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Minister of Fisheries / Ministre des Pêches

March 26, 2026

Ms. Shaila Anwar
Clerk of the Senate and Clerk of the Parliaments
Senate of Canada Building
2 Rideau Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4

Dear Ms. Anwar:

Pursuant to Rules of the Senate 12.23.(3), on behalf of the Government of Canada, I have the honour to table in both official languages, the Government Response to the eighth Report from the 44th Parliament, First Session, of the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans entitled, “Sealing The Future: A Call To Action.”

Yours sincerely,

The Honourable Joanne Thompson, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries

Attachment: 1

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE 8TH REPORT (FROM THE 44TH PARLIAMENT, FIRST SESSION) OF THE STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS ENTITLED,SEALING THE FUTURE: A CALL TO ACTION

March 26, 2026

Mr. Fabian Manning
Chair
Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans
Senate
Ottawa ON K1A 0A4

Dear Mr. Manning,

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (the Committee) for its report entitled, *Sealing the Future: A Call to Action* (the Report). I appreciate the comprehensive set of recommendations developed by the Committee that encompass scientific research, domestic and international markets, and the sustainable management of seal populations on Canada's three coasts.

I would also like to thank the Indigenous peoples, industry representatives, members of academia, provincial and territorial representatives, and other expert witnesses from diverse backgrounds who testified on this important topic. Many witnesses expressed concerns about negative impacts of seal populations on fisheries, and others shared personal stories about the impact of international market barriers and attitudes toward the seal product industry to their livelihoods and cultural practices. I have heard these concerns, and appreciate the witnesses for dedicating their time and effort to identifying ways in which we can collaborate to help address them.

Canada's sustainable seal harvest is important to the economic and cultural strength of our coastal and Indigenous communities. The Government of Canada's current approach to seal management focuses on a sustainable, humane, and well-regulated seal harvest that supports Indigenous, rural, and coastal communities in Canada. The Government of Canada will continue to pursue initiatives that facilitate sealing activities, while maintaining conservation and humane-harvest objectives.

Details are provided below regarding the Government's Response to the specific recommendations of the Committee.

Recommendation 1:
An effective and sustainable seal population management strategy be urgently developed and implemented as soon as is practicable or no later then six months from the tabling date of this report. It must be prepared in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and take into consideration the complexity of the ecosystems seals are a part of; the impacts of climate change on seals and their ecosystems; the variety of seals species on Canada's three coasts; and the social, economic and cultural importance of the seal industry.

The Government of Canada acknowledges this recommendation and shares the Committee's view of the importance of the seal industry to support economically healthy communities. The Government supports an approach to managing seal populations that is effective in promoting a sustainable, humane, and well-regulated seal harvest. Sealing is a valuable economic, social, and cultural activity that supports Indigenous, rural, and coastal communities in Canada. The Government continues to work with all stakeholders, Indigenous partners, and provincial and territorial governments on efforts that support seal harvesters and the sealing industry in Canada.

Limited market opportunities for seals has meant that removals have remained well below sustainable harvest levels for some time. For non-commercially harvested seal species,

including those in the Arctic and the West Coast, DFO implements monitoring and conservation measures to support sustainable management across all regions. While there is no commercial seal harvest on Canada's West Coast, First Nations harvest seals for food, social, and ceremonial purposes, and a subsistence seal harvest occurs in the Arctic.

DFO has dedicated seal scientists in the Maritimes, Arctic, Quebec, Newfoundland, and Pacific regions who conduct seal research primarily focused on surveys and assessments to estimate seal abundance and population trends. Where feasible, DFO scientists conduct research to increase our understanding of the role of seal populations in complex ecosystems. This is part of DFO's effort to integrate a greater number of ecosystem factors, such as climate change, into its stock assessments.

The harvest of seal populations must continue to be ethical and sustainable to protect market access for Canada's multi billion dollar fish and seafood sector, especially access to European and US markets that have strict regulations for seal harvests and seal products.

