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The Cape Fur Seals in Namibia - an expert

THE CAPE FUR SEAL

With reference to your conference on seals and seal culling 20th September 2011.

by Ron Thomson

INTRODUCTION

: I have been approached by several loyal and prominent Namibians to 'get involved' in the ongoing debate on seals and seal culling in Namibia. I state certain specific internationally accepted principles concerning wildlife management in general. My intentions are open and honourable - and in what I consider to be the best interests of Namibia's wildlife and its people. The question of whether Namibia should or should not continue with its seal culling programme cannot be considered in isolation of several international protocols that shape, or should shape, the principles and practices of every sovereign state's wildlife management programmes – worldwide. And here I would like to go back to the World Conservation Strategy (1980) (revised but, in principle, not changed, in 1991) – which I shall from here on refer to as WCS.

THE WORLD CONSERVATION STRATEGY (& NATIONAL CONSERVATION STRATEGIES)

The WCS is the mission statement (or principle policy) of the world's parent 'nature conservation' body, a United Nations organisation called the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). The WCS has also been referred to as "The Blue Print for the Survival of Mankind on Planet Earth". In 1980 those responsible sovereign states of the world that were members of the IUCN at that time, obligated themselves to the people of the world to model their NATIONAL Conservation Strategies (NCSs) on the WCS template. And they wrote the provisions of their NCSs into their domestic laws. The important provisions of the WCS, therefore, in various forms, were written into the legal fabrics of all these states – and, in that way, the WCS obtained its legal teeth. Of particular importance to the Cape Fur Seal management debate is what the WCS refers to as "**living resource conservation**" the three principle objectives of which are:

- (1) To maintain essential ecological processes and life support systems** (such as soil regeneration and protection, the recycling of nutrients, and the cleansing of waters) on which human survival and development depend;
- (2) To preserve genetic diversity** (the range of genetic material found in the world's organisms), on which depend the functioning of many of the above processes and life support systems, the breeding programmes necessary for the protection and improvement of cultivated plants, domesticated animals and micro-organisms, as well as much scientific and medical advance, technical innovation, and the security of many industries that use living resources: and
- (3) To ensure the sustainable utilisation of species and ecosystems** (notably fish and other wildlife, forests and grazing lands) which support millions of rural communities as well as major industries.

In essence, these three provisions represent prescriptions for man's 'use' of the earth's living resources. They tell us that if mankind wishes to survive into posterity, man must learn to live in symbiotic harmony with nature - and the key to him achieving that objective is "sustainable utilisation".

THE (SO-CALLED) GREEN MOVEMENT

The vast majority of people alive today live in the big cities of the world. They are detached from nature and do not understand how it functions. Nevertheless, they have learned to "love" nature (in a detached kind of way) and it has become 'socially correct' within most urban centres for people to support what are perceived to be "worth-while wildlife causes". This has rendered these people highly susceptible to manipulation by the propaganda of unscrupulous persons and/or organisations who

constantly plague them for financial support. The people and/or NGOs responsible for these activities are collectively called "The Green Movement" or simply "The Greenies". Many people look upon "The Greenies" as cranks and social misfits. Some of them may be that. But they are not all bad. In the First World many people are now referring to "The Green Movement" as being the biggest 'Confidence Industry' the world has ever known. Whether or not this reputation is justified, I do not know. Are the 'Greenies' as bad as they have been painted – some of them: YES! There are three elements to the Green Movement: The Environmentalists; The Animal Welfarists; and The Animal Rightists. The best way to assess the bona fides of these three groups is to evaluate them against their attitude towards the three WCS ("living resource conservation") objectives listed above – with a bit of common sense added to the mix. **The TRUE environmentalist – supports ALL three of the WCS ("living resource conservation") objectives listed above** and he fights for them all tooth and nail. Indeed, everyone alive today SHOULD be a TRUE environmentalist because to be anything else would be suicidal.

