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Vice-Chair

Ms. Megan Leslie

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•(0845)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP)): Welcome, everybody, to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, the 51st meeting.

You'll notice that the chair has become remarkably better looking since our last meeting. I think it's just a statement of truth. I don't think Mr. Albrecht would fight me on this.

Welcome to our witnesses. Thank you very much for being here today.

My name is Megan Leslie. I'm the MP for Halifax and the vice-chair of this committee. As you know, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we're doing a study on licensed hunting and trapping in Canada. So we welcome you all.

There will be questions in French and English.

With us today, from North American Fur Auctions, we have Robert Cahill. Welcome.

We have three witnesses with us here in Ottawa from the Fur Institute of Canada: Gregory Thompson and Jim Gibb, and joining us by video conference, Dion Dakins. Welcome.

Coming to us via video from Richmond Hill, we have Nancy Daigneault from the International Fur Federation, and we're also joined by Michael Howie from The Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals. Welcome to all of you.

We'll begin with 10-minute presentations from each group. I believe the members from the Fur Institute will be sharing their time.

Mr. Cahill, we'll start with you. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Robert Cahill (Senior Vice President, North American Fur Auctions): Thank you very much.

Good day, esteemed members.

It's a pleasure to be here today to represent North American Fur Auctions and to talk about the importance of licensed hunting and trapping in Canada and to Canadians.

There remain aspects of the fur trade that many believe have disappeared into the history books, decades or even centuries ago. Your review is timely and important to the tens of thousands of Canadians who continue to support their families from the fur trade.

You know me from my 11 years with the Fur Institute of Canada as executive director—and I'm pleased to see they're here today—or

my two years with the International Fur Federation. I'm also pleased to see they're represented here today.

In 2014, I moved back to the trade side of the business, which is perhaps a little more natural for me, as I grew up in a small fur family business in Peterborough, Ontario, where, along with my brothers, we learned the craft of making fur coats from our father, who is a master furrier from England. From a young age I was grading raw fur pelts in the basement of our family business in Peterborough, where my father would buy skins from local trappers and learned that craft. My brother continues that family tradition today in Peterborough.

Now as senior vice-president of marketing for North American Fur Auctions, I have the pleasure of travelling around the world to visit the fur centres of people who are using our wonderful furs in Europe, Asia, the United States and, of course, across Canada. I draw from my substantial experience of servicing the trade over the past 12 years, where I know well the professionalism of Canadian trappers, fur farmers, and the government controls and monitoring measures that ensure compliance with humane trapping standards and the health of our precious wildlife populations. I see the interest and demands of the world's fashion community in using these beautiful and abundant furs to make extraordinary garments and fashion accessories.

For those of you who are not aware, North American Fur Auctions traces its roots directly to the company of adventurers trading into Hudson's Bay, more commonly known as the Hudson's Bay Company. The Hudson's Bay Company sold off their fur trading division in 1987 and focused more, for cost-cutting measures, on their retail activities, while our senior management of the time bought that division from The Bay, and renamed the fur division North American Fur Auctions. On our website and business cards we have, "Since 1670". The building that we operate in today was built by the Hudson's Bay Company in the early 1970s, and the senior management and many of our grading and administrative staff grew up cutting their teeth in the Hudson's Bay in London, New York, Montreal, and, of course, Toronto.

As we have done for 345 years, NAFA collects wild fur pelts from hunters and trappers throughout North America for sorting and promoting and ultimately selling of the furs via live auction to the world's fur and fashion community. The collecting of the furs is done by individuals who have collection routes that web throughout North American, much like the Hudson's Bay has been doing since 1670, although now we use trucks and planes at certain times rather than birchbark canoes.

The furs are given to us on consignment by these trappers that web across North America and we collect them, we keep their ownership on it, and we sort them for the world fur trade to utilize. The sorting of the furs requires a unique skill that is done by long-term grading teams in Toronto, Winnipeg, and our American office in Stoughton, Wisconsin. Their goal is to sort the furs in a way that furriers can actually use them, so we're looking at obviously lotting common species together and then at certain things like quality of the fur, how well it's primed up for winter. So when trappers are trapping in late fall and wintertime, it is that prime time of fur. We would certainly like to see that, rather than trappers who would have to trap in the spring or summertime when the fur is weak and has virtually no value. Also, it's things like the colour, the texture of the fur. In different parts of North America where the animals live, their hair takes on very different characteristics, and this is what the buyers are looking for.

Today NAFA employs some 650 people around the world, with 250 to 300 being in Canada on a full-time or a full/part-time, seasonal basis. We hold three to four auctions per year that attract 350 to 700 buyers from around the world, along with supporting trade members in the trapping, fur farming, and service sectors.

● (0850)

Our auctions typically have five to seven days of an inspection period, where the buyers come and physically inspect the auction lots of fur, and then six to seven days of full selling at live auction. We fill Toronto airport hotels and restaurants for six to eight weeks per year, driving an significant economic spinoff to that local economy.

NAFA is by far the largest seller of wild fur in the world, with approximately 65% to 70% market share of North American furs. NAFA's wild fur collection comes from all corners of Canada and the United States, with all of the fur bearers harvested legally within the regulations set out by provincial and territorial governments.

It can be said that there are trappers in every federal riding in Canada, including populated urban centres where human-wildlife conflict is increasingly an issue that requires professional trappers.

Approximately 50% of Canadian trappers are aboriginals, for whom fur continues to play a more important role in family income, as the value of the meat often exceeds the value of the pelts they're selling.

The auction buyers compete for NAFA's world-renowned collection of furs, and these are professional auction brokers that just travel the world—today there is an auction finishing up in Copenhagen after seven days. They are professional buyers who understand the quality and value of fur, and travel around to the four to five world auctions that exist. These buyers are from England,

Canada, United States, Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Greece, Russia, Turkey, Denmark, Japan, Korea, and there are a significant number today from China and Hong Kong, with China and Hong Kong buying approximately 70% of the furs and then using them either domestically or for export as garments.

NAFA's role is not only to sort the fur but to also promote it around the world, so we are identifying who these companies are that are working with our fur and are actively promoting to them.

In every way the fur is sold as a commodity. It will change depending on the levels of the market today, driving the demand and supply. The prices will fluctuate, and they have for hundreds of years.

We know the following from looking back at our sales figures over the past five years—and these are just NAFA numbers, as there are other wild fur distribution centres in Canada as well, though we carry about 70% to 75% of Canadian furs. But in 2010, there were just under 800,000 wild fur pelts sold, at a value of \$13,500,000. In 2011, 700,000 were sold at over \$15 million. In 2012 just under 900,000 pelts were sold at \$25 million. In 2013 there were 850,000 pelts sold at \$39 million; in 2014, 863,000 at \$22 million; and so far this year in 2015, we've sold 485,000 pelts at approximately \$11 million. Clearly, there are substantial fluctuations that impact the value of the furs and the money that goes directly into the pockets of trappers across Canada.

In addition to those figures, we sell approximately 10 million ranch mink skins from Canada, the United States, and Europe, which makes us the second-largest fur auction house in the world.

I'd just like to touch on a couple of factors that really do impact demand and supply now. In terms of demand, it's affected in many ways. The price difference between 2013, at \$39 million, and 2014, at \$22 million for a very similar quantity of pelts is absolutely, one hundred per cent related to the conflict in Russia and the Ukraine. Russia has been a significant buyer of Canadian furs, and world furs for that matter, for many years, as it's a big fur user, and that conflict has stopped the movement of their people. It has impacted the ruble price—and, obviously, the oil price as well is having an impact on that economy. It's having a significant impact not only on their buying directly from us, but also on their buying through other countries and producers that would produce garments and sell wholesale into Russia. Those would be Greece, Turkey, China and, of course, Canada. Today the purchases from Russia are minimal.

● (0855)

And we've seen this impact in the past. We've seen Asian economic crises that have significant and immediate impacts on the price of the furs and the quantity that would be sold in a given year. Right now we're selling virtually 100% of our mink collection, but not enough of our wild fur collection.

Looking at things like supply and demand, fashion is driving demand. If a company like Canada Goose starts to put coyote trim on its coats it has a significant beneficial effect on the value of coyote and also drives fashion trends around the world.

Looking at supply, more commonly looked at as production, there are biological factors like weather and reproductive rates that will impact it. But also the price will impact the supply that's being sold on the market, as when the prices are strong the trappers will make a greater more effort to trap and provide more fur.

With that I'd like to thank you for your time. I think this review of what the fur trade is about today is extremely important, and I certainly look forward to any questions you may have.

Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you, Mr. Cahill.

We'll move on to the Fur Institute, and I'm not quite sure who's going to kick it off.

Mr. Thompson's going to kick it off. You have 10 minutes, and you're sharing it, I believe.

Mr. Gregory Thompson (Advisor, Fur Institute of Canada): Yes we are.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

On behalf of the Fur Institute of Canada and the chair, Mr. David Hutton, I'd like to thank you, the committee, for this opportunity to appear before you today on the topic of regulated hunting and trapping in Canada.

I'm joined today by our two presenters. Mr. Jim Gibb, who is sitting to my left, is an Ontario trapper, wildlife control specialist, and owner and operator of Triple J. Wildlife Services. Jim is a member of the institute's executive and chair of the institute's communications committee. Also, via video conference from St. John's, Newfoundland, we have Mr. Dion Dakins, CEO of Carino Processing Limited and also a member of the institute's executive

and, as well, chair of the FIC sealing committee. Both gentlemen are well versed in the importance of fur trapping, wildlife conflict management, and sealing to Canada's culture economy and environment.

The Fur Institute of Canada has recently celebrated 30 years of partnership with Canada's jurisdictions in the delivery of trap research and testing, promotion of animal welfare, fur bearer trapping, and the fur trade.

