Europe.

That's nice and dandy, but unfortunately, as soon as the ban was in place the price of sealskins fell—this was 1983, so I can't speak to it from personal experience—quite dramatically. So even though there was the exemption in place, seal hunters could not support the modern methods of hunting because they could not fetch the prices for their sealskins that they could before the ban.

I would hand it over to them, because I was a year old in 1983.

Mr. Gabriel Nirlungayuq (Director, Wildlife Department, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks for that question. Yes, we have been told that we're an unintentional victim, but that's not true. It is an intent for people who hunt; whether it's on the east coast or the north coast, it's an intent all together. Unfortunately, animal rights people have used that term, that we won't be touched, but we will be; we know that.

As a matter of fact, last year the Government of Nunavut and NTI, when the Greenland Home Rule Government attempted to stop the market exportation, went to the Greenland Home Rule Government asking them the question, saying, if you ban seal products from the east coast, you're affecting us too.

So we realize this quite well.

Mr. Scott Simms: I want to touch on the IUCN. You talked about the memorandum that was signed, I think in Amman, Jordan—is that correct?

One interesting point we talk about is that this was an exemption for seal products that pertained to...who exactly?

Mr. Robin Anawak: This was not an exemption. What I was referring to was a recognition by the IUCN that species that have sustainable, abundant populations should not be regulated or restricted in trade, because they are abundant. As long as there is management in place, the IUCN, in the specific passage I quoted, recognized that indigenous and local communities should be able to harvest species as long as they're abundant.

Mr. Scott Simms: Was the United States of America a signatory to that?

Mr. Robin Anawak: I couldn't tell you. They are IUCN members, and I believe this was a unanimous decision, but I cannot be certain. I can check on that and give you a written answer.

Mr. Scott Simms: That would be great, because I'm trying to get to the MMPA, which is the Marine Mammal Protection Act in the United States, which does not allow any importation.

What I've heard is that seal products are imported to the United States from Alaska. Is that true? Would you know that?

Mr. Robin Anawak: I wouldn't assume it's imported, because Alaska is—

Mr. Scott Simms: Well, no, understood. Good point. But is it exported—I'm only using these terms because of the sheer distance of it—from Alaska down to the United States of America? Would you know that?

Mr. Robin Anawak: I wouldn't know.

Mr. Scott Simms: I guess what I'm asking is, is there a commercial market in the United States despite the fact that there is an MMPA?

Mr. Robin Anawak: I can only assume there is. As ITK, we deal solely with national issues.

Mr. Scott Simms: Go ahead.

Mr. Gabriel Nirlungayuq: I just want to try to answer Mr. Simms' question.

In regard to the United States, they allow their natives to hunt, but they don't allow them to sell it, only if it's within an art form. If it's a craft, they allow it.

•(1210)

Mr. Scott Simms: All right. That answers that question.

Let me go back to the ringed seal issue. Mr. Ningeocheak, you say there are two million ringed seals and 80,000 are harvested. Where do you get these numbers? Is this a number from DFO, or is it a number that your own association has on ringed seals?

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Interpretation): I will let the director of harvesting wildlife respond to that, but personally, I would like to respond to it before he does.

Numbers mean a great deal to the other cultures. On the question of where the numbers are extracted from, I will let Mr. Nirlungayuq speak to that.

Mr. Gabriel Nirlungayuq: Thank you for that question. Those are from within the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission council. We got that from the reports of their scientific committee. However, those numbers that have been exported are much lower than before the anti-fur movement affected the exportation.

Mr. Scott Simms: You mentioned, sir, that you're noticing a difference in the icefields. I think one of the things you said was that ice formations are changing. Is there a noticeable difference in the reduction of seals as a result of ice formations changing recently?

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Interpretation): When I talk about the arctic climate and how it's changing, I also need to mention that the Nunavut area, or the north, the Arctic, is a very vast and immense geographical area. Traditionally, it has always been that it becomes ice-free in Rankin Inlet, in Hudson's Bay, two weeks before the Clyde River has open water.

I spoke to a good friend of mine this spring when I was living in Rankin Inlet. We had been ice-free and out boating for two weeks when I spoke to him in Clyde River, and he told me, at the same time, that the ice hadn't broken. He was living in the North Baffin area and I live in the Hudson's Bay coastal area north of Churchill. When I'm out boating, he's still out ski-dooing on the ice on the Clyde River. We are talking about the same region, the same area, of Nunavut.