Recommendation 2:
A more robust and state-of-the-art marine and fisheries research capacity be rapidly developed and implemented by using both currently available and up-to-date modern research methods and emerging technologies, by acquiring and establishing additional ocean-specific research infrastructure, and while incorporating Indigenous knowledge. These research capacity-building activities must be developed in collaboration with Indigenous governments and organizations, communities, seal industry members, the academic community, international experts, private sector organizations, and other stakeholders.

The Government of Canada shares the Committee's view that having adequate marine and fisheries research capacity is critical to understanding seal populations and their role in Canada's ecosystems.

In alignment with the Committee's recommendation that this capacity include currently available and up-to-date modern research methods and emerging technologies, the Government utilizes a variety of research methods when conducting seal research. For example, DFO employs animal-borne satellite telemetry devices to monitor seal movements, behaviour, and distribution on all three coasts.

Seal scientists across the country use modern techniques, such as fatty acid and stable isotope analysis and genomics, to investigate seal diet and foraging ecology, in addition to employing methods like analysing hard parts found in stomachs and scats. In Quebec, DFO collaborates with Aarhus University, Technical University of Denmark, and the Ocean Tracking Network to use acoustic and satellite tagging to study harbour seal predation on salmon species in Europe, which will inform the development of technological and statistical methods that may be applied in Atlantic Canada. DFO uses remote cameras and artificial intelligence (AI) to monitor sea lions at haul-outs in Pacific Rim National Park, as well as using drones and AI to assess the body condition of seals, in support of shared conservation and research goals.

Additionally, DFO continually advances the statistical models it uses to estimate marine mammal abundance, and such examples can be found in the latest integrated population models used to assess the size of the grey and harp seal populations. These models are significantly improved from previous models in that they allow the incorporation of multiple sources of information, including environmental variables in order to better explain changes in abundance. For example, DFO's 2025 harp seal stock assessment—based on one of the most sophisticated population models to date—indicates the population declined from 5.6 million seals in 2019, to 4.4 million in 2024.

Under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* Action Plan Shared Priorities Measure 40, DFO is committed to developing and employing mechanisms that respect and incorporate Indigenous Knowledge as a distinct knowledge system in the management of fisheries, fish habitat, conservation, marine safety, and protection of the

marine environment. This is done through regular engagement and consultation with Indigenous peoples and communities, industry, and other stakeholders at the Atlantic Seal Advisory Committee (ASAC). The information and feedback shared by Indigenous partners helps inform management decisions and scientific research priorities that DFO undertakes.

DFO carries out diverse missions in support of fisheries, ecosystem science, oceanography, and hydrography, among others. To deliver on this, DFO works closely with the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) to plan and execute an annual fleet operations plan for at-sea science. A landmark in that effort is the newly delivered Canadian Coast Guard Ship (CCGS) *Naalak Nappaaluk*, which was officially accepted by the CCG in November 2025. Once it enters into full-time service, the CCGS *Naalak Nappaaluk* will become Canada's largest dedicated science vessel and the flagship platform for oceanographic research on the Atlantic coast.

Regarding the possibility of DFO increasing seal research capacity, the Government of Canada believes additional work should first focus on seal product development, market diversification, and marketing, before investments in additional science processes are contemplated.

Recommendation 3:
The Government of Canada encourage, foster, and support greater science and research collaboration concerning seal populations, their diets, and their distribution in collaboration with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments, academics, international experts, seal harvesters, commercial fishers, local communities, private sector organizations, and other relevant stakeholders, and where possible, must utilize existing modern research capacity. Resulting data and research outcomes are shared appropriately, possibly by way of a user-friendly database designed to meet the information needs of researchers and stakeholders.

The Government of Canada recognizes that collaboration with a variety of external partners is essential to the success of seal research and already undertakes many research projects in collaboration with a wide variety of partners. In many instances, it is only possible for DFO to conduct seal research projects in collaboration with partners outside federal organizations (e.g., with academics, Indigenous partners, and industry).

