


The great decline



Leila Beaudoin

Published on February 13, 2012

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Post Seal Fur Ribbons on Parliament Hill and the suggestion of some, that it may be time to say good bye - of the Canadian seal hunt?

On Feb. 2, a group of sealers from Port Saunders and Port Au Choix got together to discuss the Seal Industry. It was the same group that wore seal fur ribbons to show their support for the troubled industry. It was a week after New Democrat MP, Ryan Cleary, suggested a ban on the seal hunt. Has the century old hunt reached its dying days? Reporter Leila Beaudoin sat down with men. The following is the transcript of the questions surrounding the seal hunt.

Topics : [Sealers Association](#) , [Canadian Seal Association](#) , [Discovery Channel](#) , [Canada](#) , [Atlantic Ocean](#) , [Ottawa](#)

Q: There are nine million seals right now. If the industry does end, what do you see happening with the seals?

Conway Caines: I don't know, but it's going to be devastating. Especially on this coast, when the ice and cod fish cod fish, crab, lobsters; everything.

James Dobbin: I mean seals are real scavengers. It's making a big difference in the fishery. We had a cod fishery here for three years and it's not coming back on the count of the seals! There's no fishery going on, so it's got to be the seals.

They just don't care [anti-seal hunt groups]. I mean IFAW using pictures they took twenty five years ago of white coats. It's a big difference. They're showing lies and defaming the sealers. Everybody went through training to become professional :

Q: What kind of training?

James Dobbin: We've had the fisheries and the scientist come in and give us a three step killing program: how to hunt seal groups coming and doing what they like. For years we were told they weren't allowed within half a mile of the herd when they're in and flying right over em. They're out amongst the herd when they're pupping; they're destroying more seals than they're saving.

Q: How do seal numbers impact the rest of ocean life?

James Dobbin: It eats everything! Everything we catch. We are people, and we live up here in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, for a codfish, to put on our plate.

**insert James Dobbin picture here

Q: Do you think MP's wearing seal fur ribbons today in Ottawa, will help the Seal Industry?

Donald Spence: It isn't too late, if the government would try and do something. Try to help the sealers. I mean it's not to keep them under control. There are a dozen things they can do: put out subsidies, support companies so they can brain storming and come up with some ideas.

Q: As someone who knows this product, what would you suggest government do to make seal marketable

James Dobbin: Work harder to gain Chinese markets. They will use the meat, the pelts and the fat. Every part of the

**insert seal boot picture here

Q: Do you think seal could be marketable here in Canada?

James Dobbin: Yes. Before, in Fleur de Lys, they made salami, and different stuff with seal meat. They had lots of pr
Some people just didn't like the look of the meat; it's dark meat. And with animal rights putting the pressure on, big stc

They had a couple tractor trailer loads of sausage, sent it to Ontario, and they loved it there. We should have been t
let it go. Besides that, the Federal government wouldn't help much.

You know, the seal hunt was gone one time before and the Canadian Seal Association revived it.

**Q: You said "they didn't like the way the meat looked." It seems this battle has always been about the way th
feel?**

James Dobbin: It's just animal rights came up with that cute and cuddly stuff. Not us. "When we look at a seal we see
a big part of our livelihood. As we sit here right now, it is dying underneath our feet along with the rest of the fishery.
port Newfoundland. They're cutting the fisheries right to the bone. This year our turbot fishery is caught back to a five
twenty-four hour fishery! It's not in days anymore, it's in hours. We got about four days fishing comin' up to make a li
gone? That was one of our main starts for the spring of the year.

Q: What is the biggest problem the sealing in industry is facing right now?

Everyone: the markets

Q: Would you argue that if it weren't for negative imagery, seal would still be a marketable product?

Dean Offrey: Yes. It [imagery] is what turned away the markets. They all gave up, because it was a bad name, they v
Look at what they did to Canada; they weren't going to buy other products if it was associated with seal. It's blackma

Q: Do you think the damage can be undone?

Dean Offrey: It's never too late. There will always be someone who wants it [seal].

Clifford Dobbin: They did before. They got the markets back. We couldn't sell em [seals] for a couple of years and th
dollars. It is possible to turn it right around again. And with the government's help we can do it.

Q: When you say "with the government's help" do you mean provincial, federal?

Clifford Dobbin: All levels of government.

Q: Who is the voice of the fishermen right now?

Clifford Dobbin: The Canadian Sealers Association. It's the only voice we've got.

Q: Who is responsible for the bleak state of the industry?

James Dobbin: Government. They let em in, to the killing fields. That's where the bad imagery came from. We've bee
them not to give them the permits to go out there. But the government kept issuing it, saying "we've got nothing to hic
kept letting em go until they stopped the seal hunt."

Q: Are you angry?

James Dobbin: Yes. This would not have happened nowhere else in the world, only here in Canada. No where's else up with what we've put up with over the years. Out trying to hunt and helicopters flying around, down in ya workplace the government giving em permission to do it.

Maybe the sealers should have taken it into their own hands and drove em out ourselves. But we couldn't because w

Q: Why haven't the sealers been more vocal?

Clifford Dobbin: We should have been. We should have been rioting, demonstrating. I mean we've seen green peace Do what you got to do, close down government buildings; we've got to do it. We've don't it for other fisheries, so why

Q: But is it too late?

Clifford Dobbin: In my mind it is never too late. As long as it's still open and it's a viable industry than we can still do i

*When we look at
the seal we see
money.*

- James Dobbin

We've been too quiet. We sit back and take it. We've always expected our union but in reality it never happens."

Donald Spence: That's the problem, unions and government. The union and gove crap. We get bullied into it. At the end of the day every fishery we're into... the ur do for you. You stay here and we will report back to you."

What have they [Fishermen's Union] accomplished? Nothing, as far as I am con

If we don't step up, nothing will be done. Like you [Clifford Dobbin] said about Green Peace, they can go spray paint, any worse than that? I mean we're sensible people compared to them.

You know I'm here trying' to make a living', killing a few seals to support my family. Take Green Peace, or anyone wh put him in my shoes for one full year, when the spring rolls around next year he will be waiting on the deck of my boat sealing.

Sealing makes me a little bit of money for me to get going. When you're talking a four day fishery? I mean get real, g situation we are into.

Q: IFAW has argued the amount of money sealers make is not enough to sustain the industry, what do you

Donald Spence: It [money from hunt] supports our family and our crew. We're pretty much all family in these rural cor through this seal hunt. And, they are regulating us to death. I'm out with a boat and there's a helicopter watching me, Honestly, I don't know what to do half the time. When I go out sealing, it's worth your while to go out in my boat and s through. You've got to have fifteen years college to get through the papers to read them, the way they are worded ou

Q: Do you think the paper work you go through compares to other forms of animal husbandry?

Donald Spence: No. Watch the Discovery Channel, the Swamp Show. What are they doing there? They're coming up on white ice.

Clifford Dobbin: One of our main reasons, here in Newfoundland, why we [fishermen] haven't fought as hard as we c cooperated themselves - might as well just say it. I mean the Canadians Sealers Association is here representing si organization going that's supposed to be self-sustainable and we've got four hundred or so registered - that's how m

Twenty-five dollars a year, same as a case of beer and we can't get nobody to pay up. It's only four hundred and sev ones every year.

We can't get any cooperation from the sealers. The Canadian Sealers Association needs to be able to stand on thei markets going. There's different stuff they can do yet.

Q: If more sealers were paying into the Sealers Association would things be different?

James Dobbin: Yes. They sealers who want to go to the ice should be paying that twenty-five dollars a year. They w Europeans [after the European Union banned seal product, Canada was going to fight the case as discriminatory]. C be a plaintiff, but we never even had enough money to send anyone.

Q: Why were there only two hundred and twenty five men out on the ice last year?

James Dobbin: Because the price for seals was so low. And the companies had control of the seal hunt. They select

Q: Is that fair?

James Dobbin: No, it wasn't fair. If there's ten seals out there to be gotten than everybody should get to go out until t that been sealing for forty years, who last year had to set in on the wharf and watch fellars going out sealing.

Q: Some say the 225 number is a sign the industry is dying. But you're saying the number is just proof of ho become?

Conway Caines: To go out you need fuel, motors, food, and flairs. To go out and only end up with only three or four o [company owned boats] were ahead of you for three or four days; you got stuck in the ice and they got into the seals none, two or three seals and a backload of expense... That's why a lot of boats didn't go.

Clifford Dobbin: We've lost thousands and thousands of dollars to the seal hunt. I've been at this now for thirty-eight out of it. I don't know.

Last year was bad year for the Gulf. Early April, the ice went out through. We chased the ice so far out the line, out t allowed to go in further. We're Canadians but we weren't allowed to go past Cape Isle, that's it, we had to turn around

Q: There's been talk of a buy back. What do you think of that?

Silence.

We don't want one.

Clifford Dobbin: Create a cull. A cull would make more sense. Never mind a buy back. They're eating everything, the see it in all the fisheries. Just do the math, the population is exploding.

Conway Caines: I don't want to hear of a buy back. They going to buy my heritage from me? Try and buy back a Firs They'll tell you to come somewhere else. Buy Back. It's a joke.

Q: If next week the sealing industry was over, how would you feel?

James Dobbin: It's too hurtful to event talk about. But we will continue on, we will be like good soldiers, we will march

Q: One fisherman I spoke to earlier said he may have to move to Alberta, would you ever leave?

James Dobbin: The thought has crossed our minds already. If gets any worst, we will have no other choice.

What about your children?

James Dobbin: They're already up there [Alberta].

Most of the men said regardless they will go sealing this year. Even if like last year they lose money, it's about the pr

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