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**In alliance with:** Environment Voters, Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), Animal Alliance of Canada, Animal Protection Institute, Canadian Alliance for Furbearing Animals, World Society for the Protection of Animals, Zoocheck Canada; Respect for Animals, RSPCA, MSPCA, Born Free, Vancouver Humane Society, Nova Scotia Humane Society, and the ASPCA.

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Embargoed until 0600 h Atlantic Daylight Time, 26 May 2005**

### **World Wildlife Fund Canada Seal Meeting Called a Whitewash**

(Toronto, 26 May 2005) – A number of the world’s largest animal welfare organizations are condemning a meeting funded by World Wildlife Fund-Canada (WWF-Canada), and being held in collaboration with the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) in Halifax, beginning this morning.

In a letter sent earlier this week to veterinarians invited to participate in the meeting (see Attachment 1), fourteen animal welfare groups charged that the purpose of the meeting is not “to objectively assess hunting practices with respect to the Canadian harp seal population” - as stated in a draft agenda leaked to one of the groups earlier this month - but rather to whitewash the cruelty concerns associated with Canada’s commercial seal hunt.

The *Ad Hoc Meeting of Veterinarians to Assess Humane Practices of the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt* runs from 26 - 28 May at the Casino Nova Scotia Hotel in Halifax (see Attachment 2). The participants will hear presentations from a number of DFO employees, and the sealing industry. No animal welfare organizations or their staff veterinarians have been invited to participate.

Dr. David Lavigne, Science Advisor to the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) said, “There is nothing that this group of veterinarians will be able to tell WWF and DFO about killing seals that they don’t already know. Meetings of ‘experts’ such as this have been orchestrated by the Canadian government for decades. History tells us that the veterinarians are being exploited for their propaganda value by DFO. I am surprised that WWF-Canada is risking its scientific credibility by helping them in this way.”

Liz White, Director of the Animal Alliance of Canada, said, “This meeting is a gross violation of WWF – Canada’s published code of *Advocacy with Excellence*. WWF claims it is non-ideological, yet only seal hunt proponents will be giving information to the veterinarians. WWF claims it bases its advocacy on the best scientific advice available, yet they’ve excluded those with the best knowledge of humane hunting practices. WWF says it recognizes that issues have a wide range of stakeholders, yet it

is keeping out groups who represent the majority opinion on the cruelty of the seal hunt. WWF says it stays within its area of expertise, yet it is sponsoring a meeting on an issue that it has ignored in the past, an issue in which it has no expertise or experience. Why is WWF-Canada sponsoring an event whose obvious political purpose is to whitewash the seal hunt?"

Rebecca Aldworth, Director of Canadian Wildlife Issues for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) said, "It is inexcusable for the WWF-Canada to sponsor a meeting on humane aspects of the commercial seal hunt with the very government department tasked with promoting and defending the sealing industry. For them to neglect to involve the very people who have most consistently documented and observed the seal hunt over the past decade shows a clear bias. If they hope to become a credible voice for conservation, WWF-Canada has no choice but to withdraw its sponsorship from this politically-motivated meeting."

– 30 –

For further information, contact:

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**Note to Editors:** IFAW video and stills available through **Chris Cutter** ([ccutter@ifaw.org](mailto:ccutter@ifaw.org));  
HSUS video and stills available at <ftp://hsus3.org> (Username: hsusftp; Password: RxmtYUJ8)

## Attachment 1

24 May 2005

Invited participants

*Ad Hoc Meeting of Veterinarians to Assess Humane Practices of the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt, 26-28 May 2005,*  
Casino Nova Scotia Hotel, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Dear Participant:

You have been invited to a meeting to discuss one of the most important and contentious issues surrounding Canada's commercial seal hunt. This meeting is being funded by World Wildlife Fund Canada (WWF), in collaboration with the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO).

WWF is NOT an animal welfare organization and, historically, has refused to concern itself with the humane aspects of this or any other hunt. DFO is the major proponent of the Canadian seal hunt.

