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Chair

Mr. Tom Wappel

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.)):
We have quorum. I call the meeting to order.

This is a meeting dealing with the main estimates for 2004-05, votes 1, 5, and 10, under Fisheries and Oceans, and supplementary estimates (A) 2005, votes 1a, 5a, and 10a, under Fisheries and Oceans.

Today we have the Honourable Geoff Regan, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, appearing.

Welcome, Minister. Thank you for giving us time. I see you have a bevy of officials, and rather than me introducing them, I thought perhaps you would introduce those officials that you wish to introduce, when you wish to introduce them.

I presume you have an opening statement, and I would ask you to proceed.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, honourable members and colleagues.

[Translation]

Good morning, honourable members and colleagues.

[English]

It truly is a pleasure to be here today to discuss with you the future of Canada's fisheries and oceans resources.

[Translation]

I am pleased to have by my side, Mr. Larry Murray, deputy minister, and other senior DFO officials. Following a short presentation, my officials and I will be happy to take your questions.

Before I get started I would like to welcome the new members to the committee. I look forward to working with each of you and the committee as a whole.

[English]

The detailed work of SCOFO has always been very helpful to previous ministers, and to me, since my arrival at DFO almost a year ago. With such a varied decentralized department, the committee's work on a variety of topics is essential.

Unfortunately, as we all know, none of us can be in every part of the country every week, and I certainly can't. So I value your reports and opportunities like these to meet with you to discuss what's going

on in your respective parts of the country and what your priorities and preoccupations are.

In the same spirit, I believe it is imperative that I work closely with other federal departments, levels of government, aboriginal communities, stakeholders, and interested Canadians. It is this cooperative and open approach that will allow my department to move forward on a number of important fronts and achieve its unquestionably challenging mandate. Today provides an excellent opportunity to discuss my vision for DFO. I hope I can count on your support as we move forward.

Let me tell you about my vision for the department and for Canada's oceans and fisheries resources. It is to ensure the sustainable development and safe use of Canadian waters. Specifically, this vision encompasses healthy and productive oceans, lakes, and rivers for our fish and other marine life. It also includes sustainable aquaculture, fishing, and other marine industries that support coastal communities.

Within this vision, I have two long-term goals for the department. The first goal is to effectively manage ocean resources. The second goal is to modernize environmental processes.

To realize these goals, the department is undertaking a number of important initiatives. In the interest of time, I will only discuss a few of these initiatives in detail, but there are other important areas within DFO that my tabled presentation will address.

As you know, DFO was working with other federal departments, levels of government, and interested Canadians to develop the oceans action plan. My parliamentary secretary, Shawn Murphy, a member of your committee, has been deeply involved in that process. We're focusing on priorities outlined in the Speech from the Throne. Specifically, DFO will enhance the enforcement of international rules governing oceans and fisheries, implement integrated management plans in Canada's coastal and offshore areas, establish a network of marine protected areas, and promote the use and development of ocean technologies.

• (1105)

[Translation]

The oceans action plan is the Government of Canada's way to ensure that we encourage and support the sustainable growth of oceans industries and activities, while at the same time protecting our oceans for our children and our children's children.

[English]

As you've certainly read and heard in the media, DFO is developing and implementing the Government of Canada's international strategy on overfishing. This initiative includes increasing strategic enforcement and surveillance action on the water while pressing for greater compliance through diplomatic efforts. Canada's strategy reflects our objective to improve international fisheries governance in the years to come.

As you likely know, I travelled to Lisbon and London earlier this month to state Canada's position that there is need for urgent and cooperative action by NAFO member countries on the high seas. While in London, I met with the chair of the High Seas Ministerial Task Force, Minister Elliot Morley of Britain. We discussed my role on the task force as it prepares to tackle the wide range of problems linked to illegal fishing activities. This week I addressed the United Nations General Assembly in New York on this same topic.

DFO and the Government of Canada are committed to initiatives that will further support oceans management priorities and national marine security. That's why we're also committed to the modernization of the Canadian Coast Guard and renewal of our fleet, as stated in your report on the future of the coast guard, for which I thank you.

In order to achieve this, the coast guard is consulting fleet users to estimate the future scale and nature of their service needs. The results of these consultations will be reflected in a long-term capital plan that aims at right-sizing the fleet to address both immediate and long-term needs of clients and the Government of Canada more broadly.

The Canadian Coast Guard is also well advanced in responding to the government's December announcement that it will become a special operating agency. This change reflects how important this department and the coast guard are to the government's priorities, including our strategy for the north and the oceans action plan.

This new status is an opportunity for us to build the coast guard Canadians expect and deserve. By making the coast guard a special operating agency we affirm it as a national institution; we affirm it as an agency providing high-quality services to clients; and we position it as an integral part of the government's agenda. The new status will also give momentum to another government priority: strengthening accountability for results within both the coast guard and the rest of the department.

