



**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**
CANADA

Bill No. 50 Speaking Notes Rebecca Aldworth, Humane Society International

November 4, 2009

My name is Rebecca Aldworth, and I am the director of Humane Society International/Canada.

Globally, Humane Society International has more than eleven million members and constituents, making us one of the world's largest animal protection groups. A number of our members live in Nova Scotia, and many others spend their tourist dollars in this province – which makes the current debate over Nova Scotia's Wilderness Areas Protection Act an issue of concern for us.

I came from Montreal today, but I have family here in Nova Scotia - my sister, her husband, and their six year old child live in Dartmouth. I'm no stranger to the issues facing rural communities—I'm originally from Newfoundland, and I grew up in a remote fishing town.

But I am here today to ask you to safeguard the Wilderness Areas Protection Act by rejecting Clause 2 of Bill 50 - amendments that would allow commercial seal slaughter on Hay Island in absence of any scientific study to prove that such a slaughter would benefit the indigenous ecosystem. The amendments violate the spirit of the Act, and put at risk Nova Scotia's reputation and businesses.

There are a number of misconceptions about what Clause 2 is really about, which I'll address here. I am grateful for the opportunity to use a projector. Behind me, you will see photographs I took of the 2008 Hay Island seal slaughter.

1. Some people would like you to think this is about the commercial seal hunt – about whether or not grey seals should be slaughtered.

This is FALSE. The only question is whether grey seals should be killed in a protected nature reserve.

Grey seals breed throughout the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and there are a number of islands where seal hunters from Cape Breton and other parts of Nova Scotia can and do regularly hunt grey seals. The only question here is whether those sealers should be given the right to operate a commercial seal slaughter in a nature reserve, without evidence to prove that such killing is necessary to protect the indigenous ecosystem.

2. Some people would like you to think that rejecting this amendment will mean that grey seals cannot be killed on Hay Island.

This is FALSE. In both 2008 and 2009, the Minister authorized sealers to kill seal pups on Hay Island.

Over 1400 seal pups have been killed on Hay Island in the past two years alone. All this amendment does is remove the critical step of due diligence – the study that the Act requires to prove that the slaughter will benefit the indigenous ecosystem of Hay Island. If you reject this amendment, those who would advocate future slaughters on Hay Island would simply be required to perform the necessary study to show that the action is needed.

3. Some people would like you to think that this is about the need for a cull of grey seals.

This is FALSE. There is no evidence to suggest a grey seal cull is necessary, and the grey seal slaughter that occurs on Hay Island is a market driven hunt, not a cull.

A scientist from DFO is clear in an internal email I have distributed to you all. To protect the source of this email, the recipients have been blacked out. But I can tell you that this email was sent to a large number of decision makers in DFO and to the Nova Scotia Department of Environment. In it, Mike Hammill, head of DFO's marine mammal section, clearly states that there is no nuisance grey seal problem in the Gulf. He goes on to characterize Nova Scotia's killing of grey seals as a "wild cowboy shoot" that does not follow a national policy.¹

Peter Labor, the provincial Department of Environment's acting manager of protected areas, said about Bill 50 "This is not about doing it for protecting the biodiversity of the area... This is about providing opportunity for the DFO-licensed seal harvest to occur on Hay Island."²

Nova Scotia's Minister of Fisheries and Environment, Stirling Belliveau, noted that a recent review of the Hay Island grey seal hunt showed there is no environmental benefit of the killing.³

If sealers wanted to cull grey seals on Hay Island, they would be targeting adult female seals. Alternately, they would sterilize the adult females. But what they are doing is killing pups just a few weeks old to sell their skins to the fur trade.

In 2008, processing plants offered \$25 per grey seal skin, and sealers killed over one thousand seal pups for their fur on Hay Island. In 2009, sealers noted that processing plants were not prepared to pay for the skins, and for this reason, they did not plan to kill grey seals. It was only after a Newfoundland fur tannery offered to purchase a couple of hundred grey seal skins that a boat went out and got those couple of hundred seals. The reason for the purchase? So the fur tannery could evaluate markets for grey seal skins.

If this were really a cull, market conditions would have nothing to do with kill levels on Hay Island. But the plain and simple truth here is that this is not a cull.