Created by Canada's wildlife ministers in 1983, the institute has played a pivotal role since 1997 in retaining access to major Canadian markets for Canadian fur in Europe and Russia by supporting Canada's implementation of the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards, the AIHTS; and also as a forum for collaboration on and the promotion of sustainable use of wildlife resources and communications—and that's a strong collaboration with organizations such as NAFA, with the sealing community, and with the International Fur Federation.

The institute has played an active role with respect to animal welfare, wildlife management principles and practices, and the social value of wildlife. It remains a vital player in sustaining the licensed and regulated trapping of wild fur and sealing in Canada.

Mr. Jim Gibb will next speak to the committee with respect to the wild fur trapping side, and then we'll turn to Mr. Dion Dakins to speak to the sealing component.

● (0900)

Mr. Jim Gibb (Chair, Communications Committee, Fur Institute of Canada): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the opportunity to sit in front of you and talk to you.

For me, it's an honour to be able to come here to put a face on a trapper. You probably don't know a lot of trappers. If you're lucky, you might. I know that Robert knows a few. On the other hand, I would say that most people don't really know trappers. We exist in every community in Canada. Part of our income every year is made from trapping.

Canada is a world leader in trap research. The tools we've developed in Canada are basically manufactured here by little wee shops. I know of one in Kapuskasing that makes LDL traps, and trappers right across Canada use them. They're even bought and used in the U.S. and copied. There are all kinds of traps. Bélisle traps and Sauvageau traps are made in Quebec. Rudy traps are made in Quebec. Koro traps are made in Manitoba. These are just little shops that produce the tools we use in our trapping industry. We've been able to do this because of the contribution by our federal government to trap research. We've been doing trap research for 20 to 25 years.

As a trapper, I can sit here in front of you and honestly tell you that the tools I used when I first started—I've been trapping for approximately 35 years—are not the tools that I use today. I've been very fortunate, in that I've been able to travel to many different communities in Canada, teaching trapper education and promoting the trade. I've been to probably just about every community in Dennis' riding in the Northwest Territories, such as Colville Lake, Fort Resolution, and Fort Smith. I've probably been to every little community. I've also been up in Nunavut doing different things.

It's all about continuous education. What we need our government to recognize is that we provide a service. It's mainly done in rural areas, but in the off-season, my job is to trap racoons. On my route, I leave Milton in the morning, go to Burlington and then down to Niagara Falls, and then over to Kitchener and back into Milton. There are probably seven or eight of us who do that every day. I don't want to say who we work for, but it's basically done so that the lights stay on in your house every day. I think you've seen the story in the *Toronto Star* a few weeks ago about Toronto being the "raccoon nation" of North America. Toronto is one of the busiest places that we work out of.

Anyway, just to bring it back, what we need as trappers is access to world markets. We also need regulations that are based on science and sound judgment and not about emotion. We need to have the continued support of our government so that they understand who we are and what we do.

When markets are high, as Rob was saying, the fur trade takes care of itself, but when the markets drop off, you have issues with beaver and issues with coyotes. Trappers are always there and playing a role. Sometimes my role is going to be for the fur trade, and sometimes my role is to help society deal with problems, and we try to do that as cost-effectively as we possibly can.

Again, I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to come here and share that with you today.

Thank you.

•(0905)

Mr. Dion Dakins (Chair, Sealing Committee, Fur Institute of Canada): Good day. I hope everybody can hear me.

Madam Chair, can you hear me okay?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Loud and clear.

Mr. Dion Dakins: That's wonderful. Thank you very much.

I guess it's a recognized point that sealing is important not only for economic purposes but also for non-economic purposes and as part of our cultural fibre, whether in an anglophone, a francophone, or an Inuit community where people rely on the resource and these animals for their very subsistence. It has been described as a time-honoured tradition and a way of life among Inuit, francophones, and anglophones, each group of which demonstrates very individual harvesting techniques and expresses cultural pride in the activity.

Having said that, for four decades seal populations have grown exponentially. Since the European Union ban on seal products in 2009, the annual Canadian seal harvests have fallen well below the DFO-established total allowable catches. Populations have risen to new heights. The harp seal population is now above seven million

animals, three times the 1970 levels. The grey seal population has exceeded 500,000, an 80-fold increase since the 1960s. While ring seals are uncounted, observations indicate growth in populations. The same is true for various species on the west coast of Canada.

The economic contributions to the Canadian economy are significant, at more than \$70 million in 2005 and 2011. In 2012, the seal hunt saved our fisheries approximately \$360 million of seafood that would otherwise have been consumed by over-abundant seal populations. Northwest Atlantic harp seals eat 15 times more fish than the entire Canadian fisheries. The true value of the meat of the hunt is not fully understood, but it is consumed extensively throughout the communities.

A viable commercial sealing industry is an essential tool in a fisheries management regime. Sealing is part of the solution, not part of the problem. Either the consumer will cover the cost of maintaining a stable seal population or governments will. Unfortunately, the latter is already the case in many jurisdictions.

With about 10,000 licensed sealers in Canada, there is ability to manage this valuable resource. The problem lies in the bans, which are basically dismantling the seal harvest.

The FIC takes an active role in defending this important role of sealers in our ecosystem. They are out there making a living; 35 % of an annual income can come from the seal hunt. The hunt happens during a time of year when few other economic opportunities present themselves. With decreased demand for the product because of the bans, times are tough economically for many families who rely on this industry.

Seal hunting in Canada occurs in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Nunavut, with emerging activity on the west coast in British Columbia. Sealing is a sustainable practice that utilizes an abundant, natural, and renewable Canadian resource. It is highly regulated. Canadian sealing has among the highest standards in the world of animal welfare.

In Canada, seal hunting is also an instrument for conservation. Federal fisheries resource managers within DFO set yearly allowable catches at sustainable levels, which are rarely met. They are based on a precautionary management approach in order to maintain abundant populations.

This year the harp seal quota is at an all-time high: 468, 000 animals. If you compare that with the 2007 total of 270, 000, you can see the large jump in the species. Following the survey in 2008, there were an estimated 7.6 million harp seals in the northwest Atlantic. This is an abundant and renewable resource that needs to be managed, harvested, and commercially marketed.

The bans in place from the European Union are based on a stigmatization of sealing by the anti-use industries. It is time to establish a new narrative and restore international markets for seal products.

We would like to encourage the government to take this opportunity to develop and implement a detailed market development plan for harp, ring, and grey seals that targets opportunities in Canada, Europe, Russia, China, Taiwan, and other markets.

A commitment to an integrated, ecosystem-based management approach to fisheries that ensures the sustainable use of all marine resources is also required. The principle of ecosystem-based management is well established and internationally accepted. Canada explicitly acknowledges this approach in its fisheries policies and publications. So have virtually all seal-range states and international organizations, such as the European Union, the North Atlantic Fisheries Organization, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

However, while EBM is accepted, it is not fully applied in Canada. Canada has the largest seal populations in the world. Fisheries management is undertaken on a species-by-species, stock-by-stock basis.

• (0910)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Mr. Dakins—

Mr. Dion Dakins: The impact of seals on the ecosystem as a whole, while acknowledged, does not form an integral part of Canada's fisheries management regime.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Mr. Dakins, can I ask you to wrap up?

Mr. Dion Dakins: I'm very sorry; yes, Madam Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you. Don't worry; it's what I'm here for.

Mr. Dion Dakins: That's wonderful. Thank you.

In conclusion, we recognize that seals need to be managed in concert with our fisheries. If the principles by which the hunters conduct the activity reflect a high animal welfare standard and are regulated, this is a legal Canadian activity that deserves and should be afforded greater protection.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you to all of you. Just so you know, there's going to be lots of time for questions and comments, so if you missed anything in your presentation, I'm sure we'll have the time during our meeting today.

Next we have Nancy Daigneault from the International Fur Federation.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault (Vice President, Americas, International Fur Federation): Thank you very much.

My name is Nancy Daigneault. I'm a vice-president of the International Fur Federation with a responsibility for North and South America. I'd like to thank the chair and the committee for inviting me to testify today.

I will speak to you about the sustainable use of Canada's natural resources, trapping, and how it is an important element in environmental conservation. First I'd like to tell you a little bit about the International Fur Federation, the IFF for short.

The IFF has 49 member organizations that are trade or fur-farming associations. They come from 38 different countries from around the world. We're a diverse organization representing the interests of all sectors of the trade and we advocate with them at the local and international levels.

It's important to note that the IFF believes in sustainability, transparency, and accountability. We therefore ensure that all IFF members subscribe to our code of practice, which mandates that they respect and work on the relevant rules in their country for animal welfare, environmental standards, employment laws, corruption laws, international conventions, and treaties. We strongly believe in these principles and use them to guide us as we undertake various issues in different countries.

The IFF dedicates a sizeable amount of our yearly budget to the fur industry in Canada. This year, for example, we've allocated almost \$400,000 to Canadian fur issues. This includes money to the Fur Institute of Canada for trap research, sustainable use, and sealing issues. We also commit a sizeable amount to agricultural issues and the fashion end of the trade spectrum. The IFF is proud to support the Canadian fur industry.

I want to outline for you today why trapping is so important in Canada and how it underpins the health of our environmental efforts. I'll outline for you how trapping is well regulated in Canada, why trapping helps to control diseases dangerous to people, how trappers help with the introduction of species that have been eliminated from various jurisdictions, and how Canada has become a real leader in international trap research. Finally, I will outline for you the dangers of not continuing on our progressive path of environmental conservation.

To begin, trapping is well regulated in Canada. Our trappers are educated, accountable, and knowledgeable about their work. All provinces regulate trapping. All trappers must pass a trapper's education course. They must be licensed. Most provinces have registered traplines along which trapping is permitted, and there are also open and closed seasons. The provinces further mandate when, where, and how to trap, and they carefully monitor the harvests every year. To become effective, the trapper has to learn about animal behaviour, wildlife habitats, types of traps, trap preparation, sets and lures for different animals, and of course the care of pelts.