For example, in the Arctic, DFO has worked with groups such as the Polar Continental Shelf Program, northern wildlife management boards, and environmental non-governmental organizations to carry out integrated research activities. DFO engages with local communities prior to undertaking science activities in the Arctic, and relies on the support of local hunter and trapper associations and organizations to conduct research programs. In collaboration with the Kivalliq Wildlife Board, Assiniboine Park Zoo, and Churchill Northern Studies Centre, for instance, DFO uses satellite tagging to quantify the movements and behaviour of harbour seals near Churchill, Manitoba, and ringed seals near Rankin Inlet, Nunavut.

In 2023, DFO launched four externally-led projects to deepen understanding of seals' ecological roles, demonstrating a strong commitment to evidence-based management and collaborative science. Two of the projects—based in Atlantic Canada—were completed in 2025: Memorial University of Newfoundland published their results in two peer-reviewed journal articles; and the Fish, Food and Allied Workers summarized their results in a report and presentation. DFO will consider new studies as part of the overall body of scientific literature, increasing its knowledge base and helping to better understand population dynamics.

Additionally, DFO's long-standing Sable Island seal science program relies on collaborations with academic institutions interested in joint research opportunities. These academic partnerships contribute funding and personnel needed for labour-intensive seal research on the island. Currently, DFO has a four-year research collaboration with Texas Tech University, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, and the University of Alaska that will provide samples to estimate seal diets and young-of-the-year survival of grey seals. DFO is also collaborating with Dalhousie University and the Ocean Tracking Network to study the relationship between grey seal

behaviour, diet, and reproductive success, while deploying instruments on grey seals to collect oceanographic data and detect other acoustically-tagged marine species.

In addition to the publication of research findings in scientific journals, DFO publishes scientific advice and information on its website that addresses the important issues facing our oceans and aquatic ecosystems, such as population assessments of seals, fish stock dynamics, species at risk, invasive species, ecology of marine and freshwater ecosystems, marine protected areas, and aquaculture.

Regarding the possibility of DFO increasing seal research capacity, the Government of Canada believes additional work should first focus on seal product development, market diversification, and marketing, before investments in additional science processes are contemplated.

Recommendation 4:
The *Income Tax Act* and all other related acts be urgently reviewed and amended, as needed, to ensure that registered Canadian charities and non-profit organizations that produce or promote misinformation and/or disinformation about the seal harvest or seal products industry have their tax-exempt status revoked.

The *Income Tax Act* should also be amended to require registered Canadian charities and non-profit organizations to fill out information returns about donors, similar to those that are prescribed for registered journalism organizations in section 149.1(14.1) of the Act, which includes a public information return for the year in the prescribed form that lists each donor whose total gifts to the organization in the year exceed $5,000.

The Government of Canada acknowledges this recommendation.

The charitable and non-profit sector is an important part of Canadian society. With more than 86,000 registered charities and countless number of non-profit organizations across the country, this sector tackles some of the most pressing challenges from addressing food insecurity to advancing education, protecting the environment, and promoting health and well-being.

Canada has made important changes to enable charities to more easily do their work in a supportive regulatory environment, in recognition of the contribution they make to public debate and public policy. In particular, the *Income Tax Act* (ITA) was amended in 2018 to allow charities to fully engage in public policy dialogue and development activities, free from political harassment. This includes charities being fully able to express their position on public policy issues and provide information to elected officials or the general public on issues relating to their charitable purposes (including the conduct of public awareness campaigns).

Notwithstanding these changes, all registered charities are required to follow the rules and principles set out in the ITA and common law, including ensuring the information that they provide is fact and evidence-based, and may not deliberately spread information that is false or misleading. This includes registered charities that provide information in the context of the promotion of animal welfare. Any charity that does not adhere to these rules can have its registration revoked.