¹ See copy of email in this package

² <http://thechronicleherald.ca/Search/9013793.html>

³ <http://thechronicleherald.ca/Front/9013793.html>

4. There are those who want you to think that this is about generating income in rural communities.

This is FALSE. In reality, this is about RISKING income in rural communities.

There are just one or two boat crews who kill seals on Hay Island, and they make very little money for their efforts.

In contrast, tourism in 2007 brought in over \$225 million in revenue to Cape Breton, accounting for 17 percent of total tourism revenue in Nova Scotia. Why do people go to Cape Breton? A primary reason is the protected provincial nature reserves, including the Scaterie Island Wilderness Area. Whale watching, bird watching and seal watching are major tourist attractions in the area.

One can only imagine the impact on Cape Breton's tourism industry should those tourists see what Nova Scotia is prepared to sanction in its provincial parks.

5. There are those who want you to believe the Hay Island grey seal hunt is humane.

This is FALSE. The Hay Island grey seal slaughter does not come close to meeting international standards on humane slaughter and involves a level of cruelty that few adults can even bear to watch on video.

In 2008, I observed the seal hunt on Hay Island. I remember walking onto the beach, and there was a ridge ahead of me. The sealers were beyond the ridge, and I couldn't see them yet. But right in front of me there was a whitecoat seal pup crying horribly. I couldn't figure out what he was reacting to, until I noticed a bucket next to him, filled with wooden bats covered in blood. So I knew what I was about to see.

I walked over the ridge and there they all were – over a dozen sealers herding newborn seal pups, their mothers, and slightly older pups who had moulted their white coats into groups. They were beating the moulted seal pups to death just inches away from the newborns and their frantic mothers, who were trying to defend them. The whitecoats were covered in blood, there was blood everywhere. Everywhere the seal pups were crying. It echoed all around us.

This is not what Nova Scotia stands for. It is not what Atlantic Canada stands for.

There are not many times in life when you have an opportunity to stand up and do the right thing. This is one of them. Please protect the Wilderness Areas Protection Act. Safeguard the heritage of all Nova Scotians. Choose not to sell Nova Scotia's protected areas to commercial industries.