Trappers are key to wildlife management through government-imposed quotas. There are minimum and maximum quotas, depending on the species and the year. In Ontario, for example, the province has mandated that trappers must have a minimum harvest for beavers—these are the trappers with registered traplines. Some beavers have become overabundant in some areas.

Using Ontario as an example again, an end-of-season and harvest report is mandatory. The trapper must turn in the report to the Ontario Fur Managers Federation, which in turn feeds it to government authorities. This allows wildlife biologists to closely monitor harvest rates while collecting data on population trends.

Trappers also serve as the ears and eyes of the land. They're among the first to sound the alarm if the environmental balance is upset by pollution, habitat destruction, or diseases such as rabies and distemper. Diseased animals must be reported to the appropriate ministry right away.

A good example of this is that back in the year 2000 in New Brunswick, trappers helped to control rabies, which had become a serious concern in coyotes, foxes, raccoons, and skunks. They live-trapped, vaccinated, and ear-tagged more than 500 animals. The program successfully reduced the amount of rabies in that particular area.

When biologists need more information, regulations can be tweaked and adjusted to require that trappers turn the carcasses or certain parts of the harvested animals in. This allows them to examine such things as reproductive rates, food habits, and sex and age ratios. All of this monitoring ensures that biologists maintain accurate records of wildlife populations and health.

• (0915)

Trapping is also a critical and vital tool for endangered species management and for the reintroduction of some species to original habitat. Alberta trappers, for example, were key to helping reintroduce wolves to Idaho. Back in 1996, 66 wolves were live-trapped in Alberta and released in Idaho. By the year 2005, the wolf population in that state had grown to 565, and last year the population was at a healthy 770. This is another excellent example of how trappers support the environment.

The methods by which Canada traps are internationally recognized, and Canada's trap testing facility in Vegreville, Alberta is considered a state-of-the-art facility, which conducts research on traps and trapping methods to ensure that fur-bearers are trapped humanely. The research centre was set up and is a part of Canada's commitment to the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards, a trilateral agreement between Canada, Russia, and the

European Union. Canada can stand tall and proud. It is in full compliance with this agreement, and trap testing has served the fur trade well in ensuring that our harvests are regulated, humane, and within standards adopted by the international community.

The international standardization organization's testing methodology was used as a criterion in setting up the trap standards. Over the years, the IFF has contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to this trap testing facility, as we believe it is in our interest to ensure that fur-bearers used in the trade are harvested humanely. The Fur Institute of Canada publishes its list of approved traps on its website and updates it regularly as traps are tested to meet the standard. Over 600 trap designs have been evaluated for 15 species. The Fur Institute's trap research program is internationally recognized and puts Canada on the map for its progressive approach to environmental sustainability.

I would like to use this opportunity to draw your attention to some jurisdictions that simply do not share Canada's progressive views with regard to conservation and sustainable use. It's a shame that in some countries in the world, they simply trap animals and throw them away rather than viewing them as a natural resource that can be conserved wisely and used in a responsible manner. Most EU member countries permit trapping for nuisance control only, and the animals are then thrown away and not used. While this is a necessity, it is a shame that open and closed seasons are not permitted for trapping in order to use the resources wisely and responsibly.

Nuisance animal control is a growth industry in some areas, as development encroaches on wildlife habitat. This trend is of concern to biologists and wildlife managers, because it indicates that some people are viewing wildlife as problems that should be removed and destroyed rather than as resources that could be used, consumed, and conserved. The meat, fur, and byproducts of many fur-bearers can be used for so many different things. With the beaver, for example, the pelt is used in the fur trade; the beaver tail is used to make wallets; the scent glands are used in the perfume industry; the meat can be eaten; and the oil is used in the cosmetics industry. Muskrat meat can be eaten, as can racoon. There is also a market to use meat as bait, lures, and for other trapping purposes.

Finally, I would like to note that the animal rights agenda is a bit of a concern to the industry, and should be, when it comes to environmental conservation. Some activists are being blinded by ideology with no regard for the sound application of science, which can be a recipe for poor public policy development.

As outlined in my presentation, trapping is about environmental conservation, disease management, and more. It also supports those who truly live off the land in rural communities. Wildlife biologists and conservation authorities have spent decades studying and carefully regulating trapping in Canada, and this is the proper approach to further enhancing Canada as a leader in wildlife management and sustainable development.

In summary, I would like to recap. Trapping is about more than simply the fur trade. Trappers are committed to sustainability. They carefully monitor wildlife populations and disease. Modern-day trapping is about working closely with wildlife biologists, conservation authorities, and others to maintain ecological diversity. Trappers believe in accountability and sustainability.

I would like to thank the committee today and urge you to continue this work investigating the important role that trapping plays in the environment. Thank you.

● (0920)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you very much, Ms. Daigneault.

Last but not least, here in Ottawa we have Michael Howie joining us from the Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals.

Mr. Howie, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Howie (Director of Digital Content and Special Projects, The Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals): Thank you very much for inviting me to speak on behalf of the association.

I'd like to start by saying that we're neither specialists in hunting nor is that covered in our mandate, so I won't be speaking about that subject today. I'd also like to point out that we are neither animal rights activists nor ideologues. We are not extremists. We've been around since 1953, and we provided funding to help develop the Conibear trap at that time. Ultimately, we decided that trying to find a humane trap was not a realistic goal and we now focus on solutions, humane processes, and education.

I'd like to register a bit of concern about one or two of the biologists you've had here in the past who are admittedly hunters and trappers and receive funding from hunters and trappers, speaking about biology in this regard. We'd be happy to provide contact information for scientists who do not have any such associations and would be appropriate third-party speakers.

I'd like to talk a bit about the ability to enforce regulations. We know there are fewer conservation officers across Canada right now and these areas are open massively to these trappers. They can be hundreds of kilometres long.

Ensuring that the traps..., which are tested under the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards, a trade agreement, is virtually impossible in the field.

We would point out that trap check times range from 24 hours to a week in the case of some kill traps. We have heard of many cases and have documentation of animals being left in traps for days when these are supposed to be checked every 24 hours, and instances where endangered species, at risk species, and numerous companion animals such as cats and dogs are caught in these humane traps.

The vast majority of people using outdoor space are not trappers. The 2012 Canadian Nature Survey, which was created by provincial, territorial, and national governments, indicated that 89% of Canadians enjoy spending time outdoors. This list ranges from bird watching and photography to hunting and trapping.

It is estimated this industry of recreational outdoor use generates \$41.3 billion and 5% of that is attributable to hunting, trapping, and angling. Of that 5%, 2%, or 0.1% of that total \$41 billion, is attributable to trapping.

When the report discussed the individual categories of nature-based recreation, the report's authors added a note regarding trapping, that the small number of respondents who reported participating in trapping of wild animals was below the threshold for statistical reliability and was therefore not shown in the figure. Yet all the regulations in place protect trappers. They do not protect animals, companion animals, and other users.

In the past we have requested that provincial governments, trapping lobbies, trapping associations, and individual trappers consider putting up warning signs to the public, "traps in area". We're not asking them to identify where each trap is, and we understand their concern with that. We simply ask for a warning sign. That is ignored and called ridiculous.

We ask for registration tags on traps, so in an instance where a trap is misused, conservation officers are able to quickly identify the person responsible and use appropriate follow-up methods. That too has been dismissed.

Meanwhile, when we visit trapping association blogs, websites, or forums, we see the three tenets of SSS. For those of you who don't know what that means, it's shoot, shovel, and shut up. That is what's discussed when a dog or an endangered species is caught in a trap, yet we are being told that the trapping industry is about environmental sustainability. I'm sorry, I do not see that. The facts of the matter do not show that.

We talk about the science of population control. The most recent study shows that coyotes reproduce at a higher rate when they're persecuted. Studies out of the western United States show wolves increase depredation on livestock when they are disrupted by trapping. Yet we are told this is the only way to control these populations.

• (0925)

There was an instance a year ago of a woman walking through the woods and coming across a coyote or coywolf—the DNA was never clear—that was stuck in a snare. Veterinarians and wildlife experts believed that coywolf had been there for at least four days, based on the amount of feces and injuries. He had lost his leg and was transported to a wildlife rehabilitation centre, where he was healed and released with tracking technology. The woman who released him after seeing him in clear pain and suffering was threatened by the local trapping association as well as the municipality for interfering with a legal trapline.

There was a case not 40 minutes from my home in Hamilton where an at-risk snapping turtle was killed within six feet of a public trail in a public park. There are cases of dogs being caught in Conibear traps that are four feet from public trails, and we are being told it's the dog owners' fault. That is just no longer acceptable.

As you were told by the gentleman from the North American Fur Auctions, there are trappers in probably every jurisdiction. I should also point out that there are 3.5 million dogs and 4.5 million cats in Canada. So I would ask you, when you consider the political ramifications of this, who are you telling to go away and be quiet?

We would very much welcome the opportunity to help in updating some of these regulations. We have municipalities in urban centres saying they don't like these traps, they don't consider them safe, and they see them as a public hazard. They're being told by governments, be they provincial or federal, that they don't have the authority to say no to traps. Vancouver, Toronto, Oakville, Guelph, and numerous other municipalities are looking at these options but are being told they're not allowed to say no to traps even though they represent a clear danger to their citizens.

In short, there is a lot more to this issue than the fur industry and the trapping industry discuss. There are significantly more people than trappers on these trails, in these woods, who are not being aptly protected. These regulations need to be updated to take a long, hard look at who's really using these trails and who is at risk, because it clearly is not trappers.

I'm happy to take any questions on these subjects.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you very much, Mr. Howie.

