



By Email (pof@sen.parl.gc.ca)

November 21, 2023

Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans
Attn: Sara Gajic, Legislative Clerk
Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Hon. Chair, Deputy-Chair and Members of the Committee:

Re: Study on Canada's seal populations and their effect on Canada's fisheries

On behalf of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present before you on November 9, 2023, regarding Canada's seal populations.

I am writing to provide additional responses on harvesting, food sovereignty, individual health and community wellbeing, and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit.

To briefly recap, NTI represents Nunavut Inuit under the *Nunavut Agreement*. Our mandate is to ensure the constitutionally protected rights of Nunavut Inuit are respected and that governments live up to their responsibilities in the Agreement.

In addition to primary nutritional and sociocultural needs, sealing in Nunavut can also contribute to meeting the financial needs of Inuit families and households. Income from the sale of subsistence harvest by-products such as sealskins can help cover either general living expenses or purchases to assist harvesting. Rising costs have exacerbated the ongoing decline in the number of full-time Inuit harvesters and productivity due to decreasing availability of time and in some cases, lack of knowledge transfer. Inuit have accordingly called for more income-generating opportunities that support continued participation of Inuit in the subsistence economy. Such opportunities require a renewal of policy frameworks and funding models, as well as a long-term commitment to harvester program funding and to investments in harvest-enabling infrastructure such as small-craft community harbours.

As I stated during my presentation, the ban-induced collapse of the sealskin market has had—and continues to have—an historic and devastating impact on Inuit. Despite efforts of the Governments of Nunavut and Canada to bolster the value of Nunavut-harvested sealskins and to utilize the exception for Inuit from the European Union trade ban, Nunavut Inuit have borne a significant impact to a livelihood based on sealing. Yet, Nunavut Inuit should have the right to live in dignity and adopt a sustainable lifestyle of their choosing; rights affirmed nationally by the *Nunavut Agreement* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and internationally by the *United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). In fact, Article 20 of UNDRIP explicitly states that Indigenous peoples have the right "to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities". By working to remove existing—and deter future—

constraints on the marketability, and impediments to the trade, of seal products originating from the sustainable harvest of seals by Nunavut Inuit, Canada must ensure that Inuit cultural practices and livelihoods are not further undermined. In this regard, NTI encourages Canada to adopt a consistent, reasonable, and responsible message on matters of wildlife trade. Canada's proposed regulatory amendments with respect to the import and export of elephant ivory and rhinoceros' horn, for instance, erode Canada's ability to counter appeals for unwarranted restrictions or bans.

Conclusions

In addition to initiatives to restore sealskin markets, NTI would welcome Canada's support for the strengthening of the market within Inuit Nunangat, the creation of new markets for existing products, and investigations into new marketable seal products. Resources to assist Inuit in seal harvesting and the preparation of seal products is critical in addition to any study of seal population status.

Sealing will continue to remain an integral part of Inuit culture and daily life. In most Nunavut communities that are only connected to the south by air, store bought food can be prohibitively expensive. Therefore, sealing is one of the few viable means for many families to access nutritious food. Sealing will continue and any way to augment the benefits of by-products from sealing will not only address historic misconduct but also supplement Inuit income.

Should you have any additional questions or need additional information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Irgaut', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul Irgaut
Vice-President

