



## 1. Introduction and opening remarks

M. EBNER, *President Co-ordinator* of the Intergroup, opens the meeting and welcomes all present and represented MEPs, as well as invited speakers, experts and guests. He briefly explains the current situation with all Intergroups and clarifies what might be their future. After his opening remarks he gives the chair to *Co-President* L. LEHTINEN (Finland) who first makes a brief statement of the tragic shooting event that occurred in Finland the previous day, which he feels should not be misused to push for additional restrictions on the possession of sporting firearms by hunters. He then introduces the panel of experts.

## 2. The EU position on Seals

In the absence of “Environment” Commissioner Stavros DIMAS (Greece), or anybody from his Cabinet, MEP Elisabeth JEGGLE (Germany) of the EP “Agriculture” Committee, opens the debate with the announcement that Intergroup Co-President MEP Véronique MATHIEU (France) will be the *Rapporteur* in this Committee for the Proposal from the European Commission. She then proceeds to outline past legislation on the seals issue since it first appeared some twenty years ago, stating that “*it is not new that the EP discusses this topic*”. She agrees that so far, the European Union has no competence in the area of welfare for wild animals but that they can act only to attend to distortions among Member States. She says that in the EP, they “*want to address this unbalance*”.

L. LEHTINEN then opens the floor to questions. There are none. He suggests that any questions could be asked at the end of the presentations.

Addressing the scientific and technical aspects of seal hunting in northern Europe, Dr. Torsten MÖRNER, a veterinarian specialised in wild animal welfare and President of the *Swedish Hunters’ Association*, draws attention to the significant differences between the Canadian commercial seal harvest and the small-scale Nordic seal hunting. Sweden and Finland, with their long coastline and thousands of islands, are the two EU countries where seal hunting is practised. Seal hunting is carried out by the thousands of people who live on these islands for two main reasons: cultural, as an aspect that has been sustainable for many centuries, and pest control, to reduce damages caused by seals to fishing industry, which costs Swedish taxpayers alone over 5,000,000€ in compensation. He argues that for seal hunting to be sustainable, seal products other than the skins should also be used, something that the current Proposal will destroy and lead to seals becoming seen as “*pest animals*”. As for animal welfare, he states that “it is something which has to be decided at a local level.” Some thousand seals are hunted in Sweden each year, thus the Commission’s current proposal is seen to stop seal hunting. “*Annex 2*”, he says, “*is directed towards Canada but is not helpful to Nordic countries*” and that the conditions found in Swedish archipelago is much different from that of Canada’s Labrador.

L. LEHTINEN follows up with a question of his own of what the sustainable amount would be in the case of seals. T. MÖRNER points out that for a seal population to be stabilised (e.g. in order to avoid increased damage to fisheries, etc.), the harvest should be 8 to 10% of that population. V. MATHIEU asks about more information on the financial impact, to which T. MÖRNER responds that the 5 million Euros equates to money the Swedish government has to pay out to fishermen and others to whom seals cause damage.

Speaking on behalf of the *Humane Society International*, an animal right organisation that claims to represent over 10 Million people, Rebecca ALDWORTH tries to demonstrate how the Canadian seal “hunt” is inhumane and incompatible with the principles of ethical hunting. According to her, there is no “fair chase” as the seals are too young, seals are not killed humanely and they are not fully utilised as the primary use is the fur. She stated that only an “*unconditional prohibition*” will end this seal hunt as it would eliminate all markets for products taken from seals, also because it would be impossible to certify whether products came from seals that were killed humanely.

Once L. LEHTINEN opens the floor to questions, Dr. Yves LECOCQ, FACE Secretary-General, calls attention to the fact that the conclusions of the European Food Safety Association was much more balanced in its conclusions that “*seals that are harvested in a humane way but only added that this was not always the case*”. He asks “if the conclusion of an EU body says it’s not always the case, then an unconditional prohibition as the only way forward is not proportional. He further calls on MEPs to take into account that this proposal based only on perception will lead to a slippery road and is rather unrepresentative and undemocratic. R. ALDWORTH responds that her group opposes the commercial seal hunt because it cannot be made acceptably humane. T. MÖRNER points out that in Sweden and Finland, seal hunt meet all the “ethical hunting” conditions R. ALDWORTH set out in her presentation. She remains obstinate that it does not and that they “*must agree to disagree*”. M. EBNER injects that for him, it is important to differentiate between seal hunting that occurs in Europe to that of the Canadian commercial “slaughter”, adding that “*we don’t have to mix the two things*”. L. LEHTINEN asks what the latest position of the Canadian Government is, to which R. ALDWORTH responded that the many within the Government of Canada is considering a buy-out programme of the commercial hunt but all depends on who wins the Federal election. V. MATHIEU asks how the information she has from Canadians that she has met is different in that fewer seals are killed with the *Hakapik* and more are increasingly shot by rifle, a much less cruel way to kill seals. She asks which of this two reports are more accurate? ALDWORTH responds that in her opinion, killing with rifles, in the Canadian context, is one of the most inhumane methods of killing. Max von STEYNITZ asks on what basis is R. ALDWORTH’s definition of inhumane, which she says generally entails “*rendering an animal unconscious with one blow or one bullet, without causing undo fear or distress, immediately monitoring that animal for unconsciousness, immediately bleeding out that animal and remaining with that animal throughout the entire process to ensure that the animal does not regain consciousness*”. The final question comes from MEP H  l  ne GOUDIN (Sweden) who enquires on the same fact.

Pierre de BOISGUILBERT, French Expert on animal welfare matters, looked at the broader scope of how this seal topic is the vanguard of a wider philosophical and ideological change on the behalf of increasingly “urban” society. He feels that banning seal products is the first step towards a “*meat-less and pet-less world*” where a number of factors have narrowed the gap between human and animal. He argues that animals are personified, such as referring to pup seals as “baby” seals. The last twenty-some years, was to create a guilt trop even if you are using nature sustainably. For him, “*nothing he has seen suggests that culling of seals is not anymore cruel than the killing that takes place in slaughter houses, etc,*” adding “*You cannot guarantee the instant death of an animal*”. He expanded upon the three strategies that animal rights movement, namely legislative (the passing of rules and laws), behavioural (the putting of human and animal on equal footing), and radical, which he called eco-terrorism.

He concluded by remarking, “*Why should man extract himself (from nature) and try to achieve moral perfection?*”, that humans should have the right to use animals in a reasonable way.

In his concluding remarks, L. LEHTINEN expressed the view that “*despite sometimes much polarised positions, the debate has been constructive*” but he also recognised “*that we have all been raised with Disney’s view of animals*”. M. EBNER, who was also pleased with the outcome of the meeting stressed that “*a distinction has to be made between the commercial harvest of seals that takes place outside the EU to that of small scale hunting practised in Europe*”.

<b>3. Any other business</b>
------------------------------

No other issues are raised.

<b>4. Next meeting</b>
------------------------

The next meeting of the “Sustainable Hunting” IG is scheduled for 19<sup>th</sup> November 2008. L. LEHTINEN and M. EBNER thank all guests and participants and end the meeting.

Timothy LAWRENCE  
*IG Secretariat*