

tion, particularly as it affects my constituency and the people I represent. I will tell this House what I have been telling the Inuit hunters in my constituency.

No hunter is going to kill one less caribou or one less seal on account of this bill. I know that. The ability and right of the Inuit to hunt will still be there under the provisions of this bill. It will always be there.

No piece of legislation can take away the Inuit way of life. This bill does not take away the Inuit way of life, nor can anything else unless the Inuit themselves choose to let it go. That way of life is protected in the Nunavut land claims agreement and in the Constitution of Canada.

The Constitution of Canada is the supreme law of the land and all the other laws of Canada have to be consistent with the Constitution. Section 35 of the Constitution states:

35. (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.

(2) In this act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada.

(3) For greater certainty, in subsection (1), "treaty rights" includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

(4) Notwithstanding any other provision of this act, the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in subsection (1) are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.

Article 2 of the Nunavut land claims agreement is clear on the constitutional status of the agreement. It states: "The agreement shall be a land claims agreement within the meaning of section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982".

Mr. Speaker, the most basic aboriginal and treaty rights are the rights to hunt, trap and fish for sustenance. While there are many disagreements between aboriginal peoples and government on the exact scope and content of all aboriginal and treaty rights, there is at least agreement on harvesting rights. There is no question that aboriginal and treaty rights include hunting, fishing and trapping rights. Even the courts have said so.

Harvesting is central to the aboriginal way of life. It is at the heart of our being, who we are, who we have been, and who we want to be. We do not want to lose our connection with the land. It has sustained us for thousands of years. It has kept us alive. It sustains us still.

Most Inuit and most other aboriginal people who live in remote communities still make a living from the land. It is a proud thing and an honourable thing for us to go out on the land and come home with food for our families and neighbours. That is why there is such worry in aboriginal communities about this bill. There is a deep fear that the bill is affecting our core identity and will take away our ability to buy, possess and use firearms. Some people have been exploiting that fear. I want to address this issue now.

Government Orders

The government is well aware that aboriginal and treaty hunting and trapping rights exist. Some very specific provisions exist in these agreements concerning these rights.

• (1215)

For example, the Nunavut land claim agreement has a whole chapter on wildlife. That chapter recognizes that Inuit are traditional and current users of wildlife and that the legal rights of Inuit to harvest wildlife flow from their traditional and current use.

Under the Nunavut land claim agreement a wildlife management system has been created that reflects the traditional and current levels, patterns and character of Inuit harvesting and avoids unnecessary interference in the exercise of the rights, priorities and privileges to harvest. Subject to the terms of the chapter, an Inuk with proper identification may harvest up to his or her adjusted basic needs level without any form of licence or permit and without imposition of any form of tax or fee.

In addition, the agreement states that where there is any inconsistency or conflict between any federal, territorial and local government laws and the agreement, the agreement shall prevail.

Those provisions in the Nunavut land claim agreement offer protection. Other land claim agreements offer similar protection.

It will be necessary for the government to work out with aboriginal peoples an accommodation between existing aboriginal and treaty harvesting rights and the provisions of Bill C-68. There must be discussions, there must be consultations. There must be a dialogue so the various provisions can be reconciled and integrated. The government knows this and intends to carry out these essential discussions.

For this reason, the government put section 110(t) into Bill C-68. Section 110(t) says the governor in council, or cabinet, can make regulations, and I quote:

Respecting the manner in which any provision of this Act or the regulations applies to any of the aboriginal peoples of Canada, and adapting any such provision for the purposes of that application.

This section recognizes that the government and aboriginal peoples have to work together to implement this bill in ways that are respectful of and sensitive to aboriginal and treaty rights. These discussions will occur. There will be opportunities for aboriginal peoples to have a say in implementation.

By the way, aboriginal peoples should know that both the Reform Party and the Bloc Quebecois tried to remove this clause from the bill during the committee hearings.

During the committee hearings on this bill, aboriginal representatives asked for something more than section 110(t). Some groups, like the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada and the Grand Council