The TRUE Animal Welfarist – supports ALL three of the WCS ("living resource conservation") objectives listed above, also, but with certain provisos. He insists that when man "uses" a LIVE animal for his own benefit (such as when he ploughs a field with an ox; or when he pulls a cart with a donkey) his use of those animals should be without cruelty. He also insists that when man kills an animal to obtain benefits (such as when he slaughters an ox in an abattoir – to obtain its meat to eat) that the killing process should be humane. The TRUE animal welfarist, therefore, does NOT say that man must NOT "use" an animal to obtain benefits. He accepts the fact that man "utilises" animals to obtain benefits BUT he concentrates his energies, constructively, in making sure that man adheres to certain civilised standards in his treatment of the animals that he uses. Everybody in society, therefore, should support TRUE animal welfarism. ALL SPCA organisations, for example, SHOULD be entirely orientated towards animal welfare (but, sadly, many are more inclined towards animal rightsism today – because THAT doctrine generates more money!)

The Animal Rightist – rejects the No.3. WCS ("living resource conservation") objective listed above. Animal rightists claim that man has no right whatsoever to 'use' an animal, any animal and in any way, for his own benefit. They insist that man should only eat vegetable foods and they insist that all animals, wild and domesticated, have the 'same right to life' as has man. They also state that their biggest obstacle to the achievement of their objectives is the animal welfare movement because: it is the animal welfarists' objective to REGULATE man's use of animals (which has some measure of social acceptance); whereas it is the animal rightists objective to ABOLISH animal use.

Furthermore, by rejecting the "sustainable use" prescriptions in the WCS the animal rightists:

interfere with society's efforts to create symbiotic associations between man and the earth's living resources;

undermine, in everything they do, and at great expense, their country's efforts to achieve NCS objectives; and

undermine all wildlife management programmes that are designed to harvest abundant wildlife resources; to maintain the correct balance between the soil, the plants and the animals in national parks; and to destroy businesses that depend on the harvest of both domesticated animals and wild animals (which are living resources and which are, collectively, "products of the land" {tame & wild – respectively}).

And there is a lot more!

There are no gray areas in the animal rights philosophy. They cannot be persuaded to support arguments that favour 'change' to an animal harvest – unless that change is one step closer to abolition. Their ONLY concern is to STOP the harvest. There is no point, therefore, in trying to appeal to the animal rightists' 'realistic reasoning' in any wildlife management debate. 'Reason' is word that does not feature in their vocabulary. The animal rightist's target is ABOLITION - NOT REGULATION – and they can be satisfied ONLY by success in achieving that target.

THE AMALGAM WITHIN THE GREEN MOVEMENT.

Unfortunately, in this day and age, there is a great deal of fusion between environmentalist, animal welfarist and animal rightist NGOs. Very rarely do you, nowadays, find TRUE (public) elements of any of these ideologies. The accumulation of funds seems to be the most important criteria directing their attitudes - and in that regard the animal rightists seem to be able to generate more funds than either of the other two alliances. So elements of the animal rights ideology has crept into many environmental and animal welfare NGOs. Furthermore, many green organisations use words like "humane" and "welfare" in their titles now to hide their true identities. Don't be fooled by this duplicity.

The only way, today, to determine if a particular green NGO is animal rights orientated, or not, is simply to ask it the question: 'Do you support the concept of sustainable utilisation of living resources - as defined in the WCS's("living resource conservation") third objective?' If the NGO endorses the concept it is not animal rightist in orientation; if it rejects the concept it is animal rightist! It is as simple as that.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE DELEGATES TO THE SEAL CONFERENCE IN SEPTEMBER.

Looking through the list of delegates I can immediately identify a number of animal rightists:-

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) has been described by people who investigate the finances of such organisations, as being, perhaps, the biggest and most influential animal rights organisation in the world. Don't be fooled by the word "welfare" in their title. It is a smokescreen. IFAW is FULLY animal rightist in orientation.

The South African Seal Saving Initiative – is animal rightist in orientation

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society – is animal rightist in orientation.

The Humane Society International – is animal rightist in orientation.

The National Council of SPCA – South Africa (NSPCA) – is animal rightist in orientation.

The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) – is animal rightist in orientation.

