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Chair: Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1755)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): We'll resume the meeting.

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Seal hunting is ingrained in the DNA, and in the traditions and culture of the people of the Îles-de-la-Madeleine. Right now, in Quebec, there is demand for seal products, but supply is insufficient.

There's also an interesting project in Haute-Gaspésie to develop the seal industry. We're seeing that there are regulatory issues making seal hunting more complicated than it should be. That's why I'm proposing that the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans support the following study motion.

I propose that:

- (a) the committee undertake a study on the development of the seal industry in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Maritimes;
- (b) the study specifically address:
 - (i) the modernization of regulations,
 - (ii) measures to foster the emergence of a new generation of hunters,
 - (iii) initiatives to improve social acceptability,
 - (iv) measures to be implemented to develop the seal hunting industry;
- (c) the committee invite representatives from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, seal hunters' associations, hunters, representatives of coastal and Indigenous communities, and marine biologists to appear;
- (d) the committee devote a minimum of three meetings to this study;
- (e) the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and
- (f) pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to its report.

[English]

The Chair: Are you introducing this for the first time?

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: No.

[English]

The Chair: You've already introduced this. Okay.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Yes. It was already placed on notice on April 22.

[English]

The Chair: We have another five minutes.

Mr. Connors.

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): You say, “Maritimes” in here. It should be “Atlantic Canada”.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: I totally agree.

Moreover, my colleagues will propose an amendment aiming to widen the scope of the motion.

We could give Mr. Small the floor.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Small, you have an amendment to broaden this.

Clifford Small (Central Newfoundland, CPC): Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a few changes here. I'd like to amend the motion so that it reads as follows:

That:

- (a) the committee undertake a study on the development of...pinniped industries in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence and the Atlantic, Pacific, and Northern Regions;
- (b) the study specifically address:
 - (i) the modernization of regulations,
 - (ii) measures to foster the emergence of a new generation of harvesters,
 - (iii) initiatives to improve social acceptability,
 - (iv) measures to be implemented to develop pinniped harvesting industries;
- (c) the committee invite representatives from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, pinniped harvesters' associations, harvesters, representatives of coastal and Indigenous communities, and marine biologists to appear;
- (d) the committee devote a minimum of five meetings to this study;
- (e) one hour be dedicated to reviewing the progress made on the recommendations from the committee's December 2023 Report No. 12, Ecosystem Impacts and Management of Pinniped Populations;
- (f) the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and
- (g) pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to its report.

• (1800)

The Chair: Mr. Deschênes.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: I agree with my colleagues' amendments. The only thing I'd like to point out is that we could use *loup-marin* or *phoque* instead of *pinnipède* in the French version. It would be more accurate.

[English]

The Chair: Can we fix that, analysts?

[Translation]

Natacha Kramski (Committee Researcher): If I'm not mistaken, pinnipeds also include other marine mammals, such as sea lions. The motion would therefore be broader than if it referred only to "seals". Other marine mammals would also be included in the definition of "pinniped".

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Deschênes and Mr. Small, do you want to use the word "pinniped"? Do you want to stick with it? What do you want to do?

Mr. Cormier.

Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Are we talking about Mr. Small's amendment right now? I just want to make sure.

The Chair: Mr. Deschênes accepted the amendment, but I think the analyst is saying that "pinniped" is a broader category than seal.

Serge Cormier: There were two amendments to Mr. Small's. Is that right?

The Chair: Yes.

Serge Cormier: It's maybe the second part, having an hour or two hours, that I do not agree with. It would take time away from the witnesses we want to hear from and it would take time away from Mr. Deschênes' witnesses as well.

It's just the part about having one or two hours to review the report that I'm not agreeing with

The Chair: Does anybody else want to add to that? Are you in agreement?

Mr. Small.

Clifford Small: In fairness to Mr. Cormier, how about we add another meeting to discuss what's been acted on based on the recommendations of the last pinniped study?

The Chair: The amendment did suggest, Mr. Cormier, "a minimum of five meetings". What you're hearing is going to six meetings, possibly.