Grey Seal Slaughter - Hay Island - February 2008



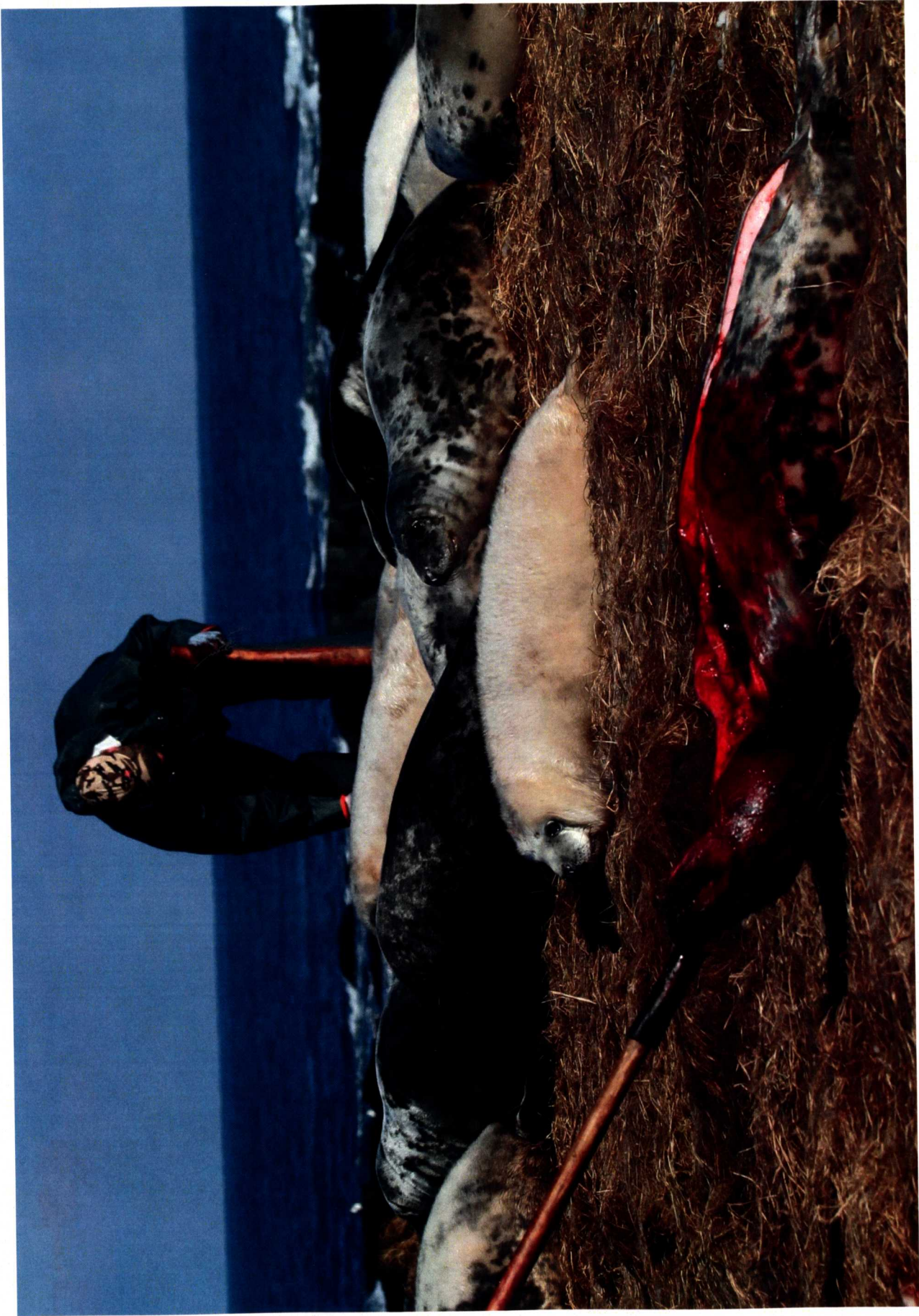
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