With respect to public transparency around donors, it is important to highlight that charities are already subject to enhanced transparency requirements around their activities. Charities are required to annually submit a public information return to the Canada Revenue Agency, which includes details on their programs and financial activities. However, information on specific donors to charities is not currently publicly disclosed, and such a proposal would raise a number of important privacy considerations. This could negatively impact charitable giving to the extent that donors do not want to have their information made public, and could place a significant administrative burden on charities that would have to report this information.

Recommendation 5:
A national educational campaign regarding Canada's seal populations, seal harvest, and seal products industry be developed in collaboration with Indigenous governments and organizations, local communities, and seal industry members. The campaign should be informed by educational materials currently available and be completed and ready to launch within one year of the tabling of this report. After its completion, the campaign material and implementation plan should be shared with the Committee.

The Government shares the view of the Committee on the importance and benefits of educating Canadians on seal populations, seal harvest, and the seal products industry. DFO currently undertakes activities in support of this recommendation by sharing clear and accurate information to Canadian and international audiences through its website and through other public-facing material. Additionally, the Department regularly publishes facts, statistics, and regulatory information on Canada's seal harvest on its public website. Resources include information about the domestic and international seal market; the humane approach to Canadian seal harvesting; how to identify distinct species of seals in Canada; the importance of the seal harvest to Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities; and seal science.

Federal programs such as the Atlantic Fisheries Fund (AFF) and the Canadian Fish and Seafood Opportunities Fund (CFSOF), which are described in greater detail in the response to recommendation 7, have provided funding to the seal industry to develop educational and marketing campaigns. For example, CFSOF provided $2.6 million to fund three advertising campaigns between 2021 and 2022, to improve the Seal and Sealing Network website search engine optimization and educate Canadians about the sealing industry.

Furthermore, DFO's engagement with international partners is guided by reliable, non-biased information about Canada's seal populations and harvest—with the goal of clearly conveying that the information shared with partners is credible and accurate.

Recommendation 6:
An effective anti-misinformation/anti-disinformation campaign related to the Canadian seal harvest and seal products industry be created and disseminated in collaboration with key stakeholders. The campaign's work should begin immediately and should be a whole-of-government initiative, led by DFO.

The Government of Canada deplores that misinformation and disinformation campaigns around seal harvesting have done considerable unjust damage to seal harvesters. Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that reside in coastal areas have historically relied on seals as an important food source. In particular, the Inuit have been dependant on seals for food, clothing, tools, and warmth for generations in Canada's northern regions. The harvest of seals supports Canada's Indigenous, rural, and coastal communities and is an important economic and cultural activity throughout Atlantic Canada, Quebec, and the Arctic. Furthermore, Canadian seal processors, artisans, and Inuit produce some of the finest products in the world that not only generate much needed revenue for their communities, but contribute significantly to the maintenance of culture and tradition around sealing.

The Government of Canada currently undertakes activities to counter the spread of misinformation and disinformation about the seal harvest through its communication strategies. DFO's current communications activities on anti-misinformation and anti-disinformation include its public website, social media content, and key messages. DFO posts facts, statistics, and regulations on Canada's seal harvest that contain the information described in the response to Recommendation 5.

Recommendation 7:
Steps be immediately taken to ensure commercial sealing is economically viable for harvesters to help grow the seal products industry so it can achieve the commercial total allowable catches set by DFO. In addition, actions should be taken to expand Canada's seal products industry to open new domestic and international markets, such as implementing

regulatory changes, investing in innovative product development, national marketing campaigns, and an effective anti-misinformation/anti-disinformation campaign.

The Government of Canada is committed to growing market opportunities for Canadian seal products and agrees with the Committee that the promotion of the industry is important. Accordingly, several programs are in place to support Canadian seal harvesters in the national and international promotion of seal products.

The Government of Canada invests in ocean sectors that embrace advanced technologies in order to increase productivity and competitiveness, enhance safety and efficiency, and improve environmental performance. This is done through entities like the Business Development Corporation and federal Regional Development Agencies, which deliver the Regional Economic Growth Through Innovation program. These initiatives are fuelling innovation in the ocean sector by providing financial assistance to start, grow, and scale ocean-related businesses in Canada.