It should strike you as unusual that animal welfare organizations – including those that regularly observe the hunt, document annually the “humane practices” associated with it, and publish reports (including veterinary reports) on the killing methods – have not been invited to attend. Nor have their staff veterinarians. Neither the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) – the only NGO to have observed and documented the hunt annually in recent years – nor the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) – which observed and videotaped this year's hunt – have been asked for permission to use archival video documentation or to submit more recent documentation to the meeting. All of which leads us to ask if the purpose of the meeting were to “objectively assess hunting practices,” what information would be available for the meeting participants to examine?

The information provided to this particular meeting (Day1) will come from:

1. the Canadian Department of Fisheries, whose distribution of misinformation about all aspects of the seal hunt (including humane killing) to the media and the public is widely known and documented, even in the academic literature;
2. the Canadian sealing industry.

Both these sources have vested interests in promoting and expanding the seal hunt. No presentations from animal welfare experts are apparently planned.

It is clear that this meeting has been called to fulfill some other purpose, and that purpose, history tells us, is political. Gatherings such as this have long been part of the Canadian government's strategy to promote and justify the sealing industry at home and abroad using propaganda putatively based on expert advice.

The DFO has been managing the humaneness of killing seals since the late 1960s and has shelves of reports and studies prepared not only by veterinarians, but also animal welfare experts. If there are any gaps left in the DFO's knowledge of the humane killing of harp seals, convening a meeting of politically selected veterinarians from at least four countries – most of whom have not observed the seal hunt firsthand – would certainly not be the most efficient nor effective means of filling them. Furthermore, you cannot “objectively assess [current] hunting practices” with the biased, incomplete, and dated information that you are being provided with.

In conclusion, this meeting is about “whitewashing” the cruelty concerns associated with Canada’s seal hunt. It was Monte Hummel, then President of WWF Canada, who proposed in a letter to Canada’s Fisheries Minister, The Hon. Geoff Regan, dated 16 April 2004, that:

“Collectively, we (WWF and DFO) need a better story to tell regarding the humaneness of the seal hunt...”

Rest assured, your credentials and your participation in this meeting will be exploited by WWF and DFO to create that story.

Yours sincerely,

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**Additional sign on: 25 May 2005**

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**Attachment 2**

# **AD HOC MEETING OF VETERINARIANS TO ASSESS HUMANE PRACTICES OF THE CANADIAN HARP SEAL HUNT**

**May 26-28, 2005**

**Casino Nova Scotia Hotel, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada**

## **Purpose**

To objectively assess hunting practices with respect to the Canadian harp seal population to: 1. ensure that current practices minimize or eliminate animal suffering; 2. ensure that available knowledge is sufficient to provide a valid quantitative assessment of hunting practices; and 3. provide recommendations for changes in practices or assessment methodology, if required.

## **Rationale**

To inform the humane debate on the annual Canadian harp seal hunt, an independent panel of veterinarians will meet to assess the treatment of seals during the course of the hunt, including the manner in which seals are hunted. While there is no expectation that this group of individuals or any other meeting will eliminate the controversy around the hunt, there is a clear need for objectivity in the assessment of animal suffering and the regulations governing the management of the Canadian harp seal hunt.

The current 2003-2005 three-year management plan has expired and new advice on all aspects of the Canadian harp seal hunt should be available to inform future management plans (required early in 2006), regulations and codes of practice.

## **Agenda (all three days of the meeting will be facilitated and notes will be taken):**

On the first day of the meeting, an information session will focus on those aspects of the hunt that might be relevant to humane issues. The purpose of this session is to inform the veterinary panel on a range of issues and practices through discussions with others involved with the seal hunt, including sealers as well as managers and scientists from the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The broader perspective of management, including quota setting, will be discussed as it pertains to humane issues. The next two days will be devoted to a discussion of all aspects of the hunt within the veterinary group.

Throughout this three-day meeting, a clear understanding of the following questions should be sought: What are the methods used? Are there other methods that could be used? Can each method be assessed in terms of animal welfare (time to death, etc.)? What are the enforcement and compliance issues? What are the relevant knowledge and data gaps? Information on acceptable methods of euthanasia for other mammalian species (domestic and wild) will be pertinent to this discussion.