[Translation]

Establishing the Coast Guard as an SOA means organizing it so that it will, in accordance with government direction, operate in a more "business-like" way, in both planning and service delivery. For example, as it prepares for SOA status, the Coast Guard is taking steps to ensure that its capital planning and management processes and governance will lead to improved results for Canadians.

SOA status will also give Coast Guard managers the tools they need to improve the organization in accordance with the Treasury Board Secretariat's management accountability framework.

The decision to grant Coast Guard SOA status represents positive change for Canadians, the Coast Guard and the rest of the DFO.

•(1110)

[English]

I know that the small craft harbours program provides valuable harbour infrastructure to hundreds of small fishing communities across Canada, which you know as well. In recognition of its importance, the government and the department have in recent years devoted more resources to this program, all of which have been used to improve the condition of our active commercial fishing harbours. However, the resources required to maintain such a large and dispersed infrastructure are not sufficient to do everything that is needed as fast we'd like, as you all know.

We need to find lasting solutions that will strengthen the small craft harbours program and make it sustainable. Those solutions cannot just be to add more money. We have to find ways to stabilize existing funding, some of which is to sunset over the next couple of years. We'll also have to work with the harbour authorities and local communities to assess our approaches to rationalization and divestiture so we can ensure that those harbours that are essential are maintained well into the future. We'll also have to consider ways to facilitate more revenue generation where it is possible and strengthen and better support the harbour authorities in their work.

I will ask the department to begin discussions with stakeholders in the coming year to listen to their ideas and concerns on this topic. We'll share the outcome of these consultations with you once they're completed, Mr. Chairman.

Finally, I'd like to address your concerns about the level of detail offered in the main estimates documents. While I share your concerns, I must also tell you that my department is bound by the guidelines set by Treasury Board. However, I'm pleased to tell you that as of next year we will be reporting on new program activity architecture that will be more relevant to your needs. I understand that the ADM for Human Resources and Corporate Services, George Da Pont, handed out details of this plan when he met with you earlier this week.

I'd invite your feedback and comments on the proposed program activity architecture to ensure that it meets the requirements of the committee. I think that's very important. This is an issue where we need to have numbers we understand and can work with.

Until the changes are made, my officials and I hope to address any specific questions you may have that you feel are not included in the report.

[Translation]

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, there is a great deal of work going on at DFO, and I'm sure that there will be a number of challenges in the time ahead.

I'd like to express to DFO employees my sincere appreciation for their dedication in implementing our very broad mandate under significant resource constraints. And I'm convinced that by working together we can make the most out of the precious resources available to us, while protecting them for future generations.

[English]

Let me close by reiterating that my vision for Canada's fisheries and oceans resources is to ensure the sustainable development and safe use of Canadian waters. To achieve this vision, the department is developing an oceans action plan, implementing an international strategy on overfishing, accelerating fisheries renewal, modernizing the Canadian Coast Guard, improving conditions for aquaculture development, modernizing its environmental processes, and reviewing its science programs.

I'm confident that our new vision and initiatives will ensure that our ocean resources are managed more efficiently in order to better serve Canadians.

I hope the briefings my officials recently provided you on west coast salmon issues and the seal hunt were useful. I thank you once again for the opportunity to be here today. My officials and I would now be happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, for that overview and for staying very close to the time. We appreciate that. It gives us more opportunity for questions.

Before I turn it over to the first questioner, I just want to say that, as I'm sure you know, our committee has been extremely interested in the issue of overfishing, among a number of other topics. We want to congratulate you and the government on the efforts you're taking, but we also want to remind you that no matter how many illegal fishing vessels we catch, the problem is with enforcement.

Enforcement is still with individual countries, and we urge you to deal with those individual countries on the types of fines and enforcement procedures they mete out. There's not much point in us catching a vessel if they get a slap on the wrist and they're back again in the nose and tail three weeks later.

• (1115)

Hon. Geoff Regan: I couldn't agree more.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Hearn, 10 minutes.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Let me thank the minister and his officials for coming to join us this morning.

Let me pick up on the final comments the minister made when he talked about the oceans action plan, etc. The minister was in New York earlier this week and he spoke to the United Nations. He talked about a resolution that Canada is a signatory to, and the minister talked about it very positively. However, the people in the industry don't look upon it as being a very positive resolution. In fact, when

they found out about it a couple of days ago, they were extremely concerned. His department, as he well knows, has been lobbied heavily these last few days to see what can be done. Of course, it's trying to close the door after the horse is out.

The resolution talks about the interim prohibition of destructive fishing practices, including bottom trawling, and twice more, throughout the resolution, they talk about regulating bottom fisheries. The concern of the industry is if you're going to deal with destructive technology—and I think all of us will agree that a lot of that technology is destructive—you weigh the good and the bad. What if you eliminate such technology, and you eliminate shrimp trawling, you eliminate the clam drags, you eliminate all bottom fisheries?

