

Switzerland, 23 April 2009

Permanent Secretariat of the Committee on the Universal Declaration  
The Honourable Céline Hervieux-Payette, c.p.  
Senator – General Secretary  
Canadian Parliament  
Room 361-E, Centre Block  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A4

Honourable Senator,

Both the utilization of natural resources and international trade provide mankind with important benefits in terms of our way of life. At the same time, for various reasons, they also can lead to disagreements about how, or whether, these resources should be utilized.

After spending most of my life being involved with conservation issues, most notably as Secretary General of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) between 1982 and 1990, I know full well what emotions can be ignited on both sides of these debates. My experience is that international trade, when properly regulated and managed, can assist with wildlife conservation.

Whether the market for a product is big or small, consumers and producers benefit when it is sold and traded. Trade helps communities get the best from their resources. And trade enables consumers to make purchases that otherwise would not be available to them.

In North America, Europe and Asia, the demand for the two most important seal products – pelts and oil – supports jobs and livelihoods. In return, this trade in pelts and oil provides fishermen with direct incentives to maintain healthy seal stocks for the future. Seal populations today are at historically high levels. Scientists estimate that there are some eight million harp and hooded seals in the north Atlantic region.

Trade restrictions on seal products would hit some of the poorest members of society whilst also negatively impacting the marine ecosystem. Finding the right balance between prey and predators makes the ecosystem more productive and preserves biodiversity. Seal harvesting, based on detailed scientific assessments, protects the ecosystem. With sustainable harvests, seal products are renewable resources.

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We endorse without reservations all initiatives promoting international standards based on the principles of the conservation of the resource that will ensure an ethical trade in seal products. This is precisely the essence of the Universal Declaration on the Ethical Harvest of Seals.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Lapointe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eugène Lapointe  
President  
IWMC World Conservation Trust