

Research on Treatment of Animals

In addition to these conservation measures, new regulations came into force in 1965 which defined the type of club that could be used in taking seals, including its minimum weight and size. Another regulation, which set a limit on the time that seal pelts could be left on the ice before removal to a base of operations, was designed to prevent the possible loss of pelts in storms and changing ice conditions. Good as these regulations were, they represented but a starting point for the actions the department has since taken—consistently in consultation with conservation and humane groups and with the industry—in exercising control over the management of the seal herds and operating methods. Among the measures adopted since 1965, and in force today, there is a provision that anyone engaged in taking seals must have a personal sealer's licence. A primary responsibility has been placed on the masters of sealing vessels to ensure that every crew member complies with the regulation. In the event of violations of the regulations, our fishery officers have the authority to suspend a sealer's licence for up to 30 days.

The regulations covering methods by which seals may be taken have been redefined and made more effective, and the section pertaining to skinning of seals has been strengthened. A prohibition has also been imposed on sealing during hours of darkness. As a further control measure, this year a ban was placed on the use of aircraft, both fixed wing and helicopters for the taking of seals in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Aircraft could still be used in searching for seals—for which they required a licence—but they could not be used in actual sealing operations. I referred earlier to the quota the department imposed in 1965 of 50,000 on the take of young seals in the main sealing area of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We could do this because Canada is the only nation harvesting seals there. However, we have been equally concerned for a number of years over the total take of seals from the herds which frequent the Front; that is the area off the coast of Labrador and northeastern Newfoundland. There we compete with the Norwegians in harvesting the seals and any quota or other conservation measure that we would like to impose required international sanction.

Largely as a consequence of Canadian initiatives, international action has now been taken to limit the combined seal harvest from the Front and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. At the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries in June of this year, agreement was reached on an over-all quota of 245,000 seals from the Front and the Gulf, and this quota will apply in 1971. This figure is based on scientific calculations of the maximum sustainable yield of the seal population; that is, the total number that may safely be harvested without jeopardizing the seal stocks. The ICNAF quota reserves 45,000 seals for capture by Canadian landmen and small boat crews, whose yearly catch averages this figure. Large Canadian vessels may take 100,000 seals and Norwegian vessels also have a 100,000 limit on their catches. Adoption of the 245,000 quota reduces the seal harvest below the average of recent years, which was about 285,000. It is below the 1970

[Mr. Goode.]

harvest by Canada and Norway, which totalled approximately 258,000.

Also becoming effective in 1971 will be a five-day reduction in the duration of the hunt. I repeat that; in 1971 there will be a five-day reduction in the duration of the hunt. The season closing date will be advanced to April 24. This change is being made to reduce the take of breeding seals, particularly mature female seals. While the healthy survival of the seal resources requires careful management and restraint in harvesting, there is evidence that the cause of conservation would be little advanced by imposition of a total hunting ban as has been advocated by some persons. Biologists state if hunting were prohibited, the harp seal population would build up from its present level of about two million animals to upwards of four million. However, the natural environment can only support a limited number of animals of any species, and an unrestricted population increase would intensify the seals' struggle for survival. Competition for food in these circumstances would become fiercer, and as a result more animals would die of starvation, parasites, predators or disease.

The population pressure on essential environmental requirements such as suitable pupping areas, would also lead to large annual losses and a serious waste of a natural resource. Controlled harvesting, on the other hand, keeps the seal herds at a safe, self-perpetuating level, and provides for productive use of what otherwise would be wasted. These are the aims of Canada's seal conservation policies. So far in my remarks I have been speaking generally of the sealing industry and of the measures that the Department of Fisheries and Forestry has adopted to conserve the seal herds and to ensure that the animals are handled in the most humane way possible. But what about the people who are most directly concerned, the sealers themselves and their dependents who have a most important stake in this operation? The typical seal hunter is a fisherman in other seasons. For many such fishermen, the returns from their primary occupation are marginal and, despite their industry and resourcefulness, they find it difficult to make what would be considered a reasonable living.

● (5:30 p.m.)

For most of these fishermen gainful employment is suspended from about November until the following April or May because of stormy weather and ice conditions. The spring seal hunt represents for them, as it has for their forebearers for nearly three centuries, the first opportunity to work, to earn money for the necessities of life and to help prepare for a new fishing season. Many of the sealers, especially the landmen, not only derive money from the sale of pelts but also use parts of the seal as food for themselves and their families. They regard the seal herds as a particularly timely resource to be harvested as are other resources of the sea, such as cod and lobster, later in the season.

I shall not go too deeply into statistics but I think I should mention a few. In 1969, the last year for which full statistics are available, 391 fishermen on 11 large sealing vessels had average gross earnings of \$900 for