I'm presuming that is not the case. However, once you, with several other countries internationally, make such commitments without consultation, a lot of people in the industry are really concerned that others—if not you, Mr. Minister, or your government—might use their weight to push for the elimination or the prohibition of such technology. You know as well as I do what that would do to the shrimp fishery, for instance, right now.

So I'd like your assurance that you see us getting around that without having a negative effect on our ground fisheries.

Hon. Geoff Regan: First of all, through you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Hearn, if you've had a look at my comment, if you've had a close look at the resolution, I don't think you'll be quite as concerned as you seem to be at the moment. I've had some discussions with industry on this, this week and previously, with people who are involved in the industry who have had some concerns. I think it's important to note that this is a resolution that's been put together by a lot of countries, and one country doesn't get everything it wants in the resolution.

Having said that, I've made it very clear in my comments before the UN on Tuesday that from our perspective irresponsible fishing activities of any kind are important to address. Having said that, to say that one type of fishing method is inherently destructive is not our experience, and in fact any type of method can be destructive if improperly or irresponsibly deployed.

So I made it very clear, Mr. Hearn, that in fact from our perspective, there are various methods that are appropriate, that we're using those methods, and that we're going to continue to do so. While I recognize, and I've heard, the concerns from the industry, I think if you have a good look at the resolution, you will find that it doesn't tie our hands in the way you're describing. I've made it very clear in my comments that in fact it's important that we maintain the range of methods we have. While we look at what we need to make decisions on this, and when we look at all these things in the future, we must base decisions on science, and the scientific evidence shows that bottom trawling, for example, in various areas does no harm.

In fact, as you know, we've protected certain areas that are of concern where there are particularly cold water corals like lophelia. *Lophelia pertusa* is a particular form of coral that exists only in one location in the Atlantic Ocean, and that's off Nova Scotia. We've protected that area. We have the Gulley off Nova Scotia. We have the Endeavour hydrothermal vents on the west coast that are protected.

So I think it's important that we address these kinds of issues in this way.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me say to the minister that I read his speech pretty closely, very thoroughly. I understand everything he said. I also don't argue with his interpretation, his view, of the resolution. However, the resolution makes some pretty hard statements regarding destructive technology and bottom trawling. The minister, our country, is only one signatory, one of many, including some very important countries, including some key fishing countries, but with the notable exception of some other very key fishing countries. I say to him if the pressure comes on internationally, the minister's interpretation mightn't hold water.

What concerns me more is the complete lack of consultation. In his speech the minister said:

...we need to work together on solutions. Consultations on management practices have been and will remain an integral part of Canadian decision-making. Stakeholders need to be a part of the solution if we are to be effective.

The industry, regardless of what the minister says, was not consulted about this resolution, had absolutely no idea that this resolution was taking place. And let me carry it a bit further. People in the industry who spoke to your officials—I won't say which ones, but some of your key officials—as late as 10 days ago tell us that the officials admitted to them that they themselves had not heard of the resolution up to then. Where did it come from? Is it strictly a PMO initiative, or has it been something the department has been talking about, and if so, why weren't some of your officials more versed and why wasn't the industry consulted on this major issue?

• (1120)

Hon. Geoff Regan: First of all, it is very important that we consult industry on all these kinds of management decisions. We do, as you know, have many regular consultations with industry. We are well aware of its views in relation to issues, for instance, concerning bottom trawling, and we respect their views. I know the deputy minister would like to add more to this because this has certainly been a concern of mine, and it's important that we have strong consultation on issues like this in the future.

Mr. Larry Murray (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would add that in terms of the resolution itself, it is fair to say that the work on the resolution had been going on for some time. It is also fair to say, from my own conversations with industry late last week, that they are in agreement with the intent of the resolution. What surprised industry and what surprised us, to be honest, was the inclusion specifically of a particular gear type, namely bottom trawling, which emerged in the final 48 hours of negotiation. As I understand it, the risks of losing the whole resolution, which was quite positive, outweighed this, and the reality is we are a country that deals in a multilateral sense. I think if one reads the resolution as

entire phrases, you can clearly argue, as the minister did, that what is in that resolution Canada has been a leader in for the last several years.

I recognize the concern in the industry, but at the end of the day the final wording of the resolution was something that came together in the final 48 hours or so, as I understand it.

In terms of the industry's concern about consultation, that's a fair criticism. We agree with that. We have worked closely with the industry on a bunch of fronts. I must say that as this initiative on governance on the high seas and so on has taken on...and we are having some significant success. We agree with the industry that we need to get beyond our consultations on NAFO or whatever and have them fully engaged in where we're going with high-seas governance. I think that is a fair criticism, that there's unhappiness in the industry in this instance. We have met with them and have agreed that we will have a workshop, and we will put in place an appropriate consultation structure to deal with these broader issues, on which we haven't dealt with industry in the past, quite honestly, as effectively as we should have.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have one last question.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is preposterous to think that a resolution has not been discussed, apparently, with industry at all, but at the last minute somebody inserted a phrase. In fact, it is inserted in several areas, so I find that difficult to believe.

