

Canada - Europe
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
Canada - Europe

**The report of the Canadian Parliamentary
Delegation of the
Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association to the
Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE)
to the**

**Meeting of the committee on the environment,
agriculture and local and regional affairs
Paris, France
May 12, 2006**

A delegation of three parliamentarians from the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association travelled to Paris, France, to participate in a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's (PACE) Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs.

Report

A delegation of three parliamentarians from the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association travelled to Paris, France, to participate in a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's (PACE) Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs. The delegation was led by Association President, the Hon. Lorna Milne, Senator, and included, from the Senate, the Hon. George Baker and from the House of Commons Mr. Raynald Blais. The delegation was accompanied by association secretary Philippe Méla and advisor Marcus Pistor.

The purpose of this meeting was, among other things, to discuss a revised report on seal hunting that is very critical of Canada's seal hunt, as well as the Canadian delegation's official response that was tabled with the committee in April. Representatives of two non-governmental organizations involved in the campaign to end the seal hunt – the Brussels office of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the Italian Lega Anti-Vivisezione (LAV) – were present at the meeting as observers.

Background

In April 2004, the PACE Bureau referred a motion for recommendation on "Seal Hunting" to the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs. In October 2004, it held a hearing involving Canadian and Norwegian seal hunt experts, as well as NGOs, and it appointed Mr. Nessa (Italy, Group of the European People's Party) as rapporteur. One year later, in October 2005, Mr. Nessa's first draft report and the response from the Canadian delegation (which included as an annex the Report of the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group on the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt) were discussed by the committee. A revised report was submitted by the rapporteur in February, and the Canadian delegation prepared and submitted a detailed response in April.

The Committee is expected to discuss a draft recommendation on seal hunting at its next meeting on June 9th in Paris, followed by a second meeting on the draft recommendation during the upcoming PACE session (June 26-30) in Strasbourg, when it will also vote on the recommendation. A full assembly debate on the draft recommendation could then be held in October 2006.

Process

PACE committee studies are usually initiated by a motion presented by PACE members, which is then referred to the relevant standing committee for study. The committee appoints a rapporteur who prepares a report, or 'explanatory memorandum', with the help of the committee secretariat. Following committee discussions of the report, the secretariat prepares a draft resolution (a decision or statement by the Assembly) and/or a draft recommendation (a statement addressed to the Committee of Ministers which includes recommendations for action by member governments). In this

case, the recommendation on seal hunting may be addressed directly to the Canadian government, such as asking Canada to change how the hunt is managed.

The committee and Assembly do not vote on the report / explanatory memorandum, the content of which is the responsibility solely of the rapporteur. They vote only on the draft recommendation or resolution. That means that the report cannot be formally amended, although the committee can ask the rapporteur to make revisions.

Overview of the Revised Draft Report and the Canadian Response

Mr. Nessa's revised report reflects a strong moralistic bias against seal hunting, similar to that of some of the major non-governmental organizations involved in the campaign to stop the commercial seal hunt in Canada. The report does not reflect scientific evidence and information that is publicly available or that was provided to the rapporteur by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). And there is a large number of factual errors that have the effect of undermining virtually every major aspect of the Canadian government's position on the seal hunt. In addition, the report fails to recognize significant improvements the government has made to the management of the seal hunt, as well as to regulations and enforcement.

The rapporteur makes a number of assertions in his report, which are refuted in the detailed response submitted by the Canadian delegation, including that the seal hunt is not humane, that the Canadian government does not enforce regulations designed to ensure humane hunting practices, that the seal hunt is not ecologically sustainable and that it is economically insignificant. It also asserts that aboriginal Canadians are not involved in the commercial seal hunt, that "the principal argument for raising the annual hunting quotas is that this would allegedly help to increase the number of cod caught in the North Atlantic"; and that the ban on hunting whitecoats and bluebacks and the trade of their fur is not being enforced.

In our response, we argue that the seal hunt is, in fact, both sustainable and relatively humane, and we express support for efforts to make it as humane as possible, in particular the recommendations of the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group on the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt, which are now being implemented by DFO. Finally, we point out that "Canadian management practices and the new policies announced in March 2006 go a long way towards addressing legitimate concerns raised about the seal hunt. They will not satisfy those who want to stop the hunt entirely. But they show a clear commitment to ensuring that the hunt is both sustainable and humane."

