

Consultation publique sur la réserve écologique de l'Île-Brion des Îles-de-la-Madeleine

THE BAPE REPORT IS NOW PUBLIC

Québec, December 21st, 2018 - At the request of the Minister of the Environment and the Fight Against Climate Change (MELCC), MarieChantal Chassé, the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE) released its report today on the *Consultation publique sur la réserve écologique de l'Île-Brion des Îles-de-la-Madeleine*. The commission began its work on September 24th and was chaired by Marie-Hélène Gauthier, accompanied by commissioner Julie Forget.

In light of the public consultation and its analysis, the commission is of the opinion that any decision to modify the boundaries of the Île-Brion Ecological Reserve in order to allow the seal hunt on its beach areas must be based on a demonstration that its biodiversity is threatened and must be established on the basis of rigorous scientific data, currently incomplete. Studies must first be carried out by the MELCC, in partnership with the responsible ministries. Thus, hunting could be considered if, at the end of these studies, seals actually pose a threat to the ecological integrity of the protected area and that hunting, under established conditions, would make it possible to control the colony without prejudicing the objectives of conservation.

The protection status of an ecological reserve aims to safeguard in a complete and permanent way the fragile and rare environments of Quebec. Under the Guidelines for Protected Areas Legislation of the International Union for Conservation of Nature that the Government of Quebec has committed to respect, the decision to change the status of a protected area must be justified by exceptional circumstances unforeseen at the time of designation. Such an amendment must be of paramount importance and imperative for the national interest. The decision to modify a strict protection statute would set a precedent that could have repercussions on the integrity of the protected areas network in Quebec.

The commission also notes that the gray seal population in the Northwest Atlantic is growing rapidly. However, the species is not considered as overpopulated by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The strong presence of gray seals on Brion Island is part of a broader issue that includes climate change that humans is currently facing. The Commission is of the opinion that it is necessary to remain vigilant about modifications to and actions on an existing protected area.

The Madelinots want to maintain access and participatory and integrated governance on Brion Island. In the event that beach areas were removed from the ecological reserve, the commission is of the opinion that a protection status should be assigned to them. Such a status should permit a range of activities, which would not undermine the conservation objectives of the ecological reserve.

The commission held three public meetings in Cap-aux-Meules and Grosse-Île, as well as a special meeting in Quebec City. These meetings heard the presentation of 6 briefs and 14 oral opinions. A total of 13 briefs were submitted by interested individuals, groups, organizations and municipalities.

AVAILABILITY OF THE REPORT

The investigation and public consultation report on the *Consultation publique sur la réserve écologique de l'Île-Brion des Îles-de-la-Madeleine* is now available. You may consult it at the BAPE office in Quebec

City, at the Jean-Lapierre Library in Havre-aux-Maisons, at the Grande-Entrée point of service, as well as on the BAPE website at www.bape.gouv.qc.ca.

– 30 –

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