It's talking about perhaps eliminating, if you read the resolution—and cut it any way you want—destructive technology, including bottom trawling, which has such a major effect on all our fisheries. It is incredible that our country, our minister, would sign something hoping that others will agree with our interpretation.

Let me ask you one final question quickly.

This past year the salmon fishery on the Fraser River was a concern to everyone. The number of returns is going to be so small that there may not be any fishery four years, eight years, twelve years down the road. The minister, I know, is planning to take some steps. Could he fill us in on exactly what is happening on what could be a major disaster on the west coast?

• (1125)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, first of all, I think it's important to understand that I don't sign the resolution, for one thing, and the member should understand that. In fact, I don't know why he suggested that would be the case.

Secondly, there are discussions among many countries. As my colleague understands, our interest here is in combating irresponsible fishing activities, particularly things like illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. I think he shares that concern, and it's important that we make efforts to advance that interest, which is the main thrust of this resolution. That's why it's important that Canada support it. While we may not be happy with every word in the resolution, it doesn't mean that overall the thrust of it isn't still positive. I know my colleague would make similar arguments on resolutions that we deal with in the House of Commons; sometimes we may not like every word in a resolution, but we end up voting for it in spite of that. The same thing may apply to bills, and I'm sure he's experienced that as well.

In relation to the Fraser River, he's asked what we're doing. I'm pleased to say that I announced a panel this morning that will be doing a post-season review. The panel will be headed by the Honourable Bryan Williams, who is a former chief justice in the provincial court of appeal—that's my understanding. He's a very distinguished British Columbian who has great knowledge of the industry, and I'm sure he will do an excellent job in looking at what's happened this year.

There are some factors that we know already. The department, in doing its planning of the commercial fishery, has to plan what happens in the commercial fishery before the fish enter the river. We know in that regard that the number of fish arriving at Mission—in other words, at the mouth of the river in British Columbia—was the general number forecasted. It's what happened to the fish after that point, particularly in the two weeks following, that was of particular concern.

Clearly, we know that Environment Canada does great work, but the ability to forecast temperatures and weather isn't so exact that you can plan weeks and weeks or months in advance and expect to know what's going to happen in the water and rivers of British Columbia. For instance, if you're planning a commercial fishery in the beginning of one month and it takes place over a number of weeks and then you have the fish going upriver, you cannot know what's going to happen. Well, the fact is that this year we had record water temperatures. As you know, salmon do well when the temperature in the water is between 15° and 17° Celsius or thereabouts. In fact, the temperatures in the rivers in this case were as high as 21°. That's a one-in-a-hundred-year occurrence. It was an exceptional occurrence that was obviously very negative for the salmon, and it is a great concern.

I'm going to ask David Bevan, the ADM from fisheries management, to add more.

Mr. David Bevan (Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Aquaculture Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Minister.

Certainly, as the minister noted, we've seen record water temperatures in terms of the records we have, including 21.5° in the main stream and up to 23° in some of the tributaries. Those are extraordinary numbers and something the review will have to factor in.

Also of concern, and raised by a number of groups, was enforcement. We had increased enforcement in the lower Fraser

River this year, with more patrols and more charges and warnings. However, we expect the review will touch upon that issue as well.

I think more broadly there's going to be a need to take a look at what happened in the total management of the Fraser River fishery this year. That means we should look at the commercial fisheries, the openings we had, as well as verify if we have it right at the Mission counter. That, of course, is a foundation for management decisions in season, and if it's not right then we have a serious problem in that regard too.

So we're looking at the entire gamut of possible reasons why the escapement targets weren't met this year, from the openings and closings and how we managed the fisheries—even though we had a very modest harvest rate compared with previous years—to how the hydro-acoustic counting process worked through the management of the fishery in the river, and what was the cause and major contribution to the mortality that obviously has taken place.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bevan.

Monsieur Roy, pour cinq minutes, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Minister, ladies and gentlemen.

I can see that the department clearly has a very specific objective, which is the effective management of ocean and fisheries resources. If I look at table 3.1 on page 23 of the 2004-2005 plans and priorities report, I see that the department's budget will be reduced very significantly over the next three years. It will drop from \$1,466,500,000 to \$1,397,200,000. If the goal is to manage the resource responsibly, the government should at least invest more in knowledge and resource management. Managing the resource means protecting it.

Right now, people in the sector are saying that there is a serious increase in poaching and the department is not monitoring these activities adequately. In some areas, in fact—I will just give you the example of area 12—crab fishermen are practically policing the fishery themselves.