I also need to mention that in North Baffin the winters will last longer than they do in the Keewatin area, so there is that difference also. Not only are we talking about climate change, we're talking about seasons that are coming later or earlier because of the location we are situated in within Nunavut.

I also want to mention the snow melt. We know that snow melts faster when you are in the mainland area, but snow doesn't melt as fast when you live in a coastal area. As you move further up north, it doesn't melt as fast as it does in the southern parts of Nunavut.

So when there is a time lapse there of two weeks, the seals will migrate up north so they can go on the ice floes to bask in the sun. So there is that movement that's dictated by the seasons too.

•(1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

To follow up on Mr. Simms' question, for a point of clarification from our witnesses, the question was, are you seeing a diminishing herd? Are there actually fewer seals because of climate change?

What has happened in the south is that we still have just as many seals, if not more. They're simply having their pups on the beaches, on the ledges, and on the little rocky islands instead of on the ice.

Mr. Robin Anawak: I will point out that in Mr. Ningeocheak's presentation he did address this. He said with how much climate change is affecting the north...he did notice that the seal populations are adapting as well.

He did mention that he is seeing seal populations in different areas. Nobody has noticed a decline in their numbers, only that they're being noticed in other areas. So they are adapting to climate change.

The Chair: Exactly.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Blais.

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

[*English*]

The Chair: Wait a second. Mr. Ningeocheak wants to comment.

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Interpretation): Mr. Chairperson, I have lived with seals all my life. My grandfather taught me to be a seal hunter. They were our teachers before the white man arrived in our country. There is a constant movement of seals—we know that—because they're looking for feeding grounds. We know that certain stocks winter in one area, but other stocks that have smaller and younger pups may migrate from place to place because they're looking for feeding grounds, so there is a constant movement.

That's all I have to say. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon.

I don't exactly know how we're going to make sure we understand each other. You can probably understand from the expression on my face what I am saying. I have a lot of respect for you and the testimony you gave. I get the feeling that you're trying to tell us that people in this country still have a lot to learn. You've spoken very wisely. And I believe that Europeans, Canadians and Quebecers can benefit from this wisdom.

To date, you have in many respects borne the brunt of the anti-hunting campaign. In the riding that I represent, there have been seal hunters for the past 300 years or thereabouts. So seal hunting is to some extent also a part of our history.

The anti-hunting campaign started about 30 years ago, and I wonder what you could have done, had the Canadian government and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada given you their support.

• (1220)

[*English*]

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Interpretation): Thank you very much.

I understand exactly what you are saying and I can relate to your being emotional about the issue.

When we had an opportunity and found out that we could be represented by your chairperson on sealing issues, I wrote to him, strongly wording it that as our Canadian government you have a responsibility to represent our interests to the European countries and to deal with policies in government-to-government relations, representing our interests government to government, and we asked that you represent our interests to the various governments.

We know that as individuals we don't have much say on what happens with government policies, or even trends that are happening in the world, but that if our government were to represent us, we had a better chance of being heard. So as Canadians we have appealed to our Canadian government, who represent us and speak for us on those issues.

Again, addressing the issue of sealing to you and our special interest in sealing, I want to mention for the last time that we are an aboriginal people in Canada, but separate from the other aboriginal peoples in Canada. We Inuit are taxpayers. We are proud to be taxpayers, because we are Canadians. We are supporting the federal and provincial governments by paying taxes; therefore, we expect the federal and provincials governments.... There are Inuit in Nunavut, Quebec, Labrador, and in other regions who are taxpayers, and we go to our governments to support us, because we support our governments, as Canadians.

Thank you.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: That's an excellent message.

Now, let me tell you this: after getting involved in the anti-seal-hunting campaign issue, I quickly understood that we were dealing with some powerful people. I'm referring, in some ways, to multinationals. In fact, the Humane Society and the IFAW have about US\$100 million each from public donations. These funds have been collected in fundraising campaigns which have been conducted in a demagogic fashion and have involved propagating misinformation.

