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NDP MP touches off firestorm by suggesting the seal hunt has had its day

Article

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Richard J. Brennan
 National Affairs Writer

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A Newfoundland NDP MP has touched off a powder keg in the province by suggesting that the time has come for the controversial seal hunt to end.

MP Ryan Cleary (St. John's South-Mount Pearl) told [CBC's Fisheries Broadcast](#) that international condemnation of the hunt and the fact that it's only a million dollar industry now makes one wonder if it's worth it anymore.

"The day of the seal hunt may be nearing an end. Part of our history is also whaling ... and the day came when the whaling industry stopped. Now is that day coming with the seal hunt?"

It just may be,” said the MP, who was elected to Parliament less than a year ago.

Cleary, who could not be reached for comment by the *Star*, told the CBC that he has seen personally how much European Union delegates oppose the seal hunt. “They are absolutely vehement in how they will never ever support the seal hunt ... and you got to question at some point is this a battle that we can win,” he said.

Jim Bennett, provincial Liberal fisheries critic, told the *Toronto Star* Wednesday that Cleary’s comments are the source of angry calls into a radio talk show.

“It is not going over at all well here ... it’s a real firestorm,” said the Member of the House of Assembly (MHA) for St. Barbe.

The provincial Liberals have called on both elected federal NDP members from across the country and provincial members from Labrador and Newfoundland to publicly state their position on the seal hunt.

“We just want to know where they stand,” said Bennett, who suggested that Cleary might have fallen victim to the “rarefied air” in Ottawa since being elected.

Frank Pinhorn, executive director of the Canadian Sealers Association, told the *Star* that what Cleary has said “is an insult to everyone here on this island who depends upon the ocean for a living ... and he’s fallen right into the laps of animal rights groups.”

“And it gives the impression in the European Community and different parts of the world that the Canadian government (supports a ban on the seal hunt).”

The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) put a story up on its website with the headline “MP: Seal Slaughter’s Days May be Numbered.”

Pinhorn said Cleary’s statement that the industry only made \$1 million last year is taken out of context, and added that sealing can’t be compared to whaling because seals are not a species under threat as whales were.

“If you go back to 2006 the industry was worth \$35 million,” he said, noting that the recent recession took a bite out of the seal hunt as it did every other industry in North America. “And we haven’t recovered from that,” he said.

Pinhorn said there are 11,000 sealers down the coast who depend on sealing in one way or another for their livelihood. “It’s like telling the prairie farmers that you can’t farm the land,” he said.

According to Pinhorn, there are an estimated 9 million Harp seal off the coast of Newfoundland, which he says is a doubling of the population since 2005.

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The NDP issued a statement Wednesday maintaining its support for humane, market driven and sustainable commercial seal harvest.

“We also strongly defend the rights of the Inuit to engage in their traditional and commercial seal harvest. And as the industry faces challenges and changes, we must all be focused on working together with those who rely on the seal harvest for their livelihoods to address these very real challenges,” the party stated.

And the NDP said Cleary was just doing his job as an MP by raising important issues about the future of this industry.

“Taking these comments out of context in order to play cynical political games does a disservice to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and everyone involved in this industry.”

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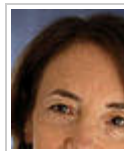
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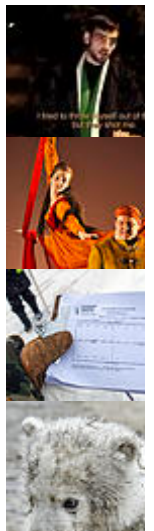


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