So, given the budget cuts to the department, your objectives of managing the resource effectively will be extremely difficult to achieve, since the department is basically having the rug pulled out from under it with these budget cuts. If inflation is taken into account, this decrease from \$1,466,500,000 to \$1,397,200,000 in 2006-2007 is a huge reduction. As a result, I feel that you will not be able to manage the resource effectively and invest enough in research and resource protection.

On page 24, the same table presents foreign overfishing in the 200-mile zone. I note, however, that \$12 million will be invested to deal with that problem in 2004-2005, but no funding is provided in 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. I find that to be of concern.

If the government really wants to take action, it will have to put up the necessary money and invest in a significant way in helping the Department of Fisheries and Oceans improve its resource knowledge, which does not seem to be the approach taken here. According to your budget forecast, the future does not look very good for resource management and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

How are you going to achieve the objective of managing the resource effectively, if the rug is being pulled out from under you?

Hon. Geoff Regan: To begin with, Mr. Roy, you need to understand that, like all the other federal government departments, we need to manage the taxpayers' money as efficiently as possible. We need to use our financial resources responsibly. You may already know that we are taking a year and a half to develop a program adjustment process in our department, so that we will be able to make do with the resources that we have.

At the same time, with respect to your comment on funding for fisheries management, the end of the Marshall regime means that certain funding will not be renewed. We are talking about \$3 million, I believe.

Mr. David Bevan: It is much more than that. We have spent around \$300 million.

Hon. Geoff Regan: We have spent about \$300 million, but the program has ended, although we will have to meet our commitments to the aboriginal committee over the next two years. So this money will no longer be there at the end of the year. There are some changes like that in the budget.

There is something else that should be noted as well. The department has to transfer money from lower-priority programs to higher-priority programs. This is what we have done over the past year and a half, and this is what we will continue to do.

Perhaps the assistant deputy minister for human resources and corporate services would like to add something.

•(1135)

[English]

Mr. George Da Pont (Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources and Corporate Services, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Minister.

The main reason for the changes and the decreases in the estimates in terms of the fisheries management program is exactly the reason the minister indicated. They're projected decreases in the grant and contribution program associated with the Marshall program, the fisheries access program.

In terms of the reference to \$12 million for the overfishing, that is funding the department hopes to receive this year. I understand no decisions have yet been made for future years.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Roy, your time has expired.

[English]

Mr. Cuzner, for ten minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): First, I'd like to welcome the minister and the officials today and thank them for their brief.

I'll start with an article that was run on the wire today with regard to allegations that were made by the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union. There have been allegations made about the federal department, and the union is calling for an immediate moratorium on any charges for fishing licences and for a judicial inquiry on this year's disappearance of spawning stock in the Fraser River and the alleged manipulation of the quota licensing system by Fisheries staff. Obviously, these are serious allegations. The accusation is that there are direct links between senior management staff and quota holders, and the accusation obviously causes great concern.

Whether or not it warrants a judicial inquiry, within the estimates, are there moneys available or processes available through the department that would be able to look into these allegations and see some kind of clarity with these charges?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, through you, thank you very much for that question, Mr. Cuzner.

Certainly, whenever you hear allegations like that, they give you grave concern. Let me say first of all, though, that I have great confidence in the work of employees of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. I really appreciate what I've witnessed over the past year in terms of their dedication. I obviously haven't met with every member of the department—there are over 10,000—but I've met with a great number, and I have been very impressed with their dedication and the hard work they do. I appreciate and value that.

Having said that, I just mention that we announced this morning the formation of the panel led by the Honourable Bryan Williams, the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia, who will be heading the post-season review. While that may not be a judicial inquiry, I think people would feel he is a very credible leader of the inquiry, and I think people will see that we are taking this very seriously. I want to have a proper and very good panel to look at this question very seriously. I think that's important—and that's in terms of the Fraser River salmon fishery, particularly the sockeye salmon.

In relation to the quota licensing system, this is a new allegation I haven't heard before this week. I haven't had any chance to study what they've brought forward this morning, and I'd like to see if anyone in fact has solid evidence to bring forward. They should bring it forward for us to consider.

Is there anything you wanted to add to that?

Mr. Larry Murray: There are clearly processes within the department, and beyond the department if warranted, and certainly we would look into those kinds of allegations with a great deal of interest and effort to make sure that they're in fact not founded, or, if they are, that we get to the bottom of them.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Maybe you can give us an update regarding crab sharing. Each spring we're faced with the situation where we deal with permit and licence holders with crab-sharing agreements. I know, Minister, that you stated that you certainly would like to see a more permanent agreement between those permit holders and the licence holders with regard to the sharing of crab. You had indicated that should the groups and the stakeholders involved not be able to come forward with an agreement on their own part, then a committee would be struck to offer advice to the minister. I'm just wondering if you could maybe update us on where that process has come to, where we are right now with it, and what we can anticipate this spring.