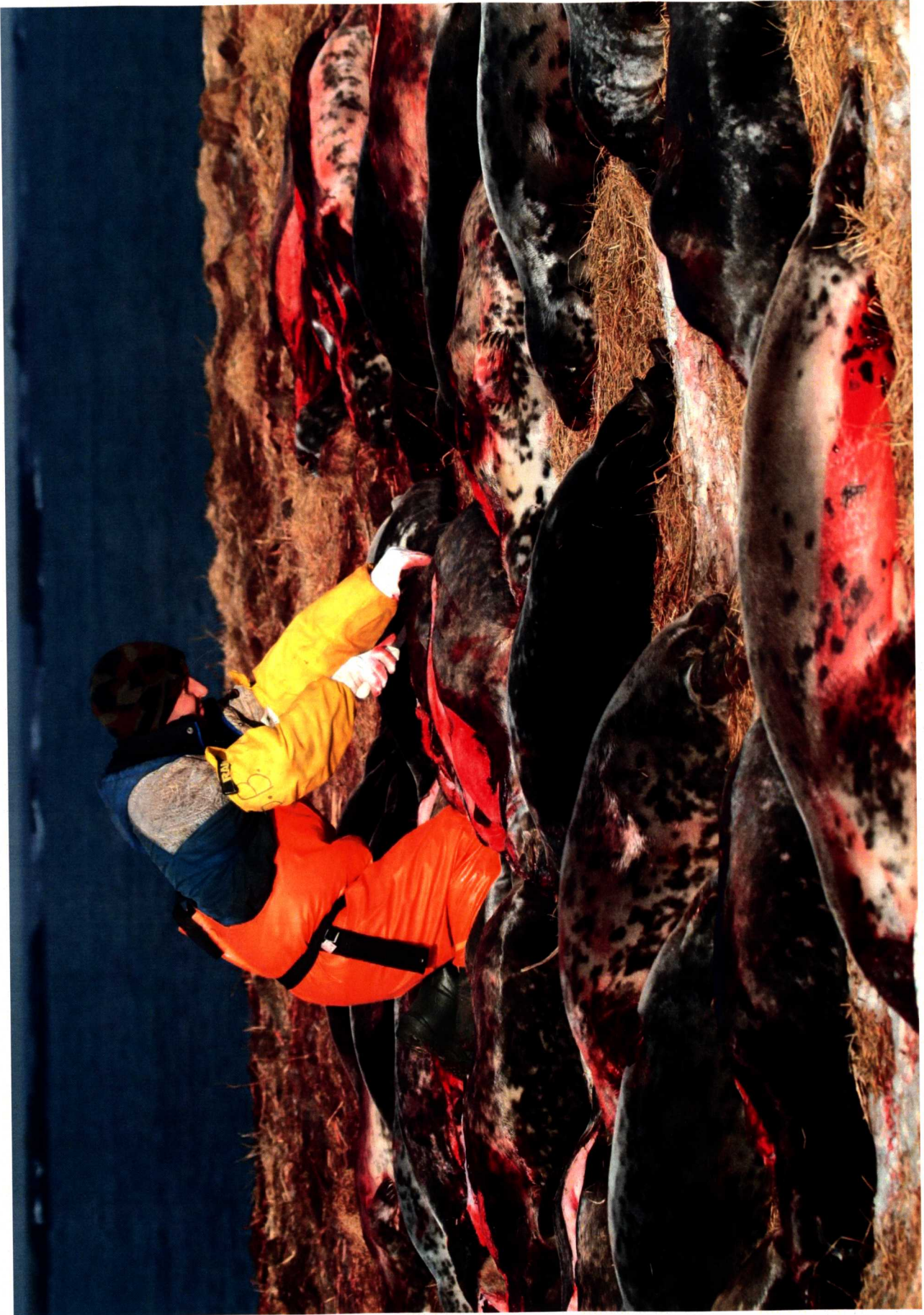
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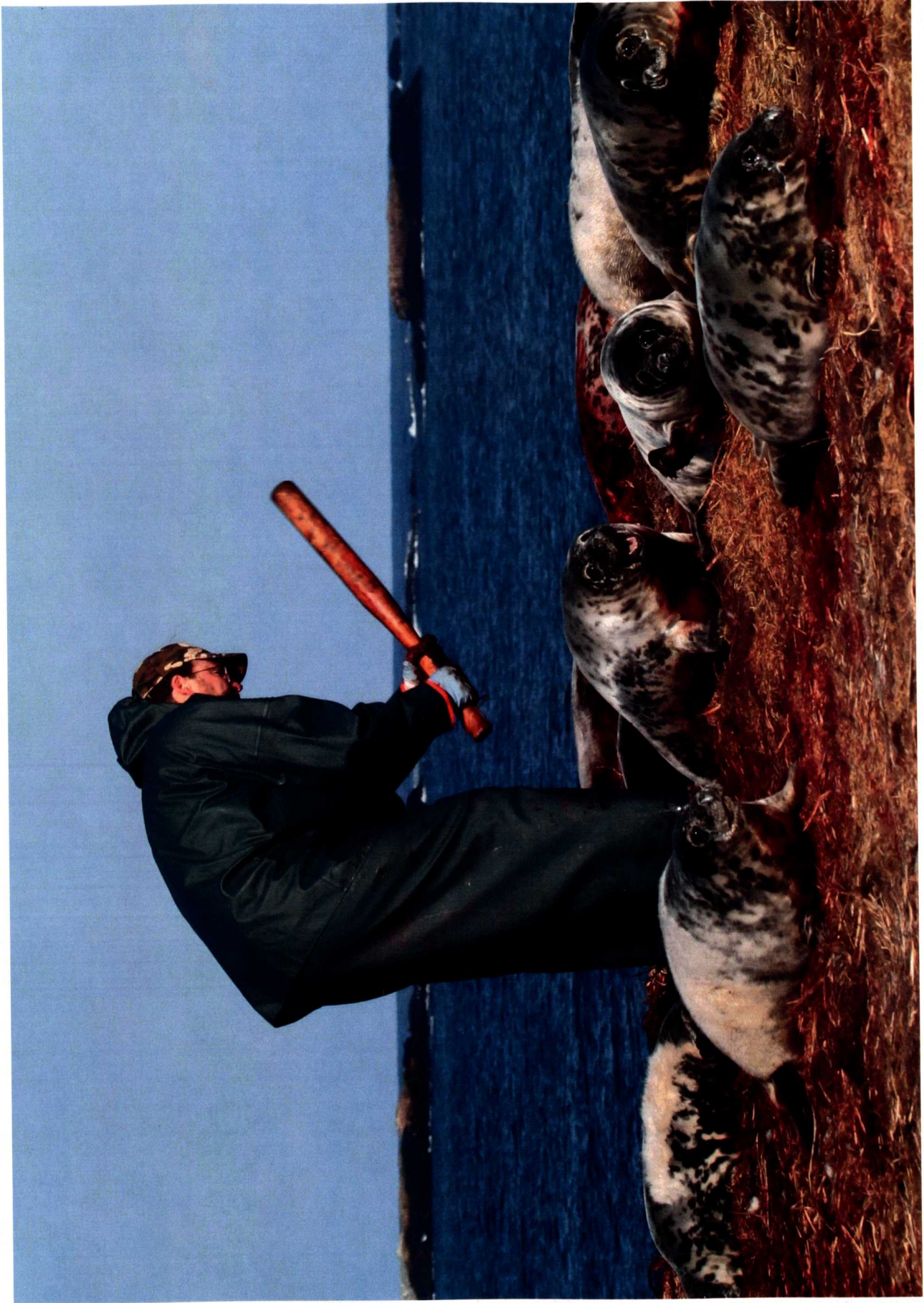
