



The Right Honourable Margaret Thatcher
Prime Minister of Great Britain
10 Downing Street
London, United Kingdom



My Dear Prime Minister:

It is a significant honor for me, as chief minister of the Northwest Territories, to write to the dean of Western political leaders. We in the north have come to admire the consistency with which you have guided the United Kingdom towards new horizons.

My jurisdiction, as its name indicates, has long entertained intimate links with Britain: the fur industry in particular provided your country with significant monies for centuries. The Arctic benefits from investments and visits made by your compatriots. Only last year, I was privileged to greet Their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of York. Your former High Commissioner, Sir Derek Day, was a frequent visitor to the NWT which covers close to three and a half million (3,500,000) square kilometres.

It is therefore with the utmost regret that I must draw your attention to an unfortunate incident which could seriously affect our wildlife industry. I refer to the personal initiative taken by Mr. Alan Clark, Minister of State (Trade and Industry), in proposing legislation whereby British retailers would be required to display labels for products which contain pelts of wild animals that may have been caught with leghold traps. My understanding is that no prior consultation had taken place with the Government of Canada, my government or, for that matter, with those most concerned, our aboriginal peoples who have enjoyed royal trust since the 18th century.

The issue is not academic. Our native peoples, whether Inuit, Dene or Metis, have hunted, trapped and fished for centuries. It is a way of life. Between 1981 and 1984, following a hasty EEC Assembly initiative, seal skin exports dropped by 75%. In our Arctic communities, Inuit, who do not injure baby seals for conservation reasons, faced serious social consequences including, might I say, suicide. A similar scenario might unfold in communities around which wildlife has flourished since time immemorial if the fur labelling scheme is not reconsidered.

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The survival of animal species is a common objective. Must it be achieved at the expense of human dignity?

Allow me to urge you to invite your Ministers to meet with representatives of the Government of Canada and mine to ensure common solutions to this question. Consultation and better communications would ultimately benefit all parties concerned.

Yours sincerely,



Dennis Patterson
Government Leader

c.c.: The Right Honourable Joe Clark
Minister of External Affairs
Ottawa, Canada