• (1140)

Hon. Geoff Regan: First of all, just to be clear, we're talking here about certain crab fishing areas, and I believe they are 23 and 24. There may be others as well that are involved in this process, but let's talk about 23 and 24 for now.

As you know, there have been quite a few efforts made over the past number of months to try to get an agreement among the different stakeholders here, the different groups involved that have an interest in the crab fishery. What I'm essentially doing is putting together a panel—I was asking a moment ago whether it's already in place; I think it's either there or about to be, at any rate—to give me advice on how to deal with this and how to resolve this issue. I'm looking forward to that panel bringing forward advice to me so we can move forward and get this resolved.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Has the panel been announced yet?

Mr. David Bevan: No. The date given to the fisheries interests to come to a consensus was October 31. That date has obviously just passed, and therefore the panel is being put in place at this time. I don't know that it has actually been announced, but the intention was to wait until after that point.

Hon. Geoff Regan: It will be announced very shortly, but it's important to understand that the timeline for that panel will be short. We're not going to give it months and months to do its work; we're going to need an answer very quickly.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Great.

Just to switch gears a little bit here, this is a topic that is of great interest to a number of people on the committee. We've talked about it for the last number of years, and that's salmon, particularly Atlantic salmon. Representing the Margaree River area, it's certainly of great interest to me, as is the salmon hatchery. Obviously, we have considerable concerns with the situation with the rivers.

When we look through the estimates we don't see a specific line item for salmon, for Atlantic salmon. One thing we've advocated continually is the development of a salmon endowment fund. I'm just wondering, Mr. Minister, what your position is on the development of a fund. Just how close are we to seeing this through to any type of reality?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Well, Mr. Cuzner—through you, Mr. Chairman—as you know, in my previous life before I became a minister, I had an interest in this topic as well. I know others on the committee do have a great interest in this.

Salmon has been and will remain a priority for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on both coasts. I want to make it very clear that we are committed to working with others, like the Atlantic Salmon Federation and other groups, for example, to help rebuild the Atlantic salmon stocks. We are doing that and we are investing in the area, although not as much as they would like.

I cannot either promise or preclude an Atlantic salmon endowment fund at this stage. I must make it clear that any decision on bringing one forward would have to be made in the context of other governmental and departmental priorities.

But I want to assure you that I am hearing these concerns. In September, I believe it was, I spoke at the dinner of the Miramichi Salmon Association and certainly heard their concerns. I've met with the ASF a number of times and with other groups involved, and with a group in Nova Scotia also. In fact, where was I recently? I think I was in Nova Scotia, in Halifax, and while we were talking about a different issue, someone who'd been very involved in the fishery wanted to mention this as a side point, because he was a keen fisherman. In fact, he gave me a hook in a little package to remind me that this was an important issue from his perspective.

So I'm certainly hearing this message, and it remains a priority for me.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: We look at the different pillars as to what allows us to manage the fishery in the pertinent fisheries. Again, I guess the cautionary points have been voiced. There's ample anecdotal evidence that sometimes our enforcement people.... And I'll present this to the minister on behalf of some of the people who are working in the field now. It has become harder.

I certainly understand the restraints the minister is under, with budgetary restraints, but we are seeing enforcement officers not having access to resources such as gas in the trucks in order to get out and not being able to take vehicles home with them. When they finish their shift at the end of the day, they park their vehicles at the office.

So those who are out in the field may take the opportunity, a little liberty, and poach or compromise rules because they know the vehicles are back at the fisheries office and they know those fisheries officers are not coming out that night; whereas when the fisheries officers were able to take those vehicles home, they might have been able to get involved in nighttime surveillance or whatever.

I guess the question would be, what steps are being taken to make sure those resources are getting into the hands of the people who are out there? I think they're wanting to do a job, but just over the last number of years, it hasn't come as easily. Cuts have had to be made and reallocations have had to be made.

• (1145)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, through you again to Mr. Cuzner, as I said, salmon is certainly a priority for me. In fact, when you consider that we as a government have a responsibility to spend taxpayers' dollars wisely, we wouldn't be spending in this area at all if it weren't a priority, and an important one, and we are.

At the same time we have been going through a process, as I was saying earlier in French, of looking at our expenditures and trying to move dollars from lower to higher priorities. That's an important process, and it's important to continue that process on an ongoing basis to constantly make sure that you're using the dollars as efficiently as possible and on the important priorities of Canadians.

I'm going to ask Mr. Bevan to add some more comments on this question.

Mr. David Bevan: It says here, as was noted, that we are looking at all our expenditures and where they're taking place. Obviously, the front lines, the field operations, are our highest priority.

We have been aware of the limits that have been placed on officers and others in terms of having the cash available to do the work they have to do. We've moved money out into the field now as a result of some of the year-end evaluations of where we spend money. We've cut our overheads to the bone in order to try to make sure the front lines have enough resources to get the job done.

