

Sustainable eNews

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Grant Indigenous People the Gift of Respect

Editorial: By Eugene Lapointe

What do indigenous peoples typically seek from their national governments and from the general public? Despite its apparent broad nature, I believe that I can answer this potentially complex question quite simply – respect. They seek to be respected by their national governments and by the electorate that puts those governments into office.

At first sight, my assertion may appear a little simplistic because, surely, indigenous peoples seek much more – control over the lands and the waterways that are their historical patrimony, unfettered access to the wildlife resources that inhabit that patrimony, authority over any external exploitation of their lands by oil and gas or mining interests not to mention the restoration of traditional rights that, all too often, have been violently taken away from them.

However, I will insist that all of these concerns flow from respect or, more accurately, from the lack of respect that has frequently been shown to indigenous peoples by national governments, multilateral development institutions and extractive industries. If a government respected the indigenous peoples living within its national borders, then it would never try to open that people's territory up to oil and gas exploration without first conducting extensive consultation with that people, asking how they believe this development should be controlled and granting them substantive control over the nature and course of that development. It goes without saying, in this context, that if the relevant indigenous peoples give the thumbs down to development proposals, that should be the final word in the matter. Consultation is meaningless if the right of the consulted party to reject the proposal is not totally respected.

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Sad to say, relations between national governments and indigenous peoples have, all too often, been typified by a lack of respect by the former party. Similarly, multilateral development institutions such as the World Bank and the Inter American Development Bank have, all too often, concluded that the wise, over-educated solons that populate their offices need pay no heed to native peoples. To the contrary, the wisdom is all theirs, accumulated at the elite educational institutions of the Western world. Why need they listen to “natives” – a noun pronounced with a distinct sense of looking down the nose hauteur.

I suspect that many of us know exactly why these multilateral organizations need to spend much more time with native peoples – because all too often the so-called development projects that they have funded have proved to be environmental disasters that have left a legacy of pollution, crime and degradation in their wake while affording little or no economic, educational or cultural benefit to the peoples whose lands were so badly desecrated. That said, I must give credit where credit is due – I applaud the World Bank and other commercial institutions for recognizing their past sins, even at this late stage, and adopting the Equator Principles to govern the financing of future projects. If these principles can be put into practice – and we all know how high sounding rhetorical commitments can prove hollow in the implementation – they could serve to reverse many decades of bad practice in the developing world by those same multilateral institutions that, supposedly, exist to help less fortunate countries.

However, I would be remiss if I were to suggest that native peoples and their lands have been threatened only by the forces of banking and industry. Far too often, those same Non Governmental Organizations that profess to be protectors of the environment and of native peoples have proved themselves arrogant and have decided that they can identify native interests much better than natives themselves. Take, for example, last year’s Canadian seal hunt, an activity that has provided a livelihood for Canadian Inuit for many years. Before the hunt could even begin, a host of left-wing, ecological NGOs vacated their offices in Washington DC and decamped north to protest the hunt and, hopefully, to halt it. Did it not occur to any of them to consult the Inuit first? As I mentioned earlier, everything flows from respect or, in this case, from the lack of it.

When the government of the United Kingdom lectures African nations that they must stop their native peoples from eating bush meat, does it not occur to Whitehall that it is projecting a picture of itself as an interfering school mar’ m who is quite convinced that she knows what is best for her childish pupils? How do residents of Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa feel when they are told by NGOs that, despite their excellent elephant conservation programs, they may not sell the ivory from culled elephants to finance those same conservation programs? A decision, I should point out, that is made not in Gabarone, Harare, Windhoek or Pretoria but in London and Washington.