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

We're now going to begin our question and answer period, starting with Mr. Sopuck. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you very much.

I appreciate the testimony.

Mr. Gibb, you're certainly welcome to come to my farm. I have nine beaver houses on my farm; they certainly need to be controlled.

This was a very important study to do, but I want to make it perfectly clear that Mr. Howie and the Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals was not a witness suggested by the Conservatives. I think it's very important to get that on the record.

I will make the point, as well, Mr. Howie, that your testimony was interesting, but I am looking at a February 5 article where you say: "Our goal is to bring an end to the commercial fur trade and to find non-lethal solutions to wildlife conflicts, which would in turn largely eliminate the need for trapping." To be perfectly clear, your organization wants to see an end to fur trapping in Canada.

On your other point, where you talked about the "bias" of biologists who are funded by perhaps hunting and trapping organizations, most of those organizations have very small amounts of money. I think it's very important to point out that The Humane Society of the United States has a budget of \$60 million a year. So when we talk about bias we need to be very clear about what the real story is.

Mr. Cahill, could you please tell the committee how important this study is?

• (0930)

Mr. Robert Cahill: The study that the committee is undertaking?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes, this particular study.

Mr. Robert Cahill: We think that the importance of this work is significant for the people of Canada to really understand that the fur trade is still very much alive and well, that there are people living off the land and that there are, as Ms. Daigneault mentioned, trappers around the world who are not able to provide their furs, who are trapping but not able to gain benefit.

In Europe, I've travelled around extensively, and in Ireland, Holland, France, the U.K., Sweden, Ukraine, and other countries they are actually trapping animals at an industrial rate, which are either thrown in the nearest ditch or incinerated at government facilities. When it's said that trapping doesn't need to occur, you just need to tell that to the Queen of the Netherlands, where they trap 200,000 to 300,000 muskrat every year, and have done so for decades at a cost of about \$100 a muskrat, and then institutionally incinerate them. They do this for control of the population. France has 200,000 trappers; they don't sell one pelt. In Spain and Ireland—I was there—they're trapping red fox and mink and just throwing them in the ditch and don't even know their value. They have lost the sense that these animals have value. In Canada, we have maintained that value and people are living on the land.

I've also seen and worked with the trapping standards and people around the world, and we have without question the highest standards here and the highest regulatory system to set regulations to enforce them, to track it. We think what we have here is without question the best system in the world to actually be proactive, recognize what's going on, and do it better. For this committee to really look at that and understand it better, I think, is extremely significant for yourselves and for the people of Canada.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thanks.

Ms. Daigneault, you talked about the importance of public policy in supporting trapping. What would the effect be of animal rights legislation, with Bill C-592 as an example, a private member's bill proposed by the NDP MP from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, which has caused great consternation in the sustainable-use community? What kind of effect on the trapping industry would animal rights legislation have?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: If you're talking about the elimination of trapping completely in Canada, it would be a significant, real economic hindrance in Canada. It's important to know that the fur trade in Canada contributes over \$800 million to the economy. Canadian trappers and fur-farm owners have earned over \$135 million in pelt sales from 2007 to 2009, and that number is even up now because pelt sales did go up, up until about 2013. So provincial and territorial governments receive about \$1.6 million in annual royalty and licence revenues paid by fur trappers; 42% goes directly to government-managed wildlife and habitat conservation programs.

It's a significant economic contributor to Canada, not to mention—going back to what my colleague Mr. Robert Cahill, from NAFA, said—that in some countries in the world they're merely trapping these animals because they have to for nuisance control, and they're throwing them away. They're not using them as a resource that can be consumed and used.

So there is a concern that, if there's an agenda to move towards a ban on trapping in any municipality in Canada or anywhere in Canada, it is going to have a significant impact.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Thompson, we tend to talk about money in terms of trapping and the outdoor way of life, the sustainable-use way of life, but much of that is about more than just money. Can you talk about the cultural and spiritual importance to trapping communities because they have the pride of work, the pride of craftsmanship, and the freedom to live a way of life that many of us can only wish we could live.

• (0935)

Mr. Gregory Thompson: Thank you for that question.

I've had the privilege of working in a number of Arctic communities in my career, both as a consultant and as a wildlife manager with the Government of Canada. The experience of interviewing hunters and trappers in remote communities has always been a very exciting opportunity for me, to learn more about that strong real connection that individuals, extended families and, indeed, communities have with the natural resources around them.

Self-sufficiency is a key theme for all of us, and it's particularly evident in the case of hunting and fishing families with whom I've spent a fair amount of time in the bush, and have travelled with,

acquiring country food, sharing that country food, celebrating the value of that country food, and sustaining that commitment with those animals that have helped their families and their forebears not only survive but thrive, in some cases in extremely hostile Arctic environments.

There's a tremendous amount of anthropological data that's in place with respect to the spiritual connection that human beings have with wild animals and the animals they harvest. That's particularly the case with hunting communities worldwide. In Canada, as was mentioned earlier, half our trappers are aboriginal, and those individuals certainly have testified extensively with respect to the importance they attach toward wild food and trapping in this country.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks so much, and thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

We'll move on to Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Thanks.

It's an interesting discussion here for sure. Having grown up in the north, I've eaten most of these animals. I wear moosehide clothing a lot. I don't wear it in Ottawa because I wear a suit. That's what people expect me to wear here, and I'm perfectly comfortable with it because that's the uniform of Ottawa. When I'm at home, I'll wear whatever is comfortable for me. When I was growing up as a child, I wore mukluks almost everyday because that's the culture that I lived in.

I see a lot of what you're saying here. I'm beginning to wonder whether trappers in Canada are getting the rough end of the stick from the government. It sounds like in other countries in the world there's a lot of money put into hazard trapping or nuisance trapping, and there's a lot of effort put in by trappers into protecting the environment, but I'm curious as to what level of federal support there is for any of this stuff in Canada.

The other question I have is what would happen to the market for Canadian furs? Is this fur that's being nuisance-trapped in other countries worthwhile putting on the market? What would happen to the market for fur if all those muskrats came on the market next year?

Mr. Robert Cahill: Much of the fur that's trapped in Europe is for pest control, so they don't have seasons. They have largely licensed trappers and there's not nearly the level of enforcement or monitoring that we have here, and they have completely lost their understanding of how to prepare fur for the market.

Fifteen years ago, and before that for many years, there was a fur auction in Leipzig, Germany that sold much of the European wild furs, but with the anti-trapping, anti-fur movement, it was all driven underground. So now those people are 30 or 40 years away from having any tradition of using the fur. Right now we're actually looking at that. Part of the reason I was going over there was to investigate that opportunity.

What would the impact be? Right now we're having a difficult time selling the furs we have. The prices are at low levels. However, we also know—

● (0940)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: That's good enough on that part. Can you answer the question about the federal government and its role in supporting hunters and trappers across the country? I'd open that up to anyone.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Mr. Gibb, do you want to say something?

Mr. Jim Gibb: I'd like to take a shot at it.

Over the last 30 years the federal government has put a lot of money into trap research. I get the other end of the stick when I'm talking to my trapper buddies and they ask why they have to change a tool and why they have to continuously keep upgrading their tools as they continue to trap. But it's because of the continued support from the federal government that we've been able to modernize our traps, and our traps are looked at as the best in the world. They are comparable—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Can you put a yearly dollar number to it?

Mr. Jim Gibb: I think it was in my presentation. Right now one of the funding sources we get is from the Ministry of Environment for trap research in our facility in Vegreville, Alberta. I think it's roughly \$300,000.

The other thing that's critical for us—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Does anyone else have any information on this? I want to share this dialogue, as I only have seven minutes.

Mr. Michael Howie: The majority of this kind of nuisance trapping is happening in municipalities where there are other solutions. In Ontario, if you say to the Ministry of Natural Resources that there's a coyote in my backyard, they give you a fact sheet and a number to call for your local trapper. The trappers are being given a great deal of business through the governments.

Mr. Jim Gibb: I would like to also add the fact that we have the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards by our federal government. It's probably one of the smartest trade agreements we've ever had because it allows us to have access to markets in the world. Without those markets, you'd probably make me a millionaire overnight because it would switch to nuisance wildlife control work. Definitely the support of our federal government in making that trade agreement has been a huge win-win for our fur industry.

Mr. Robert Cahill: There are programs for Agriculture Canada in fact that support the promotion of farmed furs in Canada, of mink and fox in particular, that our member associations benefit from, but there are not similar kinds of programs to help wild fur be promoted internationally. I think that is deficient right now.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: How about the domestic market for the sale of furs? Is there any promotion of that? What percentage of Canadian furs are sold in Canada?

Mr. Robert Cahill: To Canadians and used domestically, it's extremely low right now.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Is there any federal program to enhance that? To me that seems to be the logical place to go, our own domestic market.

Mr. Michael Howie: To me the logic is that Canadians have said they don't really want fur, sir, and that is why they are not buying it.

Mr. Robert Cahill: If you ask Canada Goose, they're now selling significant numbers of coats in Canada, and they're all trimmed with Canadian coyote primarily. We are talking with Canada Goose on issues that they want in terms of traceability and ensuring that they have that solid supply of the fur that their customers are looking for.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): I just want to point out that perhaps Mr. Dakins would like to jump in.

Mr. Dion Dakins: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Bevington, when it comes to public opinion polling, we've done a lot of it at the Fur Institute of Canada on the values of Canadians around the use of particularly seals and wild fur. What we've found is that Canadians feel that if we're going to harvest these animals, then they should be entitled to a high animal welfare outcome and the products should be used.