When it comes to sealing, it's become increasingly apparent to me how important it is for the message to be transmitted by those engaged in it, those whose livelihood depends on it, and for whom it is part of a culture. These people need to go to Europe and meet with the Europeans and, at a later stage, with the Americans. This would be a better way of getting the message through. For about 30 years, we have relied on our politicians, and our representatives. They have probably tried to fix the problem, but I don't think that they've tried hard enough. Furthermore, the argument voiced by a person engaged in sealing and whose livelihood depends on it, will hold more weight than that of a spokesperson.

And that is why I got people from the Magdalen Islands to come to Quebec City and Ottawa to meet European parliamentarians. A number of parliamentarians also came to visit us. And let me say in passing, that I would be honoured to have you visit us. It would give you an opportunity to speak with other seal hunters. I'm sure that you would all get along well. It is crucial in my opinion—and this is probably going to be one of our recommendations—that people like you should be the ones on the front lines getting the message out there and fighting the campaign they are waging. That would really work, in my opinion. It would be an extremely tough fight, but it is a fight that still hasn't been lost.

•(1230)

[English]

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Interpretation): Mr. Chairperson, thank you.

You said earlier that we have to be involved with lobbying in the European countries. I agree. But I also agree that our government has a responsibility to represent us, and because they are the link to the other European countries, they know what is happening, and they get the invitation to meet with them.

So I expect that our government and the Inuit should have an agreement to work together as a team when the Canadian government is invited as a delegation to those talks on sealing, and that we will go as part of the delegation of the Canadian government. I say that because of the high cost of travel and the responsibility of the government that represents us. We are more than willing to work in partnership with our government if they would invite us to work with them on those trips.

Thank you.

Mr. Gabriel Nirlungayuq: I'd like to try to answer some of Raynald's questions on what efforts we have taken. From the staff perspective, we try to work closely with the scientific committee of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, as well as NAMMCO and the Fur Institute of Canada, to ensure that from a statistics point of view we have that information in case there are any questions that perhaps what we're doing is unsustainable. On that front we have been engaged with those organizations, but on a campaign, in a public scale, I agree that it's one area in which we have to be more engaged, more engaged in those areas.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Stoffer—sorry, wait a second.

Go ahead, Mr. Anawak.

Mr. Robin Anawak: I just wanted to add something briefly. The Nunavut Sivuniksavut training program has been going on for more than 20 years here in Ottawa. In 1996, I believe, the students actually travelled to Europe to showcase some sealskin products and to discuss the sealing issue with Europeans, so Inuit have gone over there to discuss this issue. Our president of ITK has also been in touch with the King of Belgium, for instance, when Belgium was making sounds about wanting to ban seal products.

There's a history of travelling to Europe, but as these two said, we do feel there has to be more, and we would like government support to do so.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): First of all, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for organizing all of this today. And thank you very much for travelling all this way to explain the importance of seals in your life.

I just want to assure you about something, although I can't speak on behalf of the committee. When we get representation from folks within the first nations or aboriginal communities, it sometimes appears that you're almost apologizing for your lifestyle or your culture, and I want to assure you that you should not ever feel you have to apologize or explain your culture to us, because many of us understand, respect, and highly regard the Nunavut culture. If there are people in Canada who choose not to, I think you just go right past them and carry on. We thank you for your invitation, but please don't ever feel you have to apologize, especially when you've passed your traditions on to your next generation; hopefully they'll be able to pass your culture on to their generations and their children, and so on.

Sir, you mentioned a resolution from the European Council to the effect that it should not affect traditional lifestyles. I believe you used the word “should”. Anyone who's ever done collective bargaining knows that if you see the word “should” in a resolution, a motion, or anything of that nature, it can mean whatever you want it to mean, and if, as Mr. Blais indicated, the Government of Canada had invited people of your stature there to explain to them what the actions of the animal rights groups can do to your culture, even though they sit here at our committees and say they have no intentions to harm your way of life—well, this is exactly what they're doing, even though they may not admit it, so I couldn't agree more that you should be part of all delegations in the future.

My one question for you is on the reliance of scientific information in the north, not just with regard to global warming but also with regard to the number of seals, the number of harvests. Do you feel you have adequate support from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans officials in Nunavut? Can you possibly tell me the working relationship you have with the department? Do you feel the department could do more—maybe more resources—or is it adequate as you see it now?

And thank you for coming.

