

Canada - Europe
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
Canada - Europe

**Report of the
Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association's
delegation to the
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
to the
Meeting of the committee on the environment,
agriculture and local and regional affairs
Paris, France
June 9, 2006**

A delegation of two 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, June 9, 2006.

Report

A delegation of two 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 Scott Simms, M.P., and included, from the House of Commons, Mr. Raynald Blais. They were accompanied by association secretary Philippe Méla and advisor Marcus Pistor. The purpose of this meeting was, among other things, to discuss a revised report and a preliminary draft recommendation on seal hunting.

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. These two documents were discussed at a Committee meeting in Paris on May 12th, which was attended by three Canadian parliamentarians as well as 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).

The Committee is expected to discuss and vote on a revised draft recommendation on seal hunting at its next meeting during the upcoming PACE session (June 26-30) in Strasbourg. 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 Preliminary Draft Recommendation

Mr. Nessa's revised report, which focuses on the Canadian harp seal hunt, still reflects a strong bias against seal hunting, and there are still a number of factual errors in the report, in particular with regard to the discussion of the sustainability of hunt and the use of hakapiks and clubs. At the same time, this version does incorporate a number of arguments made by the Canadian observer delegation in its written response to his previous draft. His report also recognizes the efforts the Canadian government has made in recent years to address various criticisms of the seal hunt, including through changes in the regulations governing the hunt and through strengthened enforcement, as announced most recently by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans in March 2006. It also "welcomes the fact that the recommendations made in the report by the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group on the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt have been endorsed by the St. John's Forum, and that the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans is working towards 'implementing these recommendations for 2007 through further consultation with the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group and the industry. This will require amendments to the Marine Mammal Regulations'." Finally, Mr. Nessa thanked the Canadian delegation in his report "for the transparent way in which the exchange of views has taken place and for their active co-operation in the work of the Committee which has led to the drafting of this report." It should be noted that the content of explanatory memorandum is the responsibility solely of the rapporteur; the Committee does not vote it. The Committee, and later the Assembly, only vote on the recommendation.

The preliminary draft recommendation that was prepared by the secretariat of the Committee following the meeting on May 12th is – perhaps surprisingly – balanced. It endorses the recommendations of the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group on the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt and notes the Canadian government's efforts to strengthen regulations and enforcement as well as the fact that the "management objectives for seal hunting announced by the Canadian government are to ensure species conservation, long-term sustainable exploitation, humane hunting methods and the maximum possible use of the seals killed." However, there are some minor factual errors, and two more significant problems: first, the current text welcomes efforts in several European countries to legislate or implement a complete ban on the import of seal products; and second, it calls on for hakapiks and clubs to be banned a instruments for killing seals, at least in the commercial seal hunt.

Discussion and Follow-Up

The discussion was split in two parts, the first focusing on Mr. Nessa's revised explanatory memorandum, the second on the preliminary draft recommendation. The discussion opened with a brief statement by the rapporteur, Mr. Pasquale Nessa (Italy),

who noted that most points addressed in his report had already been discussed in previous meetings. He asked Committee members to work together to find a long term solution to the problems he identified in his report, specifically with the goal of ensuring that seals do not suffer unnecessarily during the hunt. He also explained that the purpose of the draft recommendation is to protect young seals by putting an end to the use of cruel methods used to kill them.

The floor was then given to the two Canadian delegates. Mr. Blais thanked the rapporteur for taking into account the Canadian delegations' views in his revised report and for preparing a balanced draft recommendation. He also delivered a letter from the chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, Mr. Gerald Keddy M.P., in which he expressed an interest in organizing a working meeting of the two committees in Europe or Canada to discuss this and other issues. The proposal was welcomed by the chair of the PACE environment committee, Mr. Walter Schmied, who also asked the Canadian delegation to submit their comments on the preliminary draft recommendation in writing. Mr. Simms thanked the Committee for giving him the opportunity to participate in the discussion. He briefly explained Canada's position on the seal hunt, commenting specifically on the humaneness and sustainability of the Canadian harp seal hunt.

While a broad range of views was again expressed on the seal hunt by Committee members who participated in the discussion that followed, the general view appeared to be that it was time to conclude this study and focus on the draft recommendation, which should represent a consensus position. In the remainder of the meeting Committee members and Canadian delegates discussed the draft recommendation in some detail. Mr. Simms and Mr. Blais used this opportunity to point out some of the factual errors in the text and to voice their concerns about the two more serious problems with the draft: the support it gives to efforts in several European countries to legislate or implement a complete ban on the import of seal products, and the fact that it calls for a complete ban on the use of hakapiks and clubs because these are viewed as inherently 'cruel' instruments for killing seals, despite the fact that scientific evidence does not support this position. Pointing to the example of nutritional supplements containing Omega 3 Fatty Acids derived from seal oil, Mr. Blais also noted that an effort is made in Canada to use and market seal products other than pelts. At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr. Schmied asked the Canadian delegation to submit in writing revisions it would like to propose to the preliminary draft recommendation by June 20th.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Lorna Milne, Senator
Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association

Travel Costs

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	June 9, 2006
NAMES OF SENATORS	
NAMES OF MEMBERS	Mr. Scott Simms, M.P. Mr. Raynald Blais, M.P.
NAMES OF STAFF	Mr. Philippe Méla Dr. Marcus Pistor
TRANSPORTATION	AIR \$ 21,009.52
(sometimes separated between ground and air)	GROUND \$ 542.28
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 3,698.21
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0
PER DIEMS	\$ 1,193.69
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 42.07
TOTAL	\$ 26,485.77