Serge Cormier: No, Madam Chair. I want to make it clear that we do not agree to having one more meeting or hearing on another study's report. It's taking time away from what we actually want to do. I think Mr. Deschênes wants more witnesses to come to this committee to share about the problem with the seal situation.

[Translation]

I disagree with this part of Mr. Small's amendment.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Small.

Clifford Small: Madam Chair, I'm wondering if Mr. Cormier would like to explain to us why he's not in favour of having officials come to this committee to explain the work that has or has not been done based on the recommendations of the last report. We can continue doing reports, but if there's nothing done based on the recommendations, are we just here wasting our time?

Witnesses travel to Ottawa. They want recommendations. The stakeholders are depending on us to try to get some movement out of this government for some productivity in the fishing industry. I don't know why Mr. Cormier is trying to cover up, possibly, for a lack of action on the last report on seals, sea lions and walrus. Maybe he can explain to us how much work has been done on the report. Maybe he can do it right here. We can stay for another hour, and he can tell us all the work that's been done on the pinniped file.

• (1805)

The Chair: I think we decided at the beginning that some people have flights and can't stay for another hour, but your point is taken, Mr. Small.

Mr. Deschênes.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: For me, it's important that the motion focus on seals, which is why I don't want it to be broadened too much. I don't know whether sea lion hunting takes place elsewhere. However, I want seals to be included in my study. That's what's important to people back home.

[English]

The Chair: You do not wish to use the term "pinniped". You want it to remain as "seal".

Mr. Small, you have a bit of a push-back here from Mr. Deschênes. Are you in agreement?

Clifford Small: I don't really have a problem with Mr. Deschênes' suggestion, other than the fact that, on the west coast in Pacific waters, overpopulation of sea lions has been identified as an issue. We actually dealt with that somewhat in the last report we did in 2023. I don't know if anyone else around... We have a number of members here from British Columbia who may want some testimony brought forward on sea lions. That's all.

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey.

Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My comment is that we do not agree with the amendment put forward by Mr. Small. The original study motion by Mr. Deschênes speaks specifically to an issue that is long overdue being looked at. We're supportive of the original motion by Mr. Deschênes. We're not supportive of the amendment.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the amendment by Mr. Small?

Mr. Gunn.

Aaron Gunn (North Island—Powell River, CPC): I just want some clarification on what was just said. Are we now...? Mr. Deschênes and the Liberals don't want to include the term "pinniped" because they want to restrict the study to only talking about the consequences on one coast of Canada but not the other.

I'm open for them to clarify, because I feel like when we passed an earlier study about an issue that was mainly affecting the west coast with regard to the fishery openings with sockeye salmon, we made it broad enough so that it wasn't irrelevant for half of the members sitting at this committee. They could relate to it for their ridings and their coast. I don't know if it's deliberate or a misunderstanding—that we're arbitrarily removing half of the coastline of Canada.

Mel Arnold (Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, CPC): Madam Chair, I'm also surprised that the Liberals seem opposed to some very constructive amendments, one of which simply replaces "hunters" with "harvesters"—a much more socially acceptable term.

Also, in response to their objection to hearing testimony on what's been accomplished, or which recommendations the government has followed through on, from a study we completed barely two years ago on issues that remain relevant, has anything happened or not? Here we have government members who do not seem to even want to discuss what may or may not have been done by their department in the time since that study and report were done.

Serge Cormier: Madam Chair, for the people watching at home, I want to comment on the remarks by Mr. Arnold and Mr. Small. The original motion by Mr. Deschênes basically said that we should invite representatives from Fisheries and Ocean Canada. These are the officials they want to hear from. When those officials are in the room, the opposition will be able to ask all of the questions they want of them about the report or the progress, or whatever, that has been made on seals.

I just want to make sure that people at home understand that the officials are already coming. Members will have time to ask questions of those officials. This is why we're saying that we don't need any more time. The officials will be in the room and members will be able to ask questions.

I hope we can move on all of this, Madam Chair. It's 6:12 right now, and I think you were willing to end early for the people who have to catch their flights and leave on Thursday. Thank you for doing this, but I think we have to move on it.

• (1810)

The Chair: Are there no further speakers?