•(1235)

Mr. Gabriel Nirlungayuq: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer, for those questions, and for your support and recognition of our potential, if we are a part of any campaign from here on in.

On your questions about Fisheries and Oceans support, unfortunately, for whatever reasons of political direction, the support up in Nunavut has been going down, from either an enforcement perspective or for support of scientific funding. The people up in Nunavut are wondering where DFO is, because we hunt other marine mammals, not just seals—whales and other marine mammals—and we are part of Canada. Even though we have our own land claims agreement, we still are ruled by Canada, with the recognition of our land claims.

I could say, I think without hesitation, that even though we are co-management partners with DFO, the directed funding and DFO presence and support have been going down for the past number of years.

Thank you.

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

I agree with what Mr. Stoffer said earlier. We need to work together with our government to get results.

We have worked with a Conservative government in the past. In 1993, the Nunavut land claims agreement was given approval by the Government of Canada, and at the time that was a Conservative government. Today we're back with a Conservative government.

But under the Nunavut land claims agreement, there are some obligations that the governments have failed to fulfill. It has taken five years to achieve results with the governments.

We are willing to work with the governments, as you know, and we have signed agreements in good faith with the Canadian governments. But working with the government is sometimes very slow; it takes too long. Waiting five years for implementation of certain land claims objectives is too long. We are willing to work with the governments.

I'm not saying that the Conservative government alone, which signed the Nunavut land claim agreement with us in 1993, is at fault. I'm saying that the way the government gets around to doing things takes a bit too long for the average Canadian today; I'm talking from my experience in implementing the land claims agreement. Do not take it personally, if you are the Conservative government.

• (1240)

The Chair: I think we all understand that government takes a long time.

Mr. Anawak.

Mr. Robin Anawak: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Stoffer, within our organization at least, and I'm pretty sure this pertains to our regional colleagues as well, there is a willingness and a want to work with DFO. Unfortunately, one of the problems we have is capacity. At ITK, within our environment department, there are basically three of us who deal with wildlife issues in all Canadian regions. That includes species at risk—polar bears are all over the news these days—and it includes marine species, and that includes sealing. If I told you our budget for working on wildlife issues, you would probably laugh at me.

As I said, there is a willingness, but we do not have the capacity to engage DFO in the way we would like to.

Everyone here understands, and we understand, that sealing is an important issue for Canada. We do our best with what we have. There is a willingness there, and I'm sure in the regions, as Gabriel said, there's a willingness as well. It's hard to match what DFO is doing with our own resources.

The Chair: We appreciate some of the constraints you face, and also some of the issues that face DFO. It's our intent to try to work through as many of those as we can.

Mr. Manning.

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our guests for your presence here today.

Being from the island of Newfoundland and the big land of Labrador, I understand the importance of culture and heritage. I want to say a heartfelt congratulations to all of you, young and old alike, for your great efforts in maintaining your culture and preserving your heritage. To do that takes sustainability and a way of life, and I guess the purpose of your being with us here today is to ensure that we get the message about how important it is to be able to sustain the way of life you now have.

One of the comments of Mr. Ningeocheak was about education, that education is the key. There is no doubt in my mind that your short time with us today has educated us all greatly. Certainly, if the Government of Canada of any political stripe—past, present, and future—does not work together with you to help maintain your way of life, it's a shame on all of us, in my view.

In one comment you made, you referred to your mittens as “cuffs”, and we still use that term—we still have cuffs—in Newfoundland also.

You mentioned your arts and crafts industry as secondary to the seal hunt itself. As I look around at the young people here today, I see some wonderful products. What does that industry mean to your communities in dollar value? You mentioned what the seals themselves mean, and I realize that you use the seal 100%. But the arts and crafts industry in your communities must mean so much. I'd just like to know exactly what it means in dollar value.

• (1245)

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

I'd like to direct that question to our director of wildlife. As an elected representative, I deal with policy, but Mr. Nirlungayuq will be dealing with this, as he works directly with the issue.

Thank you.

Mr. Gabriel Nirlungayuq: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, Mr. Manning, for those questions.