I would like to recognize that in the current budget there is a \$1.1 million allocation towards seal market development. That is absolutely necessary. We feel that the value actually needs to be increased, and we would like to continue the dialogue with the Government of Canada around what the real requirements for wild fur and for seal advancement are. When we look here in Newfoundland and Labrador, not only do we hunt seals but we also hunt moose, particularly in our wild international park, Gros Morne. The responsibility of Canada to hunt these moose for a proper forest succession is essential. Those products are not commercially traded. People do use the hides, we tan them in our facility here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Everybody consumes 100% of the meat.

Canadians support hunting, they support trapping, and in fact they feel that we should be commercially using the products, not wasting them.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much, Mr. Bevington.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: If I could just jump in a little bit about government support for the fur industry in Canada—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): If you can do it really quickly, Ms. Daigneault.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: —the governments have been very helpful. The AgriMarketing program, as Mr. Cahill pointed out, has committed millions of dollars over the last 10 years to helping market Canadian ranched fur overseas and within North America. The trap research facility that the Canadian government has supported for the last couple of decades has been key to helping Canada be a leader in international trap research.

• (0945)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Liberals are passing? Or maybe that's how it goes?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): No, it goes back to you.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay, the one tenth of the time. I've got it.

It's great to be here. I was on this committee for many years and it's nice to come back and see that the analysts haven't changed. The clerk has changed, but the analysts are the same; it's good to see old friends here at the table.

I'm a hunter and a farm boy from rural Alberta. I've been the member of Parliament for Wetaskiwin for almost 10 years now. I certainly enjoy outdoor pursuits and outdoor activities. I spent many years as a national park warden, and I've been a conservation officer and park ranger in the province of Alberta. I certainly enjoy the outdoor way of life.

The first question I have is to ask Mr. Dakins if he's aware of the Government of Canada's proposed support in budget 2015 for the sealing industry, and the \$5.7 million over five years for helping with market access for seal products? What might your thoughts be about that proposed budget item?

Mr. Dion Dakins: Certainly we're quite pleased to see that it's becoming a budget item, the protection and re-establishment of the right of Canadians to harvest and market seal products. However, we have been in dialogue for a few years now about the significant challenges that are levied against the sector. We feel that \$1.1 million is a start, but we'll actually need to sit down and evaluate this with the Canadian government. Will the plan be robust enough? Will these be enough resources to change the public opinion that has been furthered by the anti-use agenda?

Canadians have invested a lot of time and energy, particularly in the harvesting sector, to meet a high animal welfare standard. We would like to see an aggressive approach to re-establish markets that have been lost and that are under current threat by the anti-use agenda.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'd like to talk a little bit about that anti-use agenda. It's kind of a common theme here in Ottawa that when people who are members of Parliament, particularly in other parties from mine, don't seem to understand or grasp the significance of an

issue, the only solution they have is to ban something. We see this through the private member's bill that was proposed by the NDP, as my friend Bob Sopuck put out a little bit earlier in the committee. There have been other bills, to ban horse slaughter and things like that, that we've seen from the NDP. We all know what happened in the United States when they tried that. We had horses abandoned, with massive suffering by a lot of these horses, because there was no humane way to now dispose of them or to put them down at the end of their life or the end of their use, and so on.

So it seems to be a common theme. I don't understand why something as significant as trapping... Our nation was founded on the fur trade. I mean, this is what built our country, for crying out loud. It's part of our national heritage and our identity. It's not just the aboriginal people but also the Métis. Marcien LeBlanc, a Métis elder from my riding, goes all across Alberta. He's constantly talking about the value of this and getting young people re-connected with the land, getting them re-connected with the outdoors. It's absolutely a vital service.

I want to talk about a private member's bill that is being brought forward by my colleague Garry Breitkreuz. I think most people in the outdoor community have known this for quite some time. This is Bill C-655. I'm hoping it has enough time to pass.

I'd like to ask you, Robert, Greg, and Nancy, what your thoughts are on this bill, because it would actually codify federally and make it a Criminal Code offence for people to interfere with lawful hunting, trapping, and fishing. I'm wondering what your thoughts might be on that legislation.

I'll start with you, Greg.

Mr. Gregory Thompson: Thank you.

The reaction certainly from the community broadly has been very positive to that initiative. As a hunter, I can also attest to the importance associated with respect for licensed and trained activities that as a hunter I'm legitimately engaged in. The same perspective applies with respect to licensed and regulated trapping. There's certainly very strong support for Mr. Breitkreuz's proposal going forward.

If I may, I'd like to go back to Dion's reference to the budget item and the commitment to exploring further market development. Another component that, certainly from the institute's perspective, we're looking for is a continuation of the core funding agreements that we have in place with Environment Canada, with the Government of Canada, with respect to the maintenance of our AIHTS research program on trap research and the associated work that Nancy mentioned with respect to the Vegreville facility, which is where we do a great deal of our trap testing and research. That funding going forward will be very important to us from the point of view of maintaining our ability to implement the international agreement and continue to sustain our access into international markets, particularly in Europe.

● (0950)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Fantastic.

Robert, would you like to comment?

Mr. Robert Cahill: Yes, certainly. Thank you.

I think in some ways it's unfortunate that we need a bill that would protect people from undertaking legitimate activities that are traditional, lawful, cultural, and beneficial to families and communities. However, I think given the climate we're in today, there are people who don't accept this and have that tolerance. To bring back great Canadian values of tolerance and respect, I think it's an important statement to make.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay, good.

Nancy?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: The feedback I've heard on the private member's bill has generally been very positive. As Mr. Cahill said, it's unfortunate that we need a bill such as this to permit people to undertake a legal activity in Canada—the activity that really founded this nation. It is being well received in the community.

To look at it from a broader perspective, perhaps it could be expanded to the agricultural sector, the fur farming sector in Canada. There are many fur farmers in Canada who feel threatened by animal rights extremists. There have been incidents of fur farm break-ins and releases of animals. I think the ranch fur farming community in Canada would welcome a similar bill that would grant them greater protections as well.

I know I'm going out on a limb a little bit, because we're not looking at the agricultural sector here, but given the fact that we are discussing it, I think it's appropriate to raise that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I've been told I have 60 seconds, so Jim, the question I have for you—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Six seconds.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: —is that as a former conservation officer, I've used traps to trap bears and other things—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Mr. Calkins, your time is finished.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Maybe I'll get a chance to get back to him.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): You might.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: We'll go down that road.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you very much.

Mr. McKay.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and you certainly are an improvement over the previous chair and let's hope you keep that position, because otherwise I'm in line.

Mr. Howie, I watched with amusement Mr. Sopuck's anxiety as you gave your testimony. Apparently your major sin is that you were not a witness recommended by the Conservative party and you are clearly not singing from the same song sheet as other witnesses. It's a strange concept that we should have debate in this country. Mr. Sopuck raised a couple of issues and then went on to question other members more favourable to his viewpoint.

You didn't get a chance to respond to Mr. Sopuck's allegations, one of which, I think, had something to do with biologists. Do you want to take a moment to try to respond to Mr. Sopuck's issues?

Mr. Michael Howie: Thank you very much for that offer, Mr. McKay. In the past, Mr. Sopuck has called me a radical in the House of Commons and I did not have a chance to defend myself on that either during the RCMP fur hat debacle.

I think it's important to point out that I am not the HSUS, Mr. Sopuck. I make one-third of what I am worth on the open markets because I believe in this work. I donate most of my money to other non-profits and charities, so please, I would appreciate if you not make insinuations about my value in that manner.

I think it's also important to note that 70% of all the fur we've been talking about today comes from the farmed sector, and yet we're discussing trapping as if it is the only location where fur is coming from. It should further be noted that the government has attempted, and has spent millions of dollars, in fact, promoting fur, and people are still not buying it in Canada. It would seem a bad business decision to me to continue to hock a product that no one wants, so either change the market or change the products. I think it should also be noted that we are interested in solutions. Yes, ideally, I would like to see the end of trapping. I would also like to see the end of poverty and war. That does not mean I am not interested in getting some extra food for the homeless here and there.

To say that we are outright opposed to everything you stand for is a proclamation on your end, Mr. Sopuck, not mine. Granted, you also believe that 39% is a majority, so we'll move on from that.

● (0955)

Hon. John McKay: Thank you, Mr. Howie.

I didn't know you had such fondness for Mr. Sopuck. Had I known that I probably would have given you more time.

Mr. Michael Howie: He inspires it in everybody he meets for sure.

Hon. John McKay: I did want to raise the following with the other witnesses, with Mr. Cahill in particular, because I do like to hear both sides. As you were giving your testimony, I was thinking that I didn't know anybody who wears fur anymore. When I first got married, it was considered important that I buy the wife a fur coat. Now my wife would be horrified if I did something like that. I don't think that we are anything other than typical. I was listening to your recitation of market figures and I found the stuff about Ukraine and Russia quite fascinating.

Is Mr. Howie right that the chief problem that the market has is that Canadians and others have decided that they don't want to have fur? I noted your example of the Canada Goose company, which does seem to be an exception.

Mr. Robert Cahill: It's very much a case of trends. When I was involved with my family business in the 1980s, we were a small family business in Peterborough selling \$1 million worth of fur garments. The value today is less than 10% of that. It has changed significantly. We've also seen the economic recession that we went into in the 1990s in the western world. We went through social changes. People are investing more money in electronics and travel today than they did in the past. I think what we see in a lot of different places is a changing emphasis on the use of your disposable income. Yet we also see, if you pick up a fashion magazine today, and certainly from the fall through the winter, virtually every big fashion brand in the world using fur. I've been invited by some of the big brands to visit them in a few weeks. I'll be in France and Italy, visiting Louis Vuitton, and Gucci, and Chanel, and Fendi, and Prada. These companies are all using it, so it's not just Canada Goose. When you start looking at the lines they create, it's a whole range of things. It's really a fashion trend in different cycles in different parts of the world at different times.

Hon. John McKay: Thank you for that.

