

Comments on Wilderness Areas Protection Act Proposed Amendments

My name is Hal Whitehead. I am a University Research Professor in the Biology Department at Dalhousie University. I have studied marine mammals for over 30 years, with much of my work on the marine mammals of Atlantic Canadian waters.

I know only about this amendment from the Government of Nova Scotia News Release. I would like to comment on two parts of the proposed amendment.

For some years I was a member of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, and so helped decide the status of our threatened species. I read, and voted on, many status reports of many threatened species of all kinds across Canada. For terrestrial species, ATV traffic was frequently mentioned as an important threat to imperilled species. I therefore strongly support the amendment's aim to control off-highway vehicle traffic in Nova Scotia's wilderness areas.

However, I deplore the amendment's aim to give the minister the appropriate tools to allow a seal harvest on Hay Island. There is no good scientific evidence that seals are harming fish stocks off Nova Scotia, and the evidence that does exist, although far from clear, can be taken to indicate that the presence of seals is more likely to help groundfish stocks than otherwise. Thus there is no legitimate goal of a seal harvest in Nova Scotian waters other than commercial gain. To carry out a commercial harvest in a wilderness area refutes the purpose of the wilderness area, sets a very dangerous precedent, and might have unexpected deleterious negative consequences on other parts of the wildlife that are supposed to be protected.