So, of the 13 delegates listed on the programme for the Windhoek conference, six are definitely animal rights organisations who will be doing everything possible to obtain a decision that will abolish seal culling in Namibia. They will be satisfied with nothing else. And one delegation (Seals of Namibia) is suspect. There are NO public 'conservation-orientated' NGOs amongst the delegates who will support seal culling on a rational and common sense basis. So I would say the cards were stacked against the conference becoming an open expression of facts and ideas.

In this regard I wish to make a VERY BOLD statement: **There is no place in a responsible and civilised society for the animal rights ideology. And the sooner society gets to understand this, the better will it be for wildlife everywhere. ALL countries throughout the world need to get back to the common sense (rational & realistic) ideology of the WCS.**

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: SEAL CULLING IN NAMIBIA.

Several years ago I investigated and attended Namibia's on-going seal culling programme; and I attended one of the culling exercises. My conclusion: The culling exercise I witnessed was extremely well executed and very humane. I have been working in the national parks and wildlife management professions now for more than 50 years; AND I HAVE CONSIDERABLE EXPERIENCE IN THE CULLING OF WILD ANIMALS. Consequently, I wish to state that I believe the actual seal harvest (the killing of the seals) that I witnessed at Cape Cross in Namibia, could NOT have been better accomplished in any other way. I hope that this will be accepted as an experienced and qualified professional opinion. This same conclusion was also reached by an international group of veterinarians several years ago. Namibia, therefore, has nothing to be ashamed of with respect to the humane manner of its seal culling operations.

SEALS AND FISH.

Only Namibia's own wildlife management experts, and Namibia's own sea fisheries experts, can tell what impact the current seal population is having on the fish stocks, and whether or not the numbers of seals that Namibia harvest each year (with respect to the fishery), is enough; or not enough. These are the people that Namibia must listen to – NOT to a bunch of international animal rights NGOs who, to satisfy their own bizarre ideology, will not be satisfied with anything other than the total abolition of the seal harvest.

SEALS AND PENGUINS

The relationship between seals and penguins is a subject that needs to be properly investigated by open-minded scientists – which are becoming very hard to find in some quarters today! The history of seal harvests from Europe during the 19th century left the southern African seal population, by 1900, in tatters. Seals became so few in number that it became sub-economic to send even a single ship out from Europe to harvest seals on the southern African coastlines.

The penguins, on the other hand, thrived in the cold waters of southern Africa when the seals had been all but exterminated. In 1900 there were an estimated 300 000 breeding pairs of penguins on Dassen Island (near Cape Town) alone – and, together with the non-breeding birds present, that island was said to be then carrying one million penguins. Boats went out on a daily basis to Dassen Island (during the penguin breeding season) and to harvest fresh penguin eggs for human consumption. They were sold to the public in Cape Town's Fresh Produce Market.

Today, through protective legislation, the seals have recovered. I understand that in Namibia alone they now number, conservatively, some 800 000 (and that this population now supports a sustainable harvest of more than 10 per cent per annum). During the period of the seals' expansion, the penguins have been concomitantly reduced to an estimated 50 000 breeding pairs (TOTAL – throughout their entire range in southern Africa). Furthermore they are very susceptible to oil spills in the Cape's now very busy sea lanes. In fact, one or two major oil spills could see their demise.

The seals - over the last hundred years - have taken over many of the penguins' former breeding islands, they regularly now prey on young penguins the moment they take their first swim on open waters, and they compete with penguins for the same

food resource.

There appears to be a distinct relationship, therefore, between the numbers of seals and the numbers of penguins. When the seal numbers are low, the penguins thrive; and when the seals multiply without control, the penguins decline. This is a critical observation!

To save the penguins perhaps the best thing to do would be to (first action) cut the seal population in half; and maybe to even reduce it still further later. Man, I believe, will have to intervene here to create the kind of balance between the seals and the penguins that he deems desirable. This is called "tough love" management. If he doesn't do this, and the seals proliferate any more than they have already done, we may just cause the extinction of our local penguin. And that might be the penguins' probable fate if Namibia stops seal culling.