We alluded to it earlier. We exported 6,000 skins last year, but those are very low. As you can appreciate, sealskin prices are coming back. Historically we have exported more than that. Just for raw seals alone, bar graphs here show that in 1975 exports were in the neighbourhood of about 50,000 skins. That is a big contrast to what it was before the crash of the product. The added value of the skins is in the millions. Whether you're selling it to whoever wants to buy it off the market or to people who are actually using it, I don't have the exact figures, but they are in the millions of dollars.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Manning.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much. It is important for us to realize that it is not just the seal hunt itself; it is the secondary processing that means so much to your communities, the survival of those communities, and therefore the survival of your heritage and culture.

You mentioned, Robin, that about 20 years ago some young people from your communities travelled to Europe to present some of the craft products. Is that correct? Did I take you correctly?

Mr. Robin Anawak: That was about 10 years ago. It was in a class very much like this. It was the same program. It was 1996.

They did display some crafts, but the primary reason they went there was to discuss the sealing issue. The crafts—they were able to show off their clothing, but they wanted to engage the Europeans in a dialogue to make them understand why sealing is so important to us.

• (1250)

Mr. Fabian Manning: What I'm trying to get at, and maybe you can help, is that delegations have gone from Canada since and before. I hear from you that your people have not been part of those delegations to the extent you would like them to be. Has any effort been made, apart from here today? I just want to ascertain the efforts that have been made by your people with the Government of Canada in the past and in the present to be part of that.

I truly believe, after your presentation here today, that your presence as part of those delegations would add to the message that we try to bring. Your presence would be very important. I'm just wondering what efforts you have made and what the results of those efforts have been.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Ningeocheak.

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

I'd like to respond to Mr. Manning's question.

When you referred to the trip that was made 10 years ago to Europe, yes, a trip did take place 10 years ago. I remember it. The Nunavut Sivuniksavut students reported to NTI later on what they had discussed when they went on their trip. They talked about the culture of the Inuit, our hunting, and our conservation. The young people from the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program have represented us very well as ambassadors.

Yes, we would like to be able to go to other countries to promote our lifestyle and our concerns, but, again, we don't have the money. Give us the money and we'll go.

Mr. Chairperson, once again, we have never been asked what our concerns are about the sealing industry and the ban. We have never been consulted on how it was affecting our lives when it started to go downhill.

I want to assure you that there is a willingness on our part to work with you as a government for the interests of our people. When we sit down together with a group of people and we agree to work in a partnership, I take that in good faith, and I look forward to working with you in the future, the very near future, to resolve some of these issues that affect us as Canadians.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Manning, and then Mr. Lunney has a quick question.

Mr. Fabian Manning: I've only been here—elected—in Ottawa for one year, but from the committees I've been involved in, this committee, fisheries and oceans, crosses party lines when it comes to their strong support for the seal hunt. I'm sure other members have mentioned that also. So I think your message has been received loud and clear. In whatever language we choose to speak here today, I think the message is the same, so I welcome that.

I would just follow up with one last question, if I could, back to Robin. Maybe you don't want to share it with us, but what would your budget for wildlife issues be?

• (1255)

Mr. Robin Anawak: My own budget to work on species at risk is \$190,000 over two years, which, may I add, hasn't been received yet. We submitted our proposal several months ago, and we're nearing the end of the fiscal year and we haven't seen a dollar. That is the only funding I or my mentor receive to work on any of these wildlife issues. Most of our funding to pay for the work we do comes from our core funding. It's not supposed to, but that's the only place we can get money to do the work.

Wildlife is very important to us, so \$196,000, which hasn't been delivered, for me and my colleague to work on wildlife issues is it.

Mr. Fabian Manning: You have to work magic.

Mr. Robin Anawak: Yes. Well, I didn't have to fly here, thank God.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Thank you for your presence here today.

The Chair: How about we deliver that message?

Mr. Lunney, you have a quick question, a final question.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Yes. It's more a comment.

I want to just thank you all very much for your presentation today. It has been very, very eloquent and persuasive. I think you're convincing. I don't know how you managed to bring so many young people along with you today, because we know how terribly expensive it is to travel from the north. And also, for Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak, a 15-hour trip to come here and not have any rest before you appear... We appreciate very much your presence today.

Many of the members around the table here come from coastal areas, but my colleague Randy Kamp and I come from the west coast of Canada. I believe I can speak for members around this table, but I want to say that it's not an issue that we feel the people from Newfoundland should have to face alone, when it comes to the sealing issue. It's not an issue that the people from Iles-de-la-Madeleine should have to face alone or that the people from Nunavut should have to face alone. This is an issue that we need to address as a nation.