I want to give Mr. Howie a chance to respond, but before I do, I want to ask Mr. Gibb or Mr. Thompson about Mr. Howie's issue of tags and warning signs, particularly in urban areas or areas where people walk and occupy the same spaces as traps.

What's unreasonable about that?

Mr. Jim Gibb: I will give you part of an answer here, anyway. Because there are people who are opposed to what you do, if you put up a sign saying that you're trapping someplace, it invites a lot of problems.

I have two dogs of my own, so I'm a dog lover, but the first thing that happens when someone gets out in a rural area is that they unleash the dog and let him run wild.

Hon. John McKay: Yes.

Mr. Jim Gibb: That causes a lot of problems, because there are other users out on the land, hunting, fishing, trapping. When a dog gets caught in a trap.... Society has said to the trappers that it wants the traps to be lethal; it doesn't want the animal to suffer. I can honestly tell you that the dogs don't really suffer too much when they get caught in the trap. But that's unfortunate.

Hon. John McKay: Yes.

What about the tag business?

Mr. Jim Gibb: I can speak very definitely about the tagging business in Ontario. I have three registered traplines that I trap on in Ontario. It takes about five minutes if you contact a conservation officer to know exactly who traps there. So that's not an issue.

Where we run into a lot of problems is when people have problems with nuisance or problem wildlife, and they take matters into their own hands. They're allowed to buy a live trap at the feed store on the corner, or they get trap from somebody else because there are traps around, and they set it indiscriminately. They don't know what to do with the animal when they catch it, and then it makes the front page of *The Hamilton Spectator* or the *Toronto Star*.

• (1000)

Hon. John McKay: Okay, well, let's give Mr. Howie a chance to respond about Mr. Gibb and—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): There isn't actually time for him to respond.

Hon. John McKay: Oh my goodness.

Well, I'll invite Mr. Howie to respond in the event that Mr. Sopuck asks him another question.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks, Mr. McKay.

We will go to Mr. Bevington now.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thank you.

Trappers are environmentalists; they are dealing with environment in many cases. Are there any specific federal programs to enhance the work that they do to protect the environment? When it comes to the kinds of things that we've been talking about, diseased animals or changes in the conditions of the animals, is there a reporting system that rewards trappers for providing that information?

Mr. Gregory Thompson: If I may, sir, Nancy provided an excellent summary of the monitoring programs associated with fur bearer health and status in which the fur trappers working with jurisdictions—and these are provincial and territorial jurisdictions that I'm referring to—do report. Their harvests are monitored, and they do report on the health of the populations.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: But is there any remuneration for the trappers for doing this?

Mr. Jim Gibb: I know that specifically in the Northwest Territories, there's money provided to trappers for turning in carcasses of wolverines and wolves for study. They're doing population studies and so on, especially with the problems they're having with the caribou populations in NWT. I know there's an incentive for the trappers to turn in carcasses so that the biologists can study them.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Yes. I'm looking at this picture of the trapper as an environmental tool of the government, and of all of us, because I truly believe that's the case for people who are actively engaged in this, especially in wilderness areas where there is not much contact other than through them.

But what we seem to be running into here is the difference between trapping and.... I live in and represent a region of 1.2 million square kilometres with 40,000 people in it. It's real wilderness. People trap there and don't have a problem with somebody running into their traps. They may have a problem with other animals running into the traps, but not with people. When I see the problems that are created in urban areas, I see pretty clearly that this is where this conflict is developing. On the other side of it, I'd say right now that the fastest-growing and largest outdoor activity that is very profitable is birdwatching. Birdwatching is the one thing that is really growing throughout the world.

How do we continue to maintain trapping and continue to grow these other uses of wilderness, which are extremely valuable? That's the core issue here, I think, that we're talking about. How do we convince the rest of the world that we're a wilderness paradise that has opportunities to see wildlife, to see birds, and to be in the wilderness, and convince them that the trapping aspect of what goes on in Canada is such a valuable part of that? I guess that's where we're talking about the difference between billion-dollar industries and hundred-million-dollar industries. We need to have that balance.

Is this a subject of conversation? Are there efforts put into this wildlife and wilderness use balance, in your experience? I'd throw that open for anyone to talk about.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): I see that Mr. Dakins would like to jump in.

Mr. Dion Dakins: Thank you very much.

I think the important thing here is that we're coming into the 150th anniversary of this great nation. As was mentioned earlier, the fur trade and hunting, trapping, and fishing have been the backbones of this country for a very long time. There needs to be a requirement for further education and more science and evaluation about the role that trappers, hunters, and fishers play in maintaining an ecosystem balance.

Here in Newfoundland we have seal-watching tours as much as we have a sustained seal industry. Many of the programs around evaluating the health of populations are voluntary in nature. There is a program whereby hunters go out and collect samples for Department of Fisheries and Oceans to evaluate the health of the population of seals. There's also a program here in Newfoundland and Labrador whereby jawbones of the moose hunted in Gros Morne National Park are turned in. There is a substantial wealth of information within the jurisdictions.

I think a more substantial role could be played by the Government of Canada around our coming birthday to really educate the population on the intricate role and balance of hunters, trappers, and fishers in the local environments.

•(1005)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you, Mr. Dakins.

Mr. Michael Howie: I'd like to offer something quickly on that.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Mr. Howie, we're out of time. I apologize. Perhaps there will be a moment in another round of questioning.

I forgot to announce that we're now into five-minute rounds of questioning. That's why that one got cut a little shorter than the last round. My apologies.

Mr. Sopuck, you have five minutes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thanks.

One thing I will never do is apologize for protecting and defending rural communities, rural culture, the outdoor way of life, sustainable use, and the sustainable use communities that I am so proud to represent. In fact, that's one of the reasons I became an MP.

Contrary to Mr. McKay almost implying that we don't want debate, I welcome this debate. We are actually winning in terms of

our government's support for the sustainable use way of life. I have the honour of being chair of the Conservative hunting and angling caucus, and there are dozens of Conservative members of Parliament who are as dedicated as I am and as Mr. Calkins and others are to protecting and defending hunting, trapping, and the sustainable use way of life. My only comment would be, bring it on.

Mr. Howie brought up the issue of the muskrat hat. I was very proud to be one of the leaders in our caucus to preserve that tradition by the RCMP. It may have seemed like a small issue, but it really wasn't. The symbolism was extremely important. I'd like to quote here an MLA from Mr. Bevington's riding, Norman Yakeleya, who is a Sahtu MLA. He applauded our government for standing up in protecting the RCMP. I'd like to read what he said: "Like Mr. Sopuck, I represent a remote rural part of Canada, and many of my constituents trap. We cannot let animal rights activists sweep this sustainable renewable industry under the rug. The Muskrat hat" is very symbolic to the RCMP.

I'd like Mr. Cahill, perhaps, or Mr. Thompson, to comment on why that issue resonated so strongly throughout the country and, indeed, internationally.

Mr. Gregory Thompson: Yes, thank you.

The day the debate was taking place with respect to muskrat hats, and the announcement had been made with respect to what the RCMP was proposing, I happened to be in a farm kitchen in Western Quebec, knocking on doors, looking for permission to hunt Canada geese in the cornfields. I was in a number of households that day. Every farmer I talked to was absolutely incensed at what was going on. The reason was that the larger community involved in the use and management of both domestic and wild animals in this country saw the symbols and signals here to be very negative and very concerning on something as straightforward as an iconic piece of headgear of Canada's national police force.

This resonated not just with the fur sector, but also with the entire agricultural and hunting sector right across this country. It was a very important decision that the government took to roll back the proposed approach.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thanks.

Yes, that took 48 hours, and I think that sends a very strong signal out to the sustainable-use community about our government's stand on behalf of the sustainable-use community.

I'm certain my time is coming close to an end, but I would be remiss if I didn't put on the record a couple of quotes by two NDP members of Parliament.

On October 27, 2014, Jean Crowder, the New Democrat MP for Nanaimo—Cowichan said she supported legislation in which animals would be considered as people and not just property. Françoise Boivin, New Democratic MP for Gatineau, Quebec, the same day, made the point that animals should be treated with “the same protection that we afford to children and people with mental or physical disabilities.”

To me this opens the door to an animal rights agenda if they ever had their way.

Ms. Daigneault, can you perhaps comment on these two comments that are in *Hansard*?

•(1010)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): I'll just let you know you have about a minute and a half.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: I just want to start by saying that the fur industry in Canada has had the support of all three political parties, and the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada. We have met with members of the NDP, the Liberals, and the Conservatives, and have had support from all three different members.

I think that if anyone is heading down a route of animal rights legislation not based upon sound science, that's a danger. Arbitrary bans and arbitrary attempts to change something that's been in effect since the beginning of time in Canada, and is sustainable and a renewable natural resource, is dangerous. Heading down a path where you're being driven by ideology, rather than sound science, and are not relying on the science but reacting arbitrarily is certainly something that should be a concern to everybody.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

Continuing with the five-minute round, we're on to Mr. Choquette.
[Translation]

The floor is yours; you have five minutes.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

I will speak in French so you could put your headphones on.

[Translation]

First, my thanks to all the witnesses for joining us here today.

Our study is quite interesting and we are also taking some time to look into the issue of habitat conservation and so on. We sit on the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. So this is not just an economic issue. We feel that it is really important to consider the issues of habitat and the protection of biodiversity.

I want to respond to some facile accusations that we have heard being levelled at the comments made by my colleagues in the New Democratic Party in this whole area of protecting animals and the desire to protect them. I am talking about household pets, of course. I have discussed all this with my colleague Françoise Boivin. We have no intention of criminalizing hunting, trapping or fishing. On the contrary, we are very well aware that hunters, trappers and anglers love animals, love nature. They are attentive to them and protect

them; if they did not, their activities would no longer exist. I am sure that, for you, protecting biodiversity and wildlife is an important matter.