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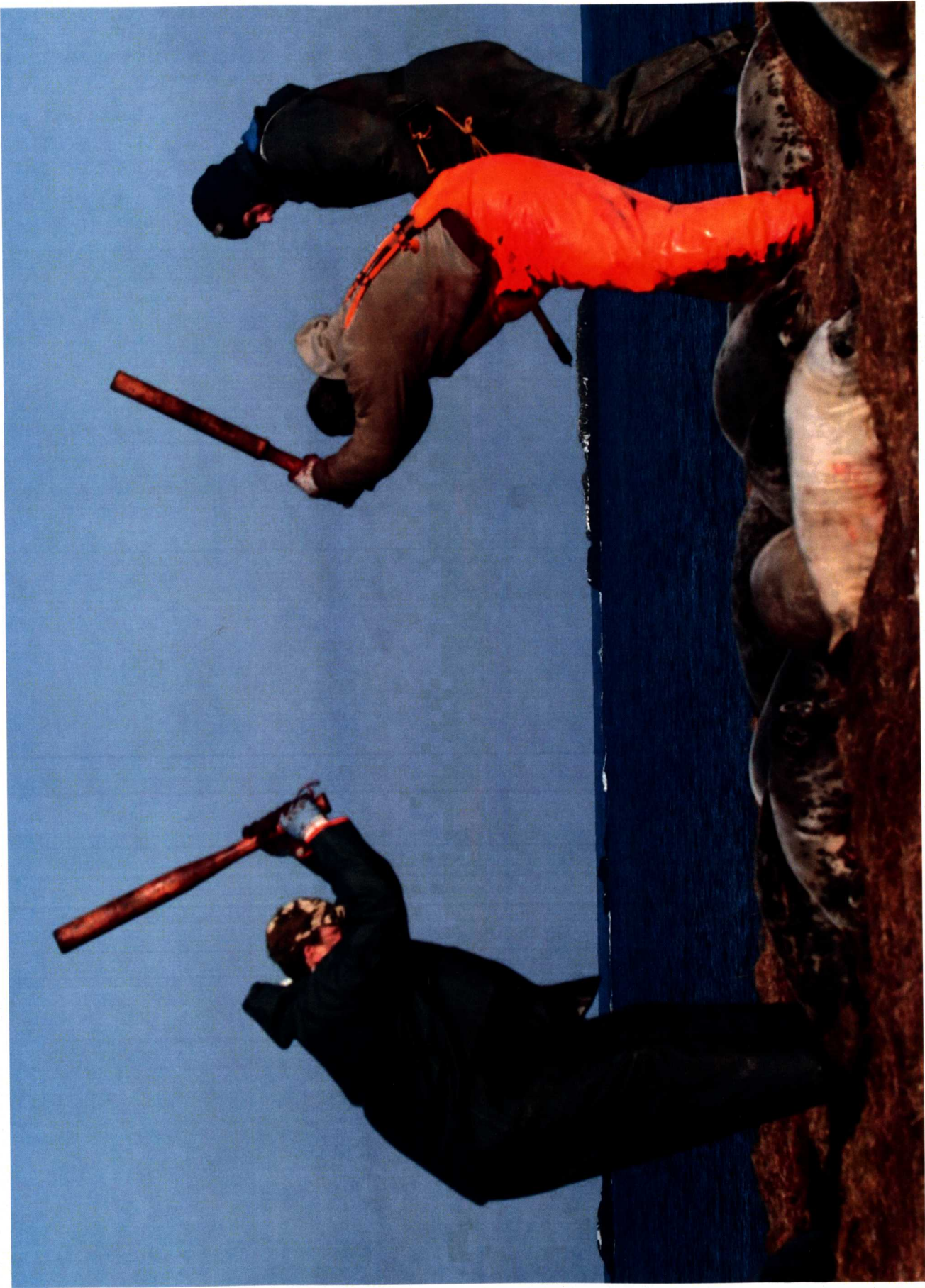
