

WITNESS STATEMENT OF INUAPIK ELL

April 29, 2015

1. I am enrolled as an Inuk under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.
2. I am 52 years old. I have lived in Coral Harbour my entire life except the past 21 months, when my family has been in Cape Dorset while my wife teaches at the school. In Cape Dorset I work at the Hamlet garage.
3. I have been a hunter of polar bears since I was about 16 years old. I started to hunt caribou in my early twenties, when caribou hunting was allowed again and two families could have one tag per year.
4. For approximately 8 or 9 years I hunted caribou on Southampton Island that were butchered in the Coral Harbour abattoir. For all but one of those years I hunted full-time when the abattoir was operating. In my last year I hunted for the abattoir on weekends, and worked at the airport as a maintainer during the week.
5. I started hunting for the abattoir in about 1994 or 1995. I believe it was the second or third year the abattoir had been running. It was run by a company called Tunnuq. Leonard Netser contacted me. He wanted me to replace a hunter who was not doing too well. I agreed to start as soon as I finished working for the government part-time on the caribou survey.
6. Before the company used a hunter, a representative would check your equipment to see whether you had what was needed. This included a snowmobile, komotiq (sled), sleeping bag, stove, GPS and rifle.
7. In an average year there would be 6 or 7 hunters. I remember the names of 3 individuals who hunted with me when Tunnuq ran the abattoir, and the names of 6 who hunted with me after the Coral Harbour Community Development Corporation took over. They were all Inuit from Coral Harbour.
8. As well as having the necessary equipment, the hunters selected had to be able to shoot straight. The most important thing was to head-shoot the animal so that meat would not be spoiled.
9. Hunters were asked back the next year if they were good. In most years the same individuals did the hunting.
10. In my early years I received \$12.50 per head shot caribou delivered to the abattoir, plus \$100.00 for my snowmobile and other equipment.
11. Later I was paid \$20.00 per head shot caribou, but nothing for the snowmobile.
12. The payment per caribou depended on the quarter where the animal was shot and whether the bullet went all the way through the carcass. When \$20.00 was paid for head or neck shots, \$15.00 was paid for shoulder or rump shots if the bullet did not go through both sides, and

\$10.00 for shoulder or rump shots if the bullet went all the way through. I would not have received anything if the animal was gut-shot. I did not have many of those.

13. I do not remember being paid anything for the days I had to stay in camp due to bad weather.

14. I was not paid for any time I lost due to equipment problems. In the years I hunted for the abattoir, the hunters were responsible for all their own repairs and maintenance.

15. For my hunting I did not receive vacation pay or overtime or a minimum wage.

16. I received my payment every two weeks, by cheque from the company in charge.

17. All the equipment I used was my own, except gas and ammunition supplied by the company.

18. To the best of my knowledge, all the hunters were paid the same way and they supplied the same equipment.

19. Each hunter went out from the camp alone, going to a different place so that the hunters would not be shooting too close to each other. The rule was that each hunter had to deliver his carcasses within one hour of shooting his first animal, so that the carcass did not bloat. Right after shooting each animal, the hunter had to cut its throat to bleed it.

20. Sometimes the hunters would leave camp at staggered intervals of 15 minutes, to make it likely that they would return one at a time. If a large number of caribou were delivered to the abattoir at once, this would cause a delay in the skinning and gutting, and increase the wastage. Usually staggering was not necessary.

21. Back at the camp, the camp foreman kept a tally sheet, noting how many animals each hunter delivered per trip, and how the animal was shot (head versus shoulder, etc.).

22. There was no foreman out on the land, where the hunting took place.

23. I usually delivered about 35 caribou per day, depending on equipment and the weather. I usually delivered about 150 to 200 caribou per week. My record for a season was 889 caribou.

24. There was usually a difference in success between the hunters. The biggest challenge was to maintain your equipment so that you could hunt every day. Some hunters had frequent snowmobile and komotiq break-downs – sometimes twice a day. It was also hard on your body.

25. I started using a .25-06 rifle. It was best on windy days. Then I bought a .22-250, which I used on calm days. The 22-250 has a faster bullet than the 25-06.

26. I had one snowmobile. I started using a light 380 Skandic, but this was too small, as it could not pull the sled when the sled was heavy. I had to buy three new snow machines for the abattoir hunting, driving them about 4000 miles in each two month season. Some hunters for the abattoir used two snow machines.

27. On my first day, I followed the hunter I was replacing. He explained the rules about how the animal was shot and when it was bled, and gave me tips based on his experience. Otherwise I received no training, and I do not believe any hunters did. We hunted using our skills and experience as Inuit. There were no classroom lessons for the hunters.
28. In most years, the abattoir ran for about two months. Depending on the weather, the hunters usually stayed at the camp for between ten days and two weeks, when we could go home for a day or two and cash our cheques. Sometimes we could stay at home for a weekend.
29. The full-time hunters for the abattoir hunted for their families in the same way. About once a week we would pick a fat caribou we shot, the abattoir would cut it up for us, and we would take it home on our next trip home. These caribou were not tallied and we were not paid for them.
30. I considered myself to be self-employed when I hunted for the abattoir. I did my best to shoot caribou and I sold them to the company. I owned all my own equipment.
31. As hunters we were different than the workers at the abattoir. Whatever meat we got, we were paid for. I don't recall paying taxes on this money.
32. I do not recall any contract or other paper being used to record my arrangement with the company.
33. At the beginning of each season, I also helped to set up camp for several days, along with the other hunters. We were paid per hour for this – I believe it was the minimum wage. Some hunters also helped to close down the camp at the end of the season. I declined because I was worn out from the hunting.
34. I did not carry hunting tags or a hunting licence with me when I hunted for the abattoir. Some kind of numbered tag was attached to each carcass at the abattoir, after it was inspected.
35. In 1993 I knew that a land claims agreement had been signed with the government, but I knew long before then that I had the right to hunt. It is my birthright as an Inuk.
36. I do not know what a Basic Needs Level is. No one ever discussed with me whether my arrangement with the abattoir company could affect the Basic Needs Level for Inuit in the future. No one discussed with me whether the rights of Inuit under the land claims agreement could be affected. What I knew when the abattoir opened was that the government had been doing surveys, and there were enough caribou to supply an abattoir.
37. Before I worked on the government survey, I had been a By-Law Officer for the Hamlet. In the years the abattoir ran, I tried to pick up part-time work, such as driving trucks, to tide me over for the rest of the year. The abattoir operation was the only source of money for many people in Coral Harbour, including most of the hunters and the abattoir workers. It really did help the community.

38. If the caribou population on Southampton Island rises again, an abattoir hunt could become important again. It may be needed to control disease, and the money would benefit the community.