At the federal level, DFO and other government departments work together to promote the most efficient utilization of existing seal harvests and to enhance market access for seal products. In its Report, the Committee noted that it does not support increasing the seal harvest when there is no available market for the end product, or when a harvest does not fully utilize the animal. Existing seal harvests across Canada's three coasts prioritize the full utilization of the resource. They are an important contributor to food security and economic activity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous coastal communities. In support of maximum utilization, the Government of Canada continues efforts to facilitate international market access for a wide variety of seal product exports, working collaboratively with other government departments, Indigenous peoples, and industry stakeholders.

The Government of Canada works across federal departments to help ensure that seal products can access global markets. Global Affairs Canada (GAC) leads the negotiation of bilateral, plurilateral, and multilateral trade agreements, the administration of export and import controls, as well as the management of international trade disputes. This work could help to address market access and international supply chain disruption concerns. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) provides programs and services, and works in collaboration with the sector to support its competitiveness and increase market opportunities at home and abroad.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) works with the provinces and with industry, including processors, along the entire food supply chain to prevent health risks. CFIA verifies that seal meat and seal byproducts (such as blubber) sold interprovincially or exported are in compliance with the food safety requirements of the Safe Food for Canadians Regulations. When required by the importing country, CFIA issues export certificates to certify that seal meat exports meet Canadian health and hygiene regulations or the health and hygiene standards of the importing countries.

In 2024, in response to the European Union's (EU) review of its regulations on the trade of seal products, the Government of Canada responded highlighting the negative economic, social, and cultural impacts the regulations had on communities in Canada. This response was co-signed by the then Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, as well as five other Ministers: the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada, the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, and the Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA). The response asked that the EU repeal the Regulation on Trade in Seal Products and replace it with rules that offer access for ethically and sustainably harvested products. Included in the formal response, the Government of Canada submitted to the European Commission an evidence package, including qualitative and quantitative information championing Canada's sustainable seal harvest and describing the harmful impacts of these regulations.

DFO works with NOAA to ensure that Canada's seal harvesting practices remain consistent with the US *Marine Mammal Protection Act* (MMPA) and its regulations, in order to protect Canada's

access to the US markets for Canada's commercial fisheries. On September 2, 2025, NOAA publicly confirmed that all Canadian fisheries meet MMPA standards, with comparability findings valid until December 31, 2029.

The Government of Canada shares the view of the Committee that collaboration between governments, Indigenous peoples, and industry is important to enable participation in the seal harvest, while respecting humane harvesting and safety requirements.

In 2023, DFO established a Working Group on Policy and Regulatory Review for Seals (the Working Group) that brings together DFO officials, provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous partners, and industry stakeholders to identify areas where DFO can alter policies and regulations to address longstanding or emerging barriers to participation in the sector.

The Working Group began with a list of 12 potential initiatives, then refined the list to three priorities for action, with other actions that could be revisited in the longer term. The initiatives currently being considered are: the inclusion of Maritimes and Gulf region provinces for Personal Use licence eligibility; the creation of a youth licence to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills between generations; and training consistency across regions. Amendments to the Commercial Fisheries Licensing Policy for Eastern Canada have been made to allow for the issuance of new Personal Use licences for seal harvesting in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. As a foundational step in advancing this initiative, pilot harvests have been conducted in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island with the help of fishing associations. Lessons learned from these pilots will provide the basis for expansion of this activity in the future.

The Government of Canada will continue to promote federal, provincial and territorial (FPT) collaboration on market development for fish and seafood products, within the context of the Economic Development Task Group (EDTG) under the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers (CCFAM). CCFAM is the primary multilateral engagement forum between FPT governments to address fisheries and aquaculture issues of national importance. EDTG remains an important forum for the Government of Canada to discuss shared responsibilities and joint action with provinces and territories for market diversification on products such as seal.

