

# Seal hunt in Senate's crosshairs

May 3, 2012 - 4:41am BY PAUL MCLEOD OTTAWA BUREAU

## Bill means issue will be debated in upper house



A fisherman surveys one seal while another is hauled in during a hunt on Hay Island, off Cape Breton in 2007. (TERRA CAMUS)

A bill to abolish the seal hunt has made it to the floor of Parliament for the first time in Canada's history.

Until Wednesday, Liberal Sen. Mac Harb was the only parliamentarian to publicly support ending the hunt.

Harb had already tried to put forward a bill to kill the seal hunt twice, in 2009 and 2010. Both times the bills died before they were even debated because not a single senator would second the bills.

Back in 2009, his Liberal colleague, Sen. Larry Campbell, kept shooting Harb a certain hand gesture as he walked by. Campbell would circle his finger beside his head.

But on Wednesday, it was Campbell, the former mayor of Vancouver and the inspiration for the CBC-TV show *Da Vinci's Inquest*, who seconded the historic bill.

"I've given him other signs with my fingers. The crazy in the head isn't the worst one," Campbell joked afterward in an interview.

He said he still supports the seal hunt but decided it was time to have a real debate on the issue.

“It wasn’t so much a change of mind as it was the fact that this bill should be debated. There’s no question that there’s interest nationally and internationally.”

Campbell said he thinks the Senate is just the place for that to happen. The bill will likely be debated for several days, and if it is sent to committee, witnesses will be called to testify.

Public discourse on the issue has devolved into two sides yelling at each other, he said.

“It’s turned into a public relations endeavour for perhaps both sides, but certainly on the part of the people who say that we’re barbaric.”

The coming days of debate will reveal whether any senators have joined Harb in opposing the hunt. But such a position remains borderline sacrilegious in the halls of Parliament, and the bill stands virtually no chance of passing through the Senate, let alone the House of Commons.

But the bill is another hint that the days of unwavering loyalty to the seal hunt are coming to an end. It’s not a moral turnaround, but an economic one.

Earlier this year, Ryan Cleary, an NDP MP from the St. John’s, N.L., area, said it was time to consider ending the hunt.

Cleary reaffirmed his support for the hunt after being raked over the coals by Conservative and Liberal MPs, but his point was that the market for seal products has disappeared.

The seal hunt quota stayed the same at 400,000 animals this year, but only one-tenth that number are actually killed. The size of the hunt has dwindled by about 90 per cent since 2004.

In 2004, there were \$12.8 million worth of seal products exported. By 2010, the last year for which data is available, the value was only \$2.2 million.

Anti-sealing activists fought for and won bans on harp seal pelts in the European Union and then Russia, shutting sealers out of their two largest markets.

[\(pmcleod@herald.ca\)](mailto:pmcleod@herald.ca)

---

**About the Author »**



[http://thechronicleherald.ca\(/author/paul-mcleod-ottawa-bureau\)](http://thechronicleherald.ca(/author/paul-mcleod-ottawa-bureau))

**By PAUL McLEOD Ottawa Bureau**