Finally, our response lists the many factual errors, misconceptions and cases where partial information is used to support the arguments of the rapporteur, and it provides and explains detailed information and evidence to demonstrate problems in the report, to clarify seal hunt practices and management, and to support our arguments.

Discussion of the Revised Report on Seal Hunting and the Canadian Response

The discussion opened with a brief statement by the rapporteur, Mr. Pasquale Nessa (Italy) of the Group of the European People's Party, on his revised report, in which he reiterated the comments he had made during the discussion of his first draft report in October 2005 and in his revised report. While he called for an open and constructive

debate on the seal hunt, Mr. Nessa repeated many of the assertions about the Canadian seal hunt practices and policies, which the Canadian delegation had objected to in the discussions in October 2005 and again in its official response to Mr. Nessa's revised report.

The floor was then given to the three Canadian delegates. Senator Milne drew attention to the Canadian delegation's response to the revised report and proposed three recommendations which could be included in the committee's draft recommendation to be discussed at its next meeting on June 9th:

1. That European Union-certified fishery inspectors (such as those employed by NAFO) attend a future seal hunt and observe sealing activity first hand. Inspectors could accompany DFO Fishery Officers, and take part in monitoring and enforcement activities such as dockside inspections, aerial and vessel patrols, and inspections at buying and processing facilities.
2. That European Parliamentarians travel to eastern Canada to experience the lifestyle of those who participate in the seal hunt. They could meet with local politicians and community leaders, sealers and sealing industry representatives to discuss and learn about what the seal hunt means to local communities.
3. The Committee may wish to examine reports done by independent observers of the seal hunt, such as veterinarians of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group on the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt, and the report done by veterinarians for the International Fund for Animal Welfare. The committee may then wish to set up its own independent panel of European veterinarians – not aligned with animal rights organizations or the Canadian government – to observe and report on the seal hunt in Canada.

Senator Baker also drew attention to the Canadian response, arguing that it nullified the assertions made by the rapporteur. He commented on the report of the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group on the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt, pointed out that it is illegal to hunt whitecoats and bluebacks, while these can still be legally hunted in Greenland, Norway and Russia, and emphasized the economic importance of the seal hunt to many coastal communities. Finally, Senator Baker drew attention to court decisions concerning the seal hunt, including the *Ward v. Canada* (Attorney General) decision of the Supreme Court of Canada (February 2002), which upheld the ban on the hunting of whitecoats and bluebacks.

Mr. Blais, M.P., noted that the seal hunt is a very emotional issue for his constituents in the riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine and explained its cultural importance in a region where seal hunting has taken place for centuries. Noting its economic significance to sealers living in very remote areas and their communities, Mr. Blais pointed out that the seal hunt allows those involved to make ends meet. He ended by inviting committee members to come to Canada and visit the communities where the sealers live.

Several committee members who participated in the subsequent discussion expressed strong opposition to the seal hunt for one or more of the following reasons: the use of clubs and hakipiks to kill seals, the killing of very young animals, and the fact that seals are killed primarily for their pelts. Others argued that there is no reason to oppose hunting per se and that further discussion is needed, since Mr. Nessa's report and the Canadian response raise many questions. The discussion concluded with a brief statement by the rapporteur who acknowledged that there would always be two sides to this debate, but who also expressed the hope that the committee could agree to a recommendation on the seal hunt.

Respectfully submitted,

Honourable Lorna Milne, Senator
Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association

Travel Costs

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| NAME OF ASSOCIATION | Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association |
| ACTIVITY | Meeting of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs |
| DESTINATION | Paris, France |
| DATES | May 12, 2006 |
| NAMES OF SENATORS | Hon. Lorna Milne, Senator Hon. George Baker, Senator |
| NAMES OF MEMBERS | Mr. Raynald Blais, M.P. |
| NAMES OF STAFF | Mr. Philippe Méla Dr. Marcus Pistor |
| TRANSPORTATION | AIR \$ 21,009.53 GROUND \$ 542.28 |
| ACCOMMODATION | \$ 3,698.21 |
| HOSPITALITY | \$ 0 |
| PER DIEMS | \$ 1,193.69 |
| OFFICIAL GIFTS | \$ 0 |
| MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES | \$ 42.07 |
| TOTAL | \$ 26,485.78 |