Working with provinces and territories, the Government of Canada has established several programs to support Canada's fish and seafood sector, including the sealing sector. For example, from 2018 to 2024, the sector received a total of $4.5 million from the Canadian Fish and Seafood Opportunities Fund (CFSOF), through two consecutive projects that sought to help the sealing sector build a collaborative national approach to issues facing the sector. These projects have helped to strengthen the sealing sector and market conditions for Canadian seal products in domestic and international markets through marketing, branding, traceability, industry coordination, and quality assurance activities. The CFSOF, introduced in 2018, sunset in March 2024.

Further, sealing industry proponents are eligible for project funding under the AFF and the Quebec Fisheries Fund (QFF). Projects under AFF and QFF are funded in partnership with Atlantic and Quebec provinces, respectively, and aim to support Canada's seafood sector transition to meet growing market demands for products that are high-quality, value added, and sustainably sourced. Combined, since 2017, these funds have invested $1.3 million in eight projects with the sealing industry in Atlantic Canada and Quebec related to product development, processing equipment upgrades, and professional capacity building. The Government of Canada remains committed to supporting a sealing sector that provides meaningful employment and market opportunities, as one part of an interconnected and productive fish and seafood sector.

For example, ACOA works with private companies, communities, partners, and Indigenous groups to create opportunities for economic growth in Atlantic Canada across many sectors. As with all sectors of the economy, ACOA's investments in the seal industry – whether in

commercial or non-commercial projects – are market focused and demonstrate commercial outcomes. In the last several years, mainly through its Regional Economic Growth and Innovation and Business Development Programs, ACOA has supported initiatives aimed at the marketing and promotion of seal products.

Recommendation 8:
A seal studies centre of excellence be established that includes Indigenous organizations, academic institutions, and other relevant stakeholders as partners, and is supported by DFO.

The Government of Canada recognizes that collaborations with Indigenous organizations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders can help to generate new and diverse research, including from experts in fields like marketing, economics, bioethics, and biology. As described in the responses to Recommendations 2 and 3, collaborating with a variety of external partners is essential to the success of seal research and the Government of Canada already undertakes research in collaboration with others.

The Government of Canada supports seal science and research. Following the Seal Summit of November 2022, DFO provided multi-year funding to organizations—including Dalhousie University, Memorial University, the Fish, Food and Allied Workers, and the Heiltsuk Tribal Council—to conduct seal science research projects that help to inform greater understanding of the role of seals in the marine ecosystem.

The Atlantic Seal Advisory Committee (ASAC) exists to bring together and engage partners on seals in Canada. ASAC meets annually to discuss Atlantic seal related issues, including management approaches, scientific research, and market issues. In addition, partners seek and engage in formal and informal discussions with DFO officials regarding their interests and views. These mechanisms work so partner views can be shared directly to DFO to support management and science operations.

Recommendation 9:
A domestic and international campaign to promote traditional and innovative Canadian seal products and to work towards the removal of trade barriers and the development of new markets be urgently developed and implemented in collaboration with key stakeholders. The work on this campaign must begin immediately and be a whole-of-government initiative led by Global Affairs Canada.

The Government of Canada shares the Committee's view that promotion of traditional and innovative seal products is important and the Government is committed to the removal of trade barriers and the development of new markets. Several programs are already in place, per the list below, to support Canadian seal harvesters in the national and international promotion of seal products.

In addition to DFO programs mentioned in the response to Recommendation 7, GAC's Trade Commissioner Service (TCS) provides support abroad, via a network of over 160 points of service located in Canada's embassies, consulates, and trade offices outside Canada, where help is provided to our export-ready companies to connect with international buyers, resolve business problems, and achieve successful outcomes. The TCS maintains six regional offices across Canada as well. Trade commissioners in our regional offices assist Canadian exporters with preparing for international markets, including via connections with our offices overseas.

GAC's support includes help for export-ready Canadian seal products companies. For example, through the CanExport Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) program, GAC provides eligible Canadian SMEs with co-funding of up to $50,000 per company to help them access new international markets. The program is designed to diversify Canadian export markets, and to foster a more inclusive approach to trade for all Canadians, including Indigenous exporters.