Mr. Deschênes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: I was open to expanding the study to include the west coast. I wasn't aware of the situation regarding sea lions. That's not a west coast topic I'm knowledgeable about. However, I

see that the harbour seal is the dominant species and that there are sometimes Steller's sea lions and sea otters.

I therefore have no objection to simply writing, "a study on the development of the sea industry and other species also found in British Columbia, namely Steller's sea lions and sea otters", so that it covers species similar to the harbour seal that may be hunted on the west coast.

[*English*]

The Chair: Then I will ask a question about Mr. Small's amendment.

Can I just do a scan of the room of those in favour of the amendment?

Robert Morrissey: We are not in agreement with Mr. Small's amendment, but we are in agreement with Mr. Deschênes.

The Chair: You're in agreement with Deschênes' subamendment to Mr. Small's amendment.

Mr. Small, what do you think? Are you good with it?

Clifford Small: I don't think it really matters what I think. I'm outvoted here.

The Chair: I get a sense that the amendment.... Mr. Deschênes is agreeing that he wants to broaden it to the west coast, but we still have an amendment on the table to vote on, guys. That's Mr. Small's amendment.

Clifford Small: I'll have a couple more words to say about my amendment.

To Mr. Morrissey et al.—his Liberal friends sitting next to him—to not address issues in the north is quite the injustice to our indigenous peoples there, who've had their way of life wiped out with the demise of the sealing industry. I know Mr. Morrissey is being a little bit partisan here, but he should consider that my amendment is inclusive. It addresses reconciliation in a sense, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cormier, you have your hand up.

Serge Cormier: Madam Chair, I would just like to simplify this for everybody. If I'm not getting it right, Mr. Deschênes, please help me with this.

When I look at the amendment by Mr. Small, the only thing we are not agreeing to is the new paragraph: "(e) one hour is dedicated to reviewing the progress made on the recommendations from committee's December...Report", etc.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, do you agree with the rest of Mr. Small's amendments, or is that too broad? I just want to make sure everyone fully understands what's happening.

Alexis Deschênes: I agree with Mr. Small's amendment to broaden the scope so that we cover seals and sea lions on the west coast, as well as other pinniped species on the north side. I'm fine with extending the study to cover all of that.

What I want is for us to mention seals in relation to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Maritimes, because that's what makes sense to us.

As for the additional hour, I'll leave that to you to discuss. I have no objection in that regard.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have to decide that we must leave because people have flights, but I'll go to Mr. Klassen and Mr. Arnold, and then I'm going to call this.

Let's try and square the circle. I'm hearing a lot of people agree on a lot of things. The only thing that people are not fully agreeing on is the extra one hour. That's what I'm hearing.

Go ahead, Ernie, and then Mr. Arnold.

• (1815)

Ernie Klassen (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): I'll make a quick comment. I don't see why the witnesses can't be asked questions about the north, the west and the east coasts. Nobody is stopping anybody from talking about the west coast or the north coast. This isn't about reconciliation. We can talk about the entire country, as long as it relates to the subject matter that is identified as the study.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

Mel Arnold: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Getting back to protocol and the actual rules of order for conducting a meeting, Mr. Small suggested an amendment, and we have not voted on that amendment.

I think, to be clear, Mr. Cormier is suggesting a subamendment to remove paragraph (e).

Rather than trying to lump all of this together, I think it would be far more clear if you, Madam Chair, were to go through the subamendment and have a vote on that.

The Chair: You're absolutely right, Mr. Arnold.

Let us look at the subamendment moved by Mr. Cormier, which is to remove the reference to the one hour of studying the report that was done a while ago. Let's vote on that.

(Subamendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Amendment as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I would like to ask everyone to vote on the amended motion, which is a motion adding Mr. Small's amendment minus the subamendment by Mr. Cormier.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Madam Chair, I just want to be absolutely sure that, in the motion, in its amended version, we still mention the Gulf of St. Lawrence and seals, but with the addition of the part....

I'm told that's the case. Well, that's perfect. That works very well for me.

[*English*]

The Chair: The amended motion added pinnipeds as a broader concept. We also removed the one-hour study of the old report, which was Mr. Cormier's subamendment.

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: It has unanimously passed.

I move that we adjourn this meeting.

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