I want to suggest to you that there is strong support around this table, but we feel that your presence with us today actually brings great strength to Canada's argument and position about why we do what we do in this nation and why we don't need to apologize to the Europeans, but we do need to stand up together.

I'm glad to hear that word "together" come out in the discussions here. I did hear a suggestion that you need to go, and we would like you to go, but I think this isn't that you should go alone. You should go as part of a delegation. We'd like to make sure that you go together, with all the resources we have, to make our story as convincing as possible.

Thank you very much for coming to make your story so clear to us today.

The Chair: I'm going to take that as a statement and not a question. Thank you, Mr. Lunney. I think it was well put.

I would like to thank very much our witnesses for travelling here and for your discussion today.

I have one final point that needs to be raised, and that is the fact of the Greenland Inuit. They are a group of people who have direct ties to Europe, to Denmark. I don't know what the association is or how we can use that connection of one group of people, but I think it's a tie and a toehold in Europe that we've not utilized enough. I wonder if you guys have thought of that, if you have expanded on that, and if you're working on that already.

Go ahead, Mr. Ningeocheak.

Mr. Raymond Ningeocheak (Interpretation): First, Mr. Chairperson, I would like to thank you for the time you've taken to listen to our presentation today.

When we talk about sealing, that is just one component we deal with on a full-time basis, implementing the Nunavut land claims agreement. If you look at the Nunavut land claims agreement, you will see that article 5, which is the biggest part of the agreement, deals with wildlife. Wildlife has been very important in our lives, and it's been taking up all of our time.

When I talk about wildlife, I also am referring to other outstanding issues that we have to resolve, such as polar bears and quotas. Scientists and biologists are always coming out with new announcements every week that caribou species may be depleting, and other fish stocks may be depleting. They make those assumptions and they make those grandiose announcements about our wildlife, and we are never consulted or involved in the study of these species. People never come to us to ask for our traditional knowledge of wildlife and management. We want to participate in decision-making.

To go back to where I'm coming from, in 1971 ITC, which is now ITK, came into effect. I remember spending two weeks at Carleton University when a group of Inuit were crafting the bylaws or the vision of the Inuit Tapiriit of Canada. We were there for one reason: to work together as a collective of Inuit people to fight for our self-determination. That's where I'm coming from today, and that's where I've always been.

Again, I wish to state again, we have traditional knowledge when it comes to our wildlife and we need to be involved in policies when it comes to making decisions about wildlife in Nunavut.

Thank you.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nirlungayuq.

Mr. Gabriel Nirlungayuq: This is a quick attempt to answer your question on our collaboration with the Greenland Inuit. Unfortunately, they're in a different country, part of the Danish kingdom. We had an incident where they were attempting to ban products from Canada. We used our advantage, if you will, being another part of the same Inuit culture and pleaded with them, saying you're going to affect your own kind, if you will.

You're right, we haven't utilized that link. I think I can safely say that, being of the same culture, there are possibilities for us there.

Thank you.

• (1305)

The Chair: Mr. Anawak.

Mr. Robin Anawak: I want to say something not so much in answer to your question but as a clarification of Mr. Lunney's comments.

We can only dream of the day when we can fly 25 people down here for this meeting. These students actually go to school in Ottawa. I didn't want you to think we have money for going out everywhere; I just wanted to clarify that. They go to school right downtown, on Dalhousie Avenue.

The second thing was that it has come to our attention that on March 15, some animal rights or humane treatment groups will be protesting on Parliament Hill. The Nunavut Sivuniksavut students have already held one counter-demonstration, last year, very effectively. They'll be doing the same on March 15.

I'll be there. I want to know whether you guys can be there.

The Chair: I'd be happy to be there.

Mr. Robin Anawak: Thank you.

Mr. James Lunney: Just as a point of clarification, lest there be disappointment, I believe that's a break week—there's a parliamentary recess that week—which may make it difficult for members. I don't want to leave anybody disappointed. I believe I'll be in Toronto.

The Chair: Oh. Maybe we'll ask them to have their demonstration on a different day.

Thank you very much.

I would like to finally thank all of our witnesses, our interpreters, our students, for appearing here today. I think it's been a very productive meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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