No one knows better how to manage native lands and how to manage the wild flora and fauna on those lands than native peoples themselves. They have lived off these lands for centuries and never experienced any problems with the sustainability of their lifestyles until they lost full control over those lands and wildlife. I say to governments, industry, banks and NGOs alike – grant indigenous people the one free gift that it is in your power to give. Give the gift of respect and then leave them alone to get on with managing their resources as they have proved they can do since time immemorial. □

Makah Whaling Rights – Legal, Harmless to the Environment, Held Up by Red Tape and Destructive Cultural Prejudices

In 1855 the US Government signed the Treaty of Neah Bay, which is unique in that it gives the Makah Tribe out on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State the right to catch gray whales forever. Today, the Makah Nation wants the red tape to stop, and their rights to continue to hunt gray whales, completely restored. In 1999, they legally killed their first gray whale in some 70 years but since then animal rights groups such as the Humane Society of the United States have opposed the hunt, saying that it is “merely” done for cultural reasons. Naomi Rose, spokesperson for HSUS, describes this cultural need as insignificant, compared to the “genuine” nutritional need of the Alaskan Eskimo villages to take their bowheads.

IWMC deplors this kind of discussion and the “politically correct” false “reasons” why the Makah are prevented from taking their whales. Gray whales are not endangered. The quota (20 whales in 5 years) would not affect the population, which has rebounded to numbers perhaps too numerous for its environment.

US Government scientists know that the quota would not adversely affect the animals, but the lawsuits demand that another environmental assessment be conducted, and that the Makah should not be given the same waiver (releasing them from the restrictions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act) that was given to the Alaskan Inuit people.

This lawsuit against the Makah’s treaty rights is nothing but a demonstration of the political power of animal rights groups to force their value system on people whose own values have sustained them and their prey for thousands of years. Naomi Rose infers (according to the New York Times, September 19) that the Makah are less deserving of such rights than are the Eskimo people, whose own quota has also been found to be safe.

This is an unreasonable prioritizing of value systems and needs by a member of the dominant white culture, and it is reminiscent of the imperialism common one hundred years ago.

IWMC wishes all the best for the Makah Nation. All the best would be that the culturally prejudiced and biologically unsound lawsuit(s) against them would be either thrown out or resolved in their favor immediately. This is a matter of interpretation of law, combined with a truly fair decision about seeking social justice for people who need their whale hunt, their national pride restored, their nutritional needs supplemented by their traditional foods, and their souls nourished through the restoration of their tribal identity through the hunt. There is no good reason, either legal or biological, why they should be prevented from conducting this hunt in the manner agreed upon at the International Whaling Commission, and in line with their treaty.

Best wishes to the Makah Nation from IWMC and all our colleagues who support the sustainable use of all natural resources. May justice prevail, and very soon. □

Evaluating the Scare Tactics about Consumption of Fish

On occasion we hear about someone's concerns that the marine fish we eagerly consume are not safe to eat. Some "experts" occasionally warn pregnant women not to eat fish because of concerns about mercury or PCB content, and to keep this food away from young children. Should we give up marine fish as a frequent diet choice? IWMC does not advocate such an approach.

The London Observer recently cited the opinions of three scientists whose expertise is in evaluating levels of toxics, pesticides, mercury and other substances in fish commonly consumed by people. All these experts are of the opinion that the health benefits of including fish in the diet far outweigh any risks from the pollutants commonly cited by Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund as posing significant health risks.

In fact, the scientists cited have repeatedly noted that the levels of contaminants are actually miniscule, occurring in fractional percentages far below levels considered to be harmful. The Center for Consumer Freedom is an organization that frequently exposes the scaremongering tactics of such groups as the Environmental Working Group, or EWG, which scientists have criticized for overstating health risks in fish and other foods.

We have to ask ourselves: Why are some "environmentalist" groups picking on the fishing industry and trying to adversely impact the marketing success of those who distribute millions of tons of fish to consumers all over the world? Why do they want to see the fishing industry suffer extreme loss of business due to their unfounded health risk claims?