It is paradoxical, therefore, that the animal rightists now want the culling of the seals to stop; yet they are continually asking the public for more and more money to "save the penguins". Money talks!

WHEN will commons sense prevail?

ANIMAL RIGHTS AND TERRORISM.

The Oxford dictionary defines a terrorist as being: "**Anyone who attempts to further his views by a system of coercive intimidation.**" Bear this in mind.

In the early 1980s, when South Africa was considering re-introducing the culling of seals on the South African coastline, animal rights groups told the South African government that IF it dared to resume seal culling, they would institute an international ban on South Africa's sea fishery products. The government capitulated. All seal culling came to an end!

In the 1990s, and early in the first decade of the 21st Century, animal rights groups threatened to institute a boycott of international tourism to South Africa IF the government ever re-instated elephant culling in Kruger National Park. The government was thus 'persuaded' not to resume elephant culling.

Both these threats were, by definition, acts of terrorism perpetrated by ordinary run-of-the-mill animal rights activists in South Africa. And, may I say, the more society accepts these kinds of insults without retaliation, the deeper are we all going to sink into the mire.

In America today the animal rightist and environmental movements have two (what have been described as) 'military wings'. They are the clandestine Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the clandestine Earth Liberation Front (ELF). Between 1996 and 2002 hundreds of "coercive" attacks (mainly arson) by these two groups, hit at businesses that used animals or the environment for profit, and of which they disapproved. Their stated objective was to make these businesses 'unprofitable'. During that short period of time they caused US\$43 million in damages. Both these organisations are now officially listed by the American FBI as "domestic terrorist organisations". We don't want this kind of thing to happen in southern Africa - which many 'green' activists in the First World now see as "fertile ground".

NAMIBIA'S CHOICES.

It would seem to me that Namibia has one of two choices. It can either capitulate – as South Africa has done in the past – and give these animal rights groups what they want. That, however, would be tantamount to succumbing to anarchy. Alternatively, it can do what is right and proper. Namibia can proudly "stand its ground". Instead of listening to these animal rights NGOs - who have only one thing in mind - Namibia can listen to its **own** scientists and to its **own** wildlife managers; and do what is best for Namibia, what is best for Namibia's people and what is best for Namibia's wildlife – **as may be determined by responsible, civilised and knowledgeable Namibians.**

If Namibia does what is right, it will discover that an awful lot of people around the world will approve of her actions. It is about time that responsible people in the world took a stance against these "green" extremists. Why should Namibia not proudly take the lead in this regard?

If Namibia succumbs under animal rightist pressure, rest assured you will find that the seal question is just the first of many other environmental 'issues' these misguided people will be fighting on your soil. The animal rightists take issues, one at a time, and they knock them down one at a time. They consider that each issue is a domino which they know will fall most easily when it is isolated and stands alone, and when the opposition to its destruction is poor.

Don't let this happen in Namibia! PLEASE!

Ron Thomson

BRIEF CURRICULUM VITAE:

I grew up in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) where I served for 24 years with the government Department of National Parks & Wildlife Management. I rose through the ranks from Cadet Game Ranger to the Provincial Game Warden-in-charge of Hwange National Park – the country's premier national park – and one of the biggest and most prestigious game reserves in Africa. During my service I qualified as an ecologist and was registered as a Chartered Biologist with the European Union for 20 years. I have huge experience in big game management (especially elephant and black rhino). I pioneered the modern capture of black rhinos in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.

In 1983 I emigrated to South Africa where I took up the post of Chief Nature Conservation Officer for Ciskei (1 year); and Director of the Bophuthatswana National Parks & Wildlife Management Board (3 years). I then operated as a professional hunter for three years. For the past 20 years I have devoted my time to researching controversial wildlife management issues, writing magazine articles on my findings, and writing books. I have written and published eight books to date – most with the purpose of “creating a better informed public” (better informed, that is, about the principles and practices of wildlife management). Several universities in South Africa use my written works as “prescribed reading” for their wildlife management students.

Altogether I have had 52 years of hands-on experience in wildlife management affairs in Africa.