Yesterday was Earth Day. Just prior to it, we found out about the Conservatives' 2015-2016 budget. It did not even mention climate change. That is why I would like to submit the following motion, which I introduced on February 5, 2014. It asks:

That the Committee conduct a review of the federal government's sectoral approach to greenhouse gas regulations, and review the delays in establishing regulations for the oil and gas sector's emissions.

So, of course, if Colin Carrie is in agreement, we could study the motion starting at 10:30 a.m.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): If we're to be doing committee business, we should go in camera. I think that's how we do it.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: I suggest waiting until 10:30 a.m. to discuss committee business.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie: Sure.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: I am sorry for taking a little time to talk about committee business.

Here is my first question.

Mr. Thompson, in the hunting and trapping sector, what are you doing to protect habitat? Do you play a role in that? Do you feel that you are actively involved in conservation, biodiversity and habitats?

[English]

Mr. Gregory Thompson: Habitat and biodiversity protection are absolutely essential to the foundation of wildlife diversity in this country, particularly habitat conservation. Healthy habitats across the full range of ecosystems contribute to wildlife diversity and for those species that trappers harvest and hunters hunt contribute to the abundance of of populations that are harvestable and usable.

In the hunting community and the trapping community we all pay our taxes. Those taxes contribute to wildlife conservation management programs across this country.

In addition, other examples would include the donations to many organizations—volunteer donations and time—to groups like the Fur Institute of Canada, to Ducks Unlimited, and to Delta Waterfowl Foundation. In cases of waterfowl harvesting, as the committee I'm sure is aware, the waterfowl hunting permit requires the acquisition of a wildlife habitat stamp that is administered as a separate fund through Wildlife Habitat Canada. These are all part and parcel of the ongoing contribution of the hunting and fishing sector to the management of the resource. Included in the management of the resource are efforts in place to ensure that the quality of habitat and biodiversity are protected.

•(1015)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

We are going to end the public session at about 10:30 a.m. to discuss the motion that the clerk will circulate to us.

[*English*]

Thank you, and now we move to Mr. Calkins, for five minutes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That's fantastic. It's great to get some more time here.

I want to comment on a few things that have been said here. It's unfortunate to see the line coming from Mr. Bevington that it's all about government programs. I think what really is at hand here is that if we completely shut down this industry, we would create a bunch of unemployed people, who can't get fair value for the work that they do, but now depend on a government program. Of course, that would require an increase in taxes, which I think just fits in with the agenda that the NDP has going along anyway.

He did bring up birdwatching, and that side of things is quite interesting. Some recent articles have called birdwatchers and hunters conservation superstars, because they're the ones that most likely contribute to conservation organizations and wildlife conservation, habitat conservation, and so on, which is a great thing. Lately I've also seen an article saying that feral cats are causing the deaths of between 1.4 billion and 4 billion birds a year in North America, which I think would be an anathema to many of the people who are contributing to birdwatching.

Mr. Gibb, you and I have set traps to deal with nuisance wildlife. What would happen if you or I were to lose the ability to trap nuisance animals, some of which are responsible for probably up to the death of 4 billion birds, I'm sure, much to the disappointment of bird watchers? If you were unable to continue to do that, what would the consequence be?

Mr. Jim Gibb: In just about every jurisdiction that has banned trapping, that decision has morphed into nuisance wildlife control work. One way or the other the animals are going to be caught. As I said earlier, the biggest problem happens when ordinary people take into their own hands how they're going to deal with problem wildlife. That's when it makes the front page of a newspaper, and a lot of times that's where trappers end up getting a bad rap because the public think it's a trapper who set that trap. In most cases, it's a landowner who is fed up with a raccoon in the garbage every night, or pigeons—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Or a coyote coming and killing the cats.

Mr. Jim Gibb: A coyote, absolutely, that's what I mean. People will take things into their own hands and shoot, shovel, and shut up, that sort of thing. Sometimes the racoon gets caught and runs away, or a cat gets caught and it makes the front page of the paper.

Legal legitimate trapping helps control animal populations. Having the ability to use proper tools and being able to be trained using those proper tools is a big thing.

Tonight I return to North Bay and I'm teaching a trapping course. It's kind of neat right now. I have four students and they're all under

the age of 20, which is neat because, generally speaking, I'm teaching a lot of older people how to trap. It's really encouraging to see younger people stepping into the role.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Absolutely. I think there's been an entire generation missed to political correctness, much to the delight of folks like Mr. Howie who have tried very hard to end an industry, to end a traditional way of life. While they might seem on the surface, through “political-correct speak”, to have the best of intentions, they certainly, I think, end up creating through unintended consequences more problems than they solve.

Ms. Daigneault, I would suggest to you that if you want to talk about support and who actually supports.... I'm a member of the outdoor caucus. We had a meeting this morning where Mr. Izumi, who is one of the most well-known and respected fishermen in Canada, told us that the value of hunting and sport fishing in Canada is over \$12 billion, more than twice what Mr. Howie tried to get on the record here today. So I hope we invite Mr. Izumi to the committee to set the record straight, rather than listening to the misinformation campaigns that some people out there actually—

•(1020)

Mr. Michael Howie: That was from a Government of Canada—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That's actually based on Statistics Canada and Canada Revenue Agency documentation, so I'd be glad to have that on the record.

The rubber really hits the road because, while Mr. Choquette said that there is support for these kinds of things, it's interesting that the only witness whom they summoned today is on the record at this committee saying that he'd like to see the end of trapping in Canada. I would encourage folks to see through the political correctness. Just because you've had a meeting with somebody from the NDP or the Liberal Party doesn't mean you have their support. I think you need to be a little more sure of where your true support actually lies on some of these issues.

Regrettably, Mr. McKay isn't here, because I'd like to advise him. I could point out a lot of people he could meet and invite to his elite Liberal wine parties who would bring their fur coats, and then he would actually know somebody who actually owns one.

How much time do I have, Madam Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): A few seconds.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'm running out of time. Let me just close by saying that I really do appreciate what you do. I appreciate the industry and the benefit it brings. I truly, truly hope that we can continue to get back to a situation where the industry can be more profitable, more successful. Through wildlife management techniques and the fact that it doesn't cost the government anything to let people trap, and by managing wildlife in a responsible way through those kinds of wildlife management techniques, I hope we can get back to sound economics where people can be self-reliant and do the things they love to do.

Thank you for coming today.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

[*Translation*]

If I may, Mr. Choquette, I would like to mention one point.

I imagine the discussion on your motion will not take very long. So can we finish at 10:40 a.m.? That would give us time for three more periods of questions.

[*English*]

If we say five minutes for discussion, that would allow us some more time for questions.

[*Translation*]

I see that you agree with that proposal. Thank you.

[*English*]

We'll go to Mr. Bevington now.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thanks, Madam Chair.

In all fairness, this is supposed to be a discussion, not a rant, so I'd like to go in that direction. I'd ask Mr. Howie to respond, because when we have people who bring up points, they should be able to defend them.

Go ahead, Mr. Howie.

Mr. Michael Howie: Thank you very much, sir.

Again, it appears that the Conservatives of this committee enjoy the term "debate" the same way my ex-wife did, in that I talk, you listen, and that's the end of the debate.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Point of order, Madam Chair.

I have listened to Mr. Howie smear people without specifically naming them before, but I object to being included in his smears. I have not yet participated in the discussion today, and I just think it's out of order for a witness to make blanket accusations against the members of any one party, particularly those who haven't spoken. I think it's disrespectful and it's insulting, and I don't really intend to sit here and take it without at least objecting.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you, Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Michael Howie: I would like to offer my formal apologies.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you, Mr. Howie. That's appreciated.

What I might ask of all of us is to take a deep breath and focus on the issue of hunting and trapping in Canada per our orders and the motion that we passed. Maybe we can pull back a little bit from personalizing this issue.

Mr. Bevington, would you like to continue.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay, I'll continue.

But Mr. Howie didn't get a chance to talk, so I'll ask him to finish his statement about where he got the statistics. Mr. Calkins brought up that your statistics are wrong. Perhaps you want to answer that.

Mr. Michael Howie: Yes, I would very much appreciate an opportunity to answer that specific member of Parliament. Those numbers come from the 2012 Canadian Nature Survey, which was signed off on by all provincial and territorial governments and the national government, including your party, sir. I'd also like to point out that being called a liar and not being given a chance to respond is also slightly rude, but I do not expect an apology. I'd also like to point out that we've been hearing one statistic and I would like verification from somebody that half of all trappers in Canada are aboriginal, because in public documents it is stated that 20,000 of the 70,000 trappers are aboriginal.

I'd also like to remind the members that there is already a \$40 billion outdoor recreational economic plan in place. People are spending billions of dollars every year and only 5% of that is for hunting, trapping, and angling, and of that 5%, 2% are trappers. Again, this is a government document. I am not making up numbers. I would not do that; I'm a journalist by training. I stick to facts.

• (1025)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thank you very much.

Mr. Michael Howie: I'm also being told that I don't—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thank you very much.