We do not think that groups such as Greenpeace, WWF and the EWG are particularly concerned about the health risks to humans who consume fish. We think they are concerned about their own credibility and donor support, and want to keep their image up front in global media. One way to accomplish this is to claim that there is extreme bad news about a common food, in order to demonstrate the power of their public relations efforts. If the general public anywhere is persuaded not to consume this food, the anti-use movement can use this impact as a power demonstration to governments, as they attempt to force governments to follow their direction on public environmental policies in the future. Claims of support from the general public are often used by such groups to persuade governments that their policies must be opposed to the use of common fish and wildlife resources by people. Perhaps they want us all to eat soybeans and wheat, unmodified, of course, by selective breeding and genetic engineering that would render them resistant to pests and diseases, and perhaps, enhanced with vitamins through scientific research.

IWMC encourages everyone to keep supporting reputable science as the standard through which food safety decisions are made, for the public good and because foods such as fish and whole grains are beneficial and necessary parts of the diets of millions of people. □

Recognizing the “Liberator” Agenda

When animal rights hoodlums such as the ALF raid an animal housing facility, they are not there primarily to free animals from confinement, or to “save” them from experimentation or slaughter. No. Such acts are meant to damage the businesses targeted, whether they be medical or pharmaceutical research labs, or poultry farms, fish pens, or mink or fox farms. There is no compassion for the animals on the part of the “liberators” who surely understand that their act of releasing the animals from confinement is a cruel, rather than a kind, act. Animals such as mink that have been confined all their lives are at least initially, helpless in the wild, and without food and shelter they will suffer and die over a considerable time period. They also have the potential to become environmental dangers as their unnatural introduction can cause harm to native species in the ecosystem. In the UK, mink have become predators of native birds, to the detriment of the countryside.

Primates and laboratory rats and mice cannot survive on their own and may additionally be disease vectors, having been part of long-term scientific research. The immediate result of the release of such animals is fear, pain and suffering on their part, whether they are hit in traffic, or cower in vegetation, not knowing how to fend for themselves. They are not “liberated” in the sense that they can usually go about finding food, shelter and mates as if they had been out all their lives in suitable habitats.

The primary goal of ALF criminals is destruction of the bottom line, in a business sense, of the facility, which they have targeted. Their goal is to terrorize people who are in the business of using animals for their own purposes or for research projects. The ALF destroys scientific research as well as fur industry production. The ALF wants society to fear them, and to refrain from using animals in business or in scientific research. This is an ideologically driven, socially dysfunctional fringe.

Recently, such an incident occurred in Norway, where the local ALF released 3500 mink from pens in a sneak attack. The owner and his neighbors were said to have recaptured 2000, and were shooting as many of the rest as possible, to prevent their suffering and to prevent any predation they might cause to other stock such as poultry or rabbits. The timing is significant; it is the season in which mink are commonly slaughtered for their pelts. The loss of breeding stock is also meant to damage the business. Breeding records are lost when animals are removed from numbered containers.

Let no one be persuaded that the ALF has ever acted out of compassion. They act out of a desire to harm people’s livelihoods, to cause fear, and to gain media attention in order to raise public awareness that they are in the area and that people should be intimidated into giving up their livestock businesses. This is eco-terrorism, and it is every bit as unjustified in civil society as any other acts of vandalism, arson, or economic intimidation. IWMC wishes the Norwegian fur farmers well in their efforts to recover from this latest attack, and calls for anyone with information about this crime to contact the local authorities so that the perpetrators can be apprehended before they strike again. □

Sea Shepherd Huffs and Puffs – But He’s Just Blowing in the Wind

It’s the slow season for seal hunt protesters. No ice, no seals. No media attention. Paul Watson had to be in court for violating Canadian seal hunt regulations. He and his ten American followers had approached sealers too closely and apparently, provoked them so obnoxiously that there was an altercation of some kind. The Mounties did not lay charges against the sealers, knowing that they had been severely provoked while legally doing their jobs. They apparently did charge the Sea Shepherds for photographing sealers killing seals. They had violated the “approaching the seal hunt too closely” restriction.

Now Watson claims to be challenging the Canadian constitution, specifically that part which gives Canadian authorities the legal right to oversee the hunt, sealers’ conduct and the conditions under which seals may be taken. Canadian newspaper accounts of the lawsuit against Canada note that no specific information about this constitutionality question has been disclosed. Watson’s attorney is mum. The judge in the case shall reserve some time late this year for the action to be considered. As usual, the charges against Watson and his gang of self-righteous thugs are given short shrift in the media accounts, compared to the precedent of a criminal challenging the constitutionality of the law under which he was charged.

In IWMC's opinion, this is just another ploy to attract media attention by this lack-luster small time bully. He is not going to change Canadian law, nor is he going to be responsible for ending the seal fishery. The annual hunt is a management plan necessary to restore ecological balance in the western Atlantic, now damaged since 1983 by a seal herd that has grown out of control, to the detriment of fish, birds, seals, whales, and maybe most of all, fishermen-sealers of the Maritimes. Our best wishes to them all. This too shall pass. □

PETA again, and not a Leg to Stand on

This is fur real: Paul McCartney’s wife wishes the world would feel sympathy for her because her prosthetic leg came off during a fight she started on behalf of another PETA anti-fur demonstration. Then the people she was brawling with (security guards at Jennifer Lopez’ New York office), wouldn’t let her into the office to use the ladies’ room. Perhaps they felt that since she wasn’t acting as a lady should, that she didn’t deserve to be admitted to those private premises. Instead, the guards called police and she was forced to repair herself somewhere in a stairwell. The guards had given her back the leg, and perhaps she re-attached it to herself there. In our opinion, they were most chivalrous, given the circumstances. They could have kept it as evidence of her assault on them as they defended Ms. Lopez’ property.

Members of the fur industry have commented that Mrs. McCartney appeared to have been looking for media attention, yet when she achieved her goal, she wasn’t pleased with the result. McCartney had reportedly charged across the street and into the office building along with other PETA supporters, according to the “Daily Dish” column of the New York Daily News. The melee was allegedly planned to be a confrontation with Jennifer Lopez, who was not present. Those who attempted their “break in” were claiming that they wished to present Lopez with a

DVD tape that they claimed was footage of animals being skinned alive, another hokey attempt to raise credibility for themselves as they object to the use of fur by anyone, especially if that anyone should be a celebrity.

Jennifer Lopez supports the use of fur and wears furs herself, therefore she has become a celebrity target of PETA's continual boring harangue against the fur industry. The allegations about furbearers being skinned alive are part of the "act" which the nutsy group commonly puts on, hoping that someone, anyone in big city media will join the party and take their pictures. McCartney reportedly claimed that she will now take her protest to Ms Lopez' home, where she will once again, attempt to force the lady to take the tricked up DVD. We wonder why any media, having received such an invitation, would take the bait and attend such a planned event. Ms. Lopez should obtain a restraining order against McCartney and all her nutcase colleagues.

IWMC applauds Jennifer Lopez for not caving in to pressure from these craven individuals, who have a documented history of not demonstrating compassion for animals. (Do not forget that PETA employees are very shortly going to be tried for illegally killing vans full of domestic pets and throwing their carcasses into mall dumpsters, instead of sheltering them and finding them homes, as they had promised.)

And now they want sympathy for their anti-fur cause and for their celebrity co-conspirator, who just happens to be disabled, yet whose "cause" is devoid of support. We advise Mrs. McCartney to find some competent counseling, a cause with some real justification, and a better leg to support her in days to come. □

And on a lighter note...

Doctors:

The number of doctors in the U.S. is 700,000
Accidental deaths caused by physicians per year are 120,000
Accidental deaths per physician is 17.14%
(Statistics courtesy of the U.S. Dept of Health & Human Services)

Guns:

The number of gun owners in the U.S. is 80,000,000 (yes that's 80 million)
The number of accidental gun deaths per year, all age groups, is 1,500
The number of accidental deaths per gun owner is 0.001875%
(Statistics courtesy of the FBI)

Statistics:

Doctors are approximately 9,000 times more dangerous than gun owners.

Fact:

Not everyone has a gun, but almost everyone has at least one doctor. □

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