News Release

US proposal to list arctic seals as endangered is senseless and misguided

IQALUIT, Nunavut (December 9, 2010) The Government of Nunavut today condemned a recent proposal released by the US government to list several Arctic subspecies of seal as threatened under their *Endangered Species Act.*

The US National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has proposed to list two populations of bearded seal, and four subspecies of ringed seal, including a subspecies that is found throughout Nunavut waters. The proposal is based on the speculation that these seals are likely to become endangered in the future due to the impacts of climate change on their sea ice habitat. However, NMFS admits that ringed seal populations are currently healthy and stable, and that sea ice and snow depth changes in the Canadian arctic will not likely be severe enough to impact seal populations until at least the end of this century.

"While we do not dispute the fact that climate change is a reality in the arctic, we strongly disagree with the logic behind listing any species as threatened without scientific evidence demonstrating that the species is in fact declining in numbers," said the Honourable Shewchuk, Minister of Environment. "Our position—which is supported by observations of Inuit all across the territory—is that ringed seal populations are healthy and abundant."

Should the proposal go forward, there would be no direct implications for the sale of Nunavut seal products, as the importing of seal products into the US is already prohibited by the *Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972)*. Although the listing would not directly affect Inuit seal harvesting rights, it could fortify animal rights groups that are determined to disrupt trade in seal products.

This proposal adds another threat to sealers and the sealing industry, both of which have suffered recently after the European Union closed its doors to the importation of seal products. Anti-sealing activists are now lobbying China to adopt similar legislation.

"We will continue to counter these threats and will be calling on Inuit groups and other sealing industry stakeholders to join us in opposing the US listing," said Minister Shewchuk. "This senseless proposal is an unwelcome and misguided initiative that could negatively impact Inuit, who have strong cultural and economic ties to this important species."

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