I want some comments on this relationship between trapping and other outdoor activities. Perhaps, Ms. Daigneault, you could speak to the international perspective on this and give us an overview on how we see this moving ahead.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: In terms of trapping internationally, as we've mentioned several times already this morning, Canada is a leader. We have a state-of-the-art facility in Vegreville, Alberta, that does trap research and testing. Canada is looked upon by other countries around the world as being the leader and where the knowledge base is in trap research. We trap sustainably in Canada and we contribute a great deal to the Canadian economy as a result. Internationally, and in many other jurisdictions, they don't share that point of view. Trapping does go on, but there are no open and closed seasons, so the animals are not trapped when the pelts are prime, and the animals are simply discarded. I think the international community looks to Canada and is very thankful for the support that the Canadian government has given for the research facility in Vegreville, for the support to the ranching community, for the AgriMarketing program, and for all the other supports that the Canadian government has given. Canada really is a leader and the Fur Institute of Canada's trap research program is considered the pinnacle and is revered internationally for its work.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: That's one aspect, the technical aspect of trapping. How do we deal with public relations issues that are not going to get any better. More people are demanding wilderness participation; wilderness is getting smaller. How do we move ahead from here to ensure that we continue to have a sustainable trapping industry and that we can promote all the activities that are very valuable in the wilderness. This is not going to get any better for you if we don't have a proactive campaign of some kind that will show people what you're talking about. Where's the effort there, internationally?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): You have about 20 seconds.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: Internationally, there are many proactive communications programs in place to help spread the word. I would invite you to look at truthaboutfur.com, a fantastic website that gives a lot of information about the trapping community in Canada and internationally, including the United States. Fur.com is another fantastic website. So there are proactive communications programs in place, but I think we as an industry recognize that more work can always be done and that we can always do better in communicating our issues to the public. That is something that we are looking at in the future.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks, Ms. Daigneault.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Dakins, I'd like to talk about the reliance on sealing by the Inuit.

Over the last few years I've been disturbed about some of the Canadian groups and how they politically support the European position on this. I find the European position so irresponsible. Here's a group that has mismanaged their own wildlife resources. As we heard today, they trap for nuisance control, yet they waste them. They seem not to have a problem. They've got a huge hunger for veal and pâté de foie gras when they're talking about animal welfare, but the ignorance and hypocrisy here is very dangerous. The Inuit don't have a Loblaws where they can buy beef and chicken and pork. We talk about tolerance and respect.

I was wondering if you could explain the impact of this anti-sealing, anti-fur trade campaign on the Inuit people living in remote communities.

Mr. Dion Dakins: On our sealing committee we have representation from the Inuit communities, who've made it quite clear that an attack on sealing is an attack on their culture and the cultures of the commercial and so-called subsistence or non-commercial hunting activities. It's critical that we as a nation start to better understand the value of the meat and the oil of these animals in the communities to maintain the health and the natural diet. Certainly, from Îles-de-la-Madeleine to Newfoundland and Labrador to Iqaluit, the hunters share a common view that the attacks against the activity of hunting seals are unjustified and that the European Union is hypocritical, because they do hunt seals within Europe because, apparently, their seals eat fish and they have a problem with the maintenance of the population. So it's critical that as a nation we formulate a plan to educate the world on the functioning of our ecosystems and the roles played by these hunters, who are very professional people with a huge cultural attachment to the use of the resource.

It's going to be critical to do that to protect the cultural integrity of Canada.

• (1030)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Gibb, would you like to comment on this as well?

Mr. Jim Gibb: From a harvester's point of view, the seal hunt in Iqaluit and in Nunavut is a food harvest. The skins are a byproduct. For a number of years they would harvest the seal, skin it, and throw the skin away because there was no commercial value to it. That, to me, is a total disgrace and a total lack of respect for the animal. If you're going to harvest an animal, I think it's our responsibility... Yes, it's a food harvest. That's their beef, to put it simply. They are not going to raise cattle north of the tree line. It's simply not going to happen. But they have seals that have been part of their culture for thousands of years. To take somebody who has a purpose in life... harvesting seals enables them to provide for their families. Their food is the seal, the skins bring money for other things, so to have them basically throw the seals away, does that make sense to anybody in this room?

Mr. Colin Carrie: No, not at all. That's why I wanted to get these points on the record.

Could you comment on how the fur trade contributes toward the Inuit and their way of life, and little bit more about how it contributes as part of their culture?

Mr. Jim Gibb: Let me use a slightly different but still relevant example, that of polar bears. You see these gooey commercials right now with Coke featuring polar bears. I mean, their aim is to sell Coke—that's what they're after. But it gives the Inuit a bad image. Polar bear conservation didn't start when they thought the ice was melting a little bit faster than normal. It started back in the 1960s. The world population of polar bears was approximately 5,000 animals. Today it's over 25,000 animals. Canada has the most regulated polar bear hunt in the world. It's broken down into 13 sub-populations. There's exportable bears that can be exported around the world. With some bears the populations are low within their units so they don't allow exporting. I mean, for those people, that's what they do. That's their life. That's their lifestyle, and they choose to be there. They don't really want to live in Ottawa. Personally, I don't want to live in Ottawa either.

I want to give you another quick example of the model of trapping that we use in North America and how successful it is. Does anybody know how many different species of otter there are in the world? There are 13 different species of otter in the world. There is only one that is legally traded in the world, the North American river otter. That's a fact that I'm very proud of.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Chair, am I over time?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): You have 15 seconds—

Mr. Colin Carrie: All right, thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): —which I'm sure you will love to give to Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thanks.

I want to look at the future.

Contrary to some of the pessimism that seems to be out there, I think the fur trade is coming back. There's a real interest in sustainable food. There's an interest in sustainable clothing. The local food movement is very strong. The demand for hunter safety training is rising again. The demand for hunting licenses is increasing. I recall being in Toronto a few months ago at a meeting. I was staying in a downtown hotel and there was a fancy magazine on the coffee table there. It was not my kind of magazine but I looked at it and, sure enough, there were ads for fur in there and a piece about how fur is coming back.

As legislators we're kind of barometers of public opinion. When the public is concerned, the issues often come to our door very quickly, but by and large we see and hear nothing from the animal rights movement. So I think that Canadians as a whole are beginning to really reconnect with our roots as a country. It doesn't matter whether you're rural or urban, Canada is Canada to everybody. So in terms of the fur trade itself, perhaps Mr. Cahill or Ms. Daigneault would speculate on the future. Could you go 10 to 20 years henceforth and speculate where we're going to be, given the fast growing economies of Southeast Asia, Korea, China and so on? Are there expanding markets that will be there for us in order to support our sustainable-use industry?

•(1035)

Mr. Robert Cahill: Thanks, Bob. I'll respond quickly and I'll leave some time for Ms. Daigneault.

We see a lot of trends shifting. I mentioned the Canada goose and the phenomenon of young people and people who weren't traditional fur users still spending more than a thousand dollars for a jacket. So it's not a cheap product, but it's wearing fur.

We're seeing the fashions change in the western world to styles that are more interesting to people today. You will often not notice fur when it's fur, because it's often dyed in colours to look like a piece of fabric; it's not just a natural piece of fur.

But we're seeing a big trend back towards natural fur, not only here in North America but in Europe as well. And in Asian markets there are significant opportunities, and driving trends there.

We see what's happening here as a positive trend for the future.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Ms. Daigneault?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: Concerning the sustainability of the fur trade, more than 75% of the pelts that go through many of the auctions in North America go to China, South Korea.... Russia used to be a very strong market, but because of the conflict with Ukraine it hasn't been in the last two years. But every year the export of the product to China and Asian markets has increased.

There is a market in Canada. People don't necessarily see it. It's not your grandmother's fur coat any more. I have a beautiful fur coat here that I wear all the time and I get nothing but compliments on it. It is wild fur; this is not ranch mink. Every time I wear this, I get people stopping me to ask where I got this garment. Sometimes you'll see fur on purses, and it will be dyed in a certain way to make it not look like a traditional fur. You'll see pieces of fur on purses, on wallets, and it will be used as trim, even on regular garments that women wear. It is a very versatile textile.

It's used in the whole fashion spectrum. It's not what people think about any more, the full-length long brown coat that our grandmothers wore. You'd be surprised how often you see it in major retailers across Canada. Even on hats there will be sometimes rabbit fur, or there will be muskrat fur on some of the hats at major retailers across Canada.

Many people aren't even realizing how versatile a textile this can be and that it is indeed a viable market in Canada and is expanding. We just don't see it in the same way we used to, because we're picturing a full-length brown coat, and now we have little patches of fur here and there on purses or on leather jackets and that sort of thing.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks.

Mr. McKay, we have about two minutes before we adjourn.

Hon. John McKay: Thank you very much.

Poor old Mr. Howie has been like a skunk at a garden party; I dare say that some of my colleagues might want to see him in one of Mr. Cahill's auctions. But I want to get his response to the tags and the signs.

I thought Mr. Gibb gave a thoughtful response to your concerns. I thought I'd give you an opportunity to reply.

Mr. Michael Howie: Thank you very much, Mr. McKay.

He did provide good answers. Many of us in this debate actually end up meeting at community meetings and having frank conversations that are surprisingly civil. We often invite trappers to come to our conferences.

In terms of the signage, I will point out that we're not saying, "there is a trap here, here, and here"; we're saying "there are traps on this trail". Yes, many people let their dogs off leash because they don't know there are traps. It's a very simple, logical deduction: if I know there are traps, you can bet your sweet patootie I'm not letting my dog off leash.

But there are no such signs, and dogs are injured. And these are not necessarily in the deep woods; this is outside of Coburg. Less than six feet off the national Heritage Trail, a woman's dog walked into a leg-hold, and another one into a Conibear trap.

I don't know how you can reason your way out of the idea of signs or tags. Frankly, people lie. I think we've seen that during this meeting. It's important to note that not all trappers are going to be honest. That's why we need regulations. That's why we have speed limits on the highway, with the OPP here in Ontario chasing us down if we're on our cellphones. Everybody knows the rules, but sometimes you just want to go a little faster, and that creates problems.

● (1040)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you, Mr. Howie.

That finishes our time.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Can I just finish with a point of order?

Mr. Howie suggested that some people lied and that we may have seen that in this meeting. I don't think that's an appropriate comment.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): That's fair enough.

Thank you all for your time today; we very much appreciate it. Thanks for contributing to this study.

I'm going to suspend temporarily so that we can clear the room. We're going to move in camera for discussion of our motion.

Thank you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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