## Day 1

A number of informal presentations will be interspersed with discussions:

- The population biology of harp seals (whelping and nursing period; early pup growth and behaviour; migratory movements by young and adults; movements of animals between the Gulf and the Front and between the western Atlantic population and eastern populations) (M. Hammill or G. Stenson)
- Distribution of quotas, e.g. by region versus by vessel; currently a very competitive hunt may increase violations (K. Jones, R. Simon)
- Existing methodology of the hunt, including regulations and the reality in the field (K. Jones, R. Simon, J-C Lapierre, M. Small)
- The magnitude of violations, enforcement, how this is assessed, and whether this is well assessed (K. Jones, R. Simon)
- Industry: past, present and future (P. Lamoureux, J-C Lapierre, M. Small)
- Contentious issues pertaining to the assessment of the human treatment of seals (e.g. definition of unconsciousness and death, use of the hakapik, swimming reflex) (P-Y Daoust)

## Days 2 and 3:

The discussion of existing hunting methodologies on the first day will inform the veterinary assessment of those methodologies. To set the stage for discussions for these two days of the meeting, there should be a review (including videotape) of observations from previous studies (Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, International Fund for Animal Welfare). Some of this information will be circulated in a background package prior to the meeting.

## **Outcomes:**

- 1) A credible statement on the humane aspects of the Canadian harp seal hunt (a statement of current understanding, including methods used in the hunt and differences among the hunting areas - both the methods themselves and information on their humaneness).
- 2) Recommendations on:
  - o Preferred (or ranked) methods of hunt.
  - o Methodology for assessment of criteria and evaluation (including information on levels of precision, sample size, field conditions).
  - o Observations necessary to answer key questions during the 2006 sealing season.
- 1) Next steps for the working group

## Attendees:

Days 1 – 3: The following veterinarians have been invited as independent participants; their comments and position will not represent that of the institution with which they are affiliated.

- Charles Caraguel, DVM 2003, École Nationale Vétérinaire de Toulouse, France; currently, Master of Science graduate student (molecular parasitology of aquatic animals), Department of Pathology and Microbiology, Atlantic Veterinary College (AVC), University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI)
- Alice Crook, Coordinator, Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre, AVC, UPEI; member of the Animal Welfare Committee of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), co-author of the article “Animal welfare and the harp seal hunt in Atlantic Canada” (Canadian Veterinary Journal, 2002)
- Pierre-Yves Daoust, professor of anatomic pathology and wildlife pathology, AVC, UPEI; senior author of the article “Animal welfare and the harp seal hunt in Atlantic Canada” (Canadian Veterinary Journal, 2002)
- Larry Dunn, Department of Research and Veterinary Services, Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration, Mystic, Connecticut, USA
- Stéphane Lair, assistant professor of zoological medicine, Faculté de médecine vétérinaire, Université de Montréal (not available for the meeting)
- Alan Longair, companion animal practitioner, British Columbia; past chair of the Animal Welfare Committee of the CVMA, member of the international veterinary panel commissioned by the International Fund for Animal Welfare to observe the hunt in 2001
- Joost Philippa, Institute of Virology, Erasmus Medical Centre, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Andrew Routh, Senior Veterinary Officer, Veterinary Department, Zoological Society of London, United Kingdom
- Allison Tuttle, DVM 2002, North Carolina State University, USA; currently, resident in Zoological Medicine (with Aquatics focus), North Carolina State University

Robert Rangeley, Marine Program Director, Atlantic region, World Wildlife Fund – Canada, will also attend the three-day meeting.

Day 1 information session only:

- Ken Jones, Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)-Management, Ottawa
- Roger Simon, DFO-Management, Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Québec
- Jerry Conway, DFO-Management, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- Mike Hammill, DFO-Science, Québec, or Garry Stenson, DFO-Science, Newfoundland
- Paul Lamoureux, biologist; coordinator of the “Table filière loup-marin inc.”, a former Sealers’ Association in les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Québec
- Mike Warren, Province of Newfoundland & Labrador
- Mark Small, sealer; former president of the Northeast Coast Sealers Co-op, Newfoundland
- Jean-Claude Lapierre, sealer; president, “Association des chasseurs des Îles”, les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Québec