

Statement on Seal Slaughter

I realize, however, Mr. Speaker, that the great concern expressed in the house, and by the general public in hundreds of letters, is with the elimination of inhumane methods of harvesting this resource. There has been a great deal of publicity, both in this country and abroad, which has raised a storm of protest. Much of this publicity is exaggerated and some of it completely untrue. It has been said, for example, that seals are deliberately skinned alive in order to improve the quality of the pelts. There is not the slightest basis for this assertion. The quality of the pelts would, in fact, be damaged by such an inhumane practice.

Furthermore, part of that film which was shown in Canada and abroad, and which created such adverse publicity for Canada, was taken two or three days before the opening of the seal season in 1964 and some of the scenes shown were put-up affairs which grossly exaggerated the operation which normally takes place by regular operators.

I have already expressed my belief that, in general, the methods used by sealers, are humane in that the seals are killed instantly although some inhumanity can result from careless, unscrupulous or unskilful operations.

This was clearly evident from the report just submitted to me of the visit to the sealing grounds of the official team of observers who, at my invitation, were in a position to consider on the site the methods used in the slaughter of seals in area 2 of the gulf of St. Lawrence.

We are all equally concerned over the problem of preventing cruelty. After consultation with representatives of the humane societies and the industry, measures bearing on this problem were incorporated in the regulations for the 1965 season and further restrictions were brought into effect this year.

As this house knows, I made a personal visit to the ice in the gulf of St. Lawrence at the opening of the sealing season on March 7. As a result of this visit and seeing things at first hand, I am now in a much better position to make further improvements in the regulations to ensure that seals are killed in the most humane way possible.

As I have just stated, this year several representatives of humane societies were also present in the gulf at my invitation, and arrangements were made by officers of my department for them to see the sealing operations. I have received a report from the Ontario Humane Society which was jointly

prepared by representatives of provincial and international humane societies. This report, which suggests certain improvements, will be discussed by the department, following the conclusion of the sealing season, with representatives of industry and humane societies with a view to further improvement of the regulations.

Commencing in 1965, the department has greatly increased its enforcement activities. Every sealing ship has aboard a fishery officer to see that the regulations are enforced. In addition, fishery officers patrol the ice where operations are being carried out by sealers both from ships and aircraft. Officers also check on quotas at landing points. I must stress that these officers are working long hours and are dedicated to their task.

● (4:40 p.m.)

I have been assigned the responsibility to introduce and apply regulations which will prevent such abuses as we have witnessed in the past in an operation which has proven most difficult to control. I have approached this problem with a sense of responsibility, fully aware that better and proper methods of killing had to be introduced and enforced if the whole sealing operation was to be conducted in full accordance with humane practices.

I should like, in closing, to assure those who have expressed concern about the sealing operations that additional steps are to be taken to improve the enforcement procedures and even more fishery officers will be at the scene of operations during next season to ensure that regulations are obeyed. It is my intention to arrange further visits to the ice in 1967 of representatives of humane societies and associated agencies, and also to have more consultation with them in a continuing effort to see that the most humane methods possible are used.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I begin by saying that I know the minister is tremendously interested in this problem and the voyage that he took to ascertain the facts was in keeping with his desire to do everything possible. The minister speaks of the pictures that were shown in various parts of the world which gave Canada a very black eye. He stated that these pictures were certainly not true representations of the slaughter of seals. Those pictures, however, were taken last year. The minister was present during the opening day of the sealing season this