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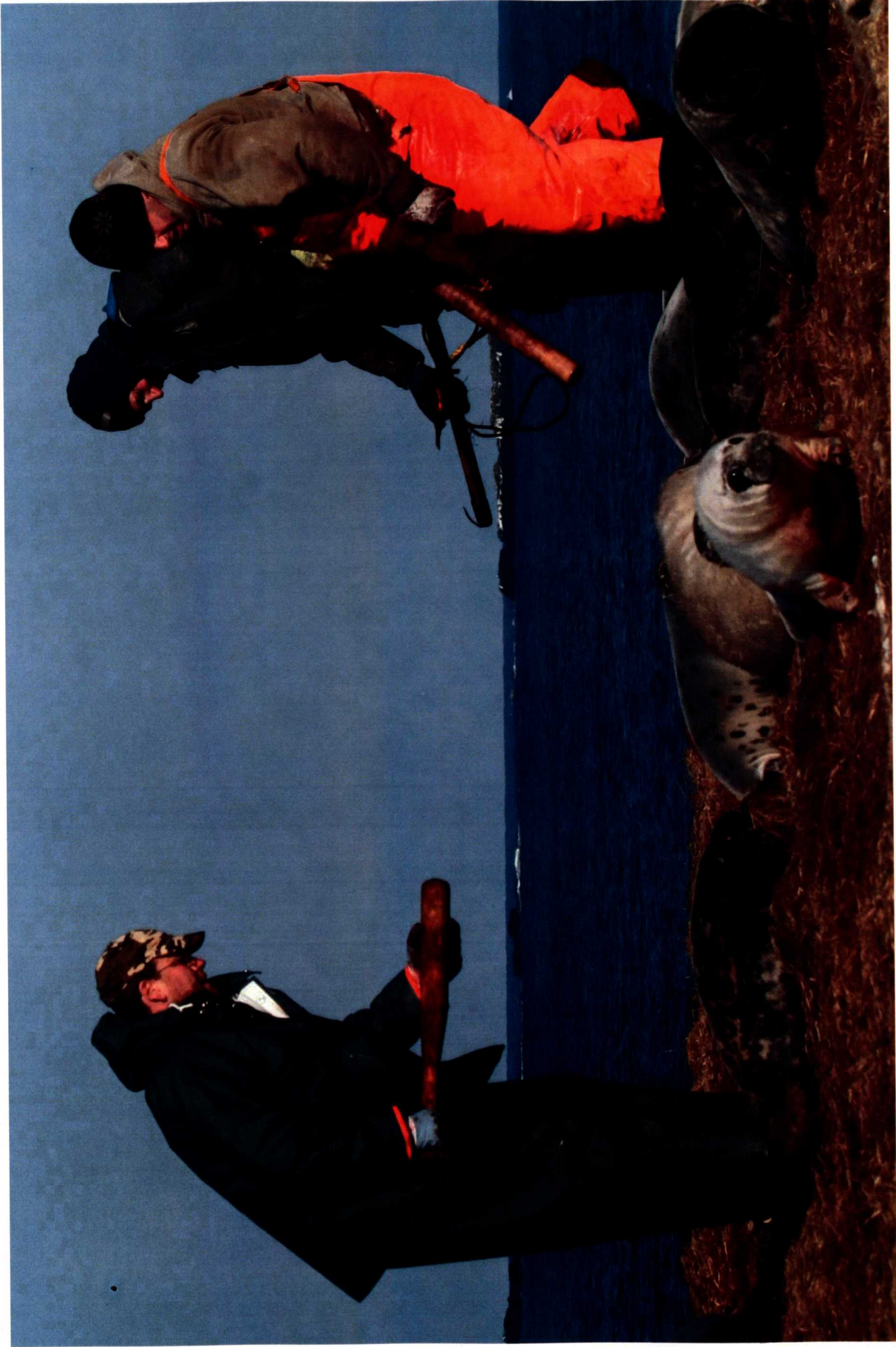
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