AAFC offers a suite of programs and services available to industry to support agriculture, agri-food, and fish and seafood trade. AAFC offers the AgriMarketing program to support national

agricultural sectors to increase and diversify exports to international markets and seize domestic market opportunities, including for seal products. Budget 2025 announced $75 million over five years, starting in 2026-27, to AAFC for the AgriMarketing Program to enhance the diversification and promotion of Canada's agriculture, agri-food, fish, and seafood products into new markets. The program aims to increase and diversify exports to global markets and seize market opportunities via industry-led promotional activities to differentiate Canadian products and producers by leveraging Canada's reputation for high-quality and safe food. Investments in technical capacity, promotion, and branding will amplify Canada's reputation as a safe, reliable supplier. This enhancement will support efforts to establish Canada's presence in new markets and gain access for new products in existing ones.

Further, AAFC offers the AgriAssurance program, which is a five-year $64 million program with two components. The National Industry Association component helps sector organizations develop, verify, and integrate assurance systems to address a wide range of issues, including food safety, plant and animal health surveillance, animal welfare, environmental sustainability, traceability, market attributes, and quality standards. These systems can assist producers to better market their products by more readily conforming to required standards, as well as supporting the use of specific product quality claims. The SME component supports businesses in adopting assurance systems and the supporting tools necessary to make verifiable claims to meet export market requirements, or domestic markets for Indigenous Peoples.

Through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2028), AAFC administers $350,000 annually to deliver targeted agriculture, agri-food, and fish and seafood market development activities in priority export markets. These activities also receive funding through other federal, provincial, and industry partners. In addition, AAFC supports Canadian companies exhibiting under the Canada Pavilion at a number of key international trade events, which Canadian seal harvesters can leverage in accessible markets.

Export-ready and registered Canadian companies that play a role in producing, promoting, or supporting Canadian agri-food and seafood products can apply to the Canada Brand program—gaining free access to digital marketing tools that can be leveraged when promoting products in international markets. Supporting trade diversification is a priority for the Government of Canada, and agri-food and seafood exports can drive growth into new markets.

Fisheries and sealing represent one of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency's (CanNor) primary investment areas in Nunavut. Over the past five years, CanNor has invested approximately $20 million in the sector, to develop a ringed seal Omega-3 industry, enhance market access, raise awareness, and support skills development. Other funding programs, such as CanNor's Northern Isolated Community Initiatives, could potentially support the industry.

The Government of Canada will continue to work toward opening and developing markets for seal products, by providing continued concierge service for Canadian seal exporters seeking new markets for their products. DFO has collaborated with AAFC on ways to showcase seal products in the Indo-Pacific region, such as through the online ecommerce site, Rakuten, and by working with officials at the new Indo-Pacific Agriculture and Agrifood Office in Manila, Philippines.

Canada will continue to advocate for an end to trade restrictions on our sustainable, humane, and well-regulated seal harvest. Actions to date include: establishing the Certification and Market Access Program for Seals in 2015 with $5.7 million in funding to support Indigenous harvested seal products to meet EU export market requirements; contributing a whole-of-government submission to the EU's review of regulations on trade in seal products, which was launched in May 2024; and committing to reduce barriers and strengthen agriculture and agrifood trade as a result of the new, strengthened partnership with the EU announced in June 2025.

Additionally, the Government has raised with the US and Japan the question of economic opportunities that would be available as a result of trade in seal products. Despite the seal

product import ban to the US—a longstanding prohibition under the *Marine Mammal Protection Act*—the Government of Canada, via its network of missions in the US, consistently works with Indigenous partners, businesses, and international stakeholders to promote the seal trade in that country.

Once again, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the members of the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for their diligence and commitment in studying and providing recommendations on Canadian seal harvest and industry. I look forward to working together to grow Canada's ethical and sustainable seal industry.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Joanne Thompson, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries