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Note by US Commissioners on the Conservation of Harp and Hood Seals

In 1966, the Provisions of the International Convention for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries were extended to harp and hood seals. The criteria of the Convention for managing fish were thus applied to the seals.

Fish stocks, in view of their vital importance as a source of food, must be managed primarily from the standpoint of providing high sustaining yields for consumption purposes. This is recognized in the authority provided under the Convention for the International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries to recommend "on the basis of scientific investigations, and economic and technical considerations..appropriate proposals, for joint action by the Contracting Governments, designed to achieve the optimum utilization of the stocks of those species of fish which support international fisheries in the Convention Area."

There is a growing awareness, however, that additional standards must be considered when managing highly developed species such as marine mammals, which have values going beyond their economic utility. This was recognized in the proposed Convention on International Trade in Endangered Wild Species of Fauna and Flora, signed in Washington, D.C., March 3, 1973. The Preamble to this Convention points out the aesthetic, scientific, cultural, recreational and economic values of wild species of animals. This Convention also recognizes that these species are "an irreplaceable part of the life-sustaining natural systems of the earth which must be protected for this and generations to come." Most ICNAF member nations participated in the development of this Convention.

The United States believes that these values going beyond economic utilization should be taken into account in managing harp and hood seals. We believe the conservation program for seals should be designed to achieve optimum sustainable populations on the basis of their relation to a balanced ecosystem, rather than solely on the basis of their economic utility.

Accordingly, we call upon the Commission to review carefully management programs for seals to insure that these broader criteria are taken into account. If necessary to facilitate the work of the Commission in this regard, the United States will consider proposing amendments to the International Convention for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries.

