

## National Post

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# On with the hunt!



Rex Murphy: "I don't think there has ever been this many seals off Newfoundland and Labrador, which ought to make some people ashamed of their eternal Save the Seals campaigns."

Paul Darrow, Reuters

Rex Murphy, National Post · Jan. 28, 2012 | Last Updated: Jan. 28, 2012 4:24 AM ET

Pity the poor Newfoundlander: His province is now under siege by land and by sea.

I've written here before about the lumbering peril on the roads down in Newfoundland. Driving around the island can be something like a UFC fight between man and moose. Between the small second-hand car - a favourite mode of travel back home on The Rock - and the hairy mastodon (that would be the moose), there is no competition really.

On land, the moose are rampant. It is not safe to go out to the clothesline anymore, for fear of running into a moose or, more likely, a pack of the them - all antlers and dumb stares. Won't be too long before they give up the woods and the boglands altogether as being too tangled or fetid for their delicate sensibilities, and start to put full roots down in the towns and villages.

It's worse off-shore, except of course there's none of us humans living in the ocean. But even if we wanted to - there's no damn room. By some estimates, there are now 12-or 13-million rapacious seals slithering underwater all around the island - sucking up every piece of protein the sea has to offer, including of course the king of all food fish, the cod.

What, after all, is a seal? It is a set of the sharpest teeth entirely surrounded by hydrodynamic blubber - an eating machine.

I don't think there has ever been this many seals off Newfoundland and Labrador, which ought to make some people ashamed of their eternal Save the Seals campaigns. These creatures were never in danger.

And now to top it off, the seals have a new defender - and he is not only a Newfoundlander, he is a Member of Parliament.

Ryan Cleary, NDP, says it's time to give up on the historic hunt for seals, even the piddling little token effort we now carry on in these, the latter days of that great enterprise. He says, if I may distill his argument, the hunt is not worth the sweat it causes us - the potential loss of markets for other products, the hassle from sour-faced enviros, and our "bad reputation" among some purehearts abroad.

Let me state that I admire Mr. Cleary for taking the stand he has. Seriously. He knows his position is unpopular (and that's a mild description of the response in some quarters to it). For his forthrightness and political courage, he deserves praise.

I can't oblige him on the main point, though. We should not stop the seal hunt, even if we were only to take a token dozen per year. We should not stop something we have been doing because outsiders - those who have no connection to Newfoundland, or to the seal hunt, and who have been telling wildly overheated fables about it for decades - tell us to stop it. To hell with them.

The hunt is legitimate. It is no more cruel or messy than many other types of animal slaughter. It is honest work. It produces useful and in some cases beautiful products. And shutting it down because Mr. Cleary and others do not like the sound of busybodies tut-tutting in the salons of the European Union, or deploring our "barbarous" ways, is the purest weakness and servility.

As long as one Newfoundlander wants to harvest one seal, to make a flipper pie, or to use the pelt to make one of those splendid sealskin hats - on with the Hunt!

Doing otherwise would be a surrender of our character as Newfoundlanders, and an apology for the rigorous and demanding way of life we have known, and which has earned us tenure here for half a millennium.

Meantime, the increasingly beleaguered humankind out here on the edge of the world, overrun on land and sea, stare down at hard times ahead. Are we to become MooseLand or Seal-A-Topia? - a kind of Disneyland of the Maritimes? Skirmishes over seals or moose earn a lot more thought than any consideration of the needed renovation and renewal of an entire province drifting away from its historic sense of itself.

Rex Murphy offers commentary weekly on CBC TV's The National, and is host of CBC Radio's Cross Country Checkup.

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