In that particular area, and in the Maritimes in general, we have provided additional funding specifically geared to field operations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. Minister, in our seventh report to the previous Parliament—the report was, by the way, unanimous—recommendation 15 was:

That the federal government establish, in cooperation with the Atlantic Salmon Federation, a wild Atlantic salmon endowment fund to be used to assist volunteer organizations to implement Atlantic salmon conservation and habitat stewardship programs.

In the response that was given it was pointed out that the Pacific salmon endowment fund was created with a contribution of \$30 million from government. On behalf of our committee, I would urge you to do whatever you can in pre-budget consultations with your colleagues to do what you can. Thirty million dollars, with a \$9.1 billion surplus and many billions of dollars surplus for upcoming years, is literally a drop in the bucket to protect the Atlantic salmon.

I'm asking you—and I know you will—to fight as hard as you can, like a salmon struggling upstream, if I can put it that way, to get that \$30 million so we can get this fund established.

Who's next?

Mr. Keddy, five minutes.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would also like to welcome the minister to committee this morning.

Along with my colleague, Mr. Hearn, I certainly have some serious reservations about the announcement at the UN. I would note that the minister replied that it was only a temporary resolution, and that he didn't actually sign it and it doesn't specifically target bottom trawling. However, in sections 66, 67, 68, and 69 it specifically targets bottom trawling and any fishery that's harmful to the habitat or to the environment.

For Canada to sign that type of resolution is, I think, highly irresponsible. It totally ignores the state of the fishery on the east coast. With the downturn in the ground fishery, we have a \$500 million to \$600 million scallop fishery, mainly off Georges Bank and

Browns Bank, and certainly off Sable Bank and Emerald Bank and other areas.

To put these fisheries directly in peril at a time when the fishery needs...not only at a time when they are healthy, because they self-regulate, but at a time when the industry needs that income, both the harvesters and the processors, is difficult to believe.

I'm just wondering if there's anything we can do. It also has a two-year deadline. We're going to come back to the United Nations in 24 months and give an update on whether we've enforced this technology ban.

I'd like to know what we can do in the short term to get ourselves out of this predicament.

• (1150)

The Chair: That's a good question. Let's leave it at that.

Quickly, Mr. Regan.

Hon. Geoff Regan: First of all, Mr. Chairman, I think it's important to understand that the reason I said I didn't sign it was because it was suggested that I had signed it, and clearly I did not. It's important to set out the facts on that.

This resolution calls on countries to consider an interim ban on a case-by-case basis based on science in sensitive areas, for instance the hydrothermal vents on the west coast, which we've already protected. And it's talking about the area beyond 200 miles.

I don't think when you look at it that you disagree it's a worthwhile objective. In fact, what we've heard from industry generally is that they do support the intent of the resolution. Their concern has been with certain specific wording in the resolution. That's a concern that I share and it's what I was trying to address in my speech on Tuesday.

But I understand what you're saying. And I think we want to make sure that people understand our position. I put our position on the table very clearly, that in fact if we're talking about sensitive areas, for example the corals off Nova Scotia or the Gulley, which we've already protected, it's important that we do that. We agree with that, and that's why we support the resolution, even though we can understand the concerns of the industry about the specific wording, although they support the intent. The intent is very important, because we are obviously trying to gain international political will to get things done in this area generally in terms of irresponsible fishing practices.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: I thank the minister for the brevity of his answer, because we have only five minutes to ask questions.

I'm not sure I agree with your take on the resolution; I hope you're correct.

However, I have two other matters. On the Atlantic salmon, the endowment fund has been asked for by committee. There is an urgent need in Atlantic Canada to support both habitat and the spawning capacity of Atlantic salmon. We have a distinct species in the inner Bay of Fundy, the inner Bay of Fundy salmon, that's not being protected. This is a totally different species from Atlantic salmon, a totally different genetic variety, and we're not talking—I agree with our chair—about a lot of money here: \$30 million in the big scheme of things would be returned very quickly to the provinces of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec just in sport fishery alone. I'm not even certain you couldn't take the licence fees and find the \$30 million if you wanted to set that aside for a period of time.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Let me say, first of all, as I've said, I do value the Atlantic salmon fishery, and I think it's important to note that in fact it is important not only in terms of the people who happen to enjoy the fishing themselves, but clearly also in terms of the economic benefits it brings for outfitters and people who have perhaps lodges and even in some cases hotels or motels that are near fishing areas, as well as grocery stores. There's a whole range of businesses and people that benefit from the industry's activities. I'm very cognizant of that and I want you to know that.

But I want to just address for a second this question about the Bay of Fundy salmon, because I'm advised that it's not, in fact, a different genetic strain. It is protected, but I'm going to let Mr. Bevan tell us about that.

• (1155)

Mr. David Bevan: It is in fact a separate strain of salmon obviously. It's recognized as a species under the Species at Risk Act and we have listed that as an endangered species. Therefore, it's subject to the rebuilding plan process and to the prohibitions on harm and harassment and killing of these fish.

So it's covered by the Species at Risk Act, and we have looked at this issue. We've declined the possibility of having incidental harm permits issued to any fisherman or other people who could harm those fish. So it's under the highest protection we can possibly offer at this point in terms of fishing mortality and other activities that could in fact harm those fish.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, can I just quickly ask the deputy minister to comment on something else?

Mr. Larry Murray: I'm not sure, Mr. Chair, whether this is entirely appropriate, but we have experience with the Pacific salmon endowment fund at \$30 million. This amount is actually inadequate; \$50 million would be much better. If in fact the committee is going to support an endowment fund on the east coast, to make it worthwhile with current markets and all that, I would say \$50 million on each coast would be a more appropriate number if it's going to actually do something useful.

The Chair: Mr. Deputy Minister, I think the committee unanimously agrees with you.

Just so we have something clear on the record, Minister, I think we all understand your point that you didn't physically sign the United Nations resolution. But do I understand it correctly that Canada supported the resolution?

Hon. Geoff Regan: That's right, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Simms, you have five minutes.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Thank you.

Mr. Minister, thank you for coming.

I want to talk about your recent trip to Portugal. May I be so bold as to suggest that Portugal necessarily hasn't been a good world citizen when it comes to conservation. I didn't come here to start a diplomatic row, but there you have it—tell it like it is, I suppose.

In your trip and in your discussions, did you gauge any sincerity whatsoever by the foreign ministry or the fisheries minister there that they too want to get serious about conservation, given what they have done just outside the 200-mile limit?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much for the question.

I did have very good meetings, not with the foreign affairs department but with the minister of fisheries and some of his senior officials in Portugal. I can tell you that Jean-Claude Bouchard, who is the associate deputy minister of fisheries, has been to Portugal three times now this year. He was there in May and then again since then, and when I went, he was with us.

He found a very different response from what he found back in May particularly. As you recall, after the May 5 events, when we boarded and inspected two vessels and found four infractions that day, Mr. Bouchard went not that long afterwards to Portugal to discuss the issue with them. His view is that when we went a week ago or so, he'd seen a 180-degree turn. Now it's important to note that there's a new minister of fisheries. There is a change in the government. Actually, the former Prime Minister of Portugal is now the head of the European Commission. There's a new prime minister and the person who was the foreign affairs minister is now the fisheries minister.

It was clear to me that he wanted to work with Canada in a positive way and to have positive relations. Therefore, we've agreed to have some important exchanges, which are valuable in terms of increasing understanding and improving the relationship. But I think it's very important to note that the diplomatic angle here is one part of our approach. It is a two-pronged approach, which is diplomatic on the one hand but also increasing our enforcement on the other.

I think what we—all of us, I believe—are after most of all are results. What we have seen is that compared to last year, when there were 47 infractions found by our inspectors, this year we've found 8, including one minor one this morning, as a matter of fact, and 4 of those 8 were on that first day on May 5 when we boarded those two vessels. Last year there were 47 infractions. That is a tremendous decline in infractions in spite of the fact that we've had more than 150 inspections this year. We've had a much greater presence out there and a far greater number of inspections this year. We've also seen a drop in the number of foreign vessels fishing on the nose and tail. In fact, this fall there are fewer than half the number that were there last year. Last year there were about 53 vessels fishing groundfish out there and now there are about 20. So that's an important change.

What we're seeing is I think because of our presence. If they go in the area where the moratoria species are located high on the slope of the Grand Banks, they know we're going to be there and we're going to inspect them. That's an inconvenience, without question, but we're doing our job to protect those stocks. What we're seeing is more often those ships are out in deeper waters where they're allowed to fish stocks.

In fact we have three vessels on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks today. There is the *Leonard J. Cowley*, the *Cape Roger*, both of them coast guard vessels, as well as HMCS *Charlottetown*, a navy frigate that's out there today doing patrol and doing their job on the nose and tail.

• (1200)

Mr. Scott Simms: Have you had any discussions with the provincial minister in Newfoundland and Labrador, Trevor Taylor? He seems to be taking quite an interest in this and is quite vocal about it. Have you worked with him?

Hon. Geoff Regan: In fact at the beginning of the year—I think it was January 6 or thereabouts—I was in St. John's, and Mr. Taylor and I flew on one of the surveillance flights in a small plane out to the 200-mile limit and just beyond and actually observed some of the ships that were out there and saw how the people on board the surveillance flight do their job.

I must say I was very impressed with the professionalism of the people who work for our department and for the company we've hired to do these flights in terms of how they pursue, find, track down the vessels, how they identify them—identify their numbers—as they fly by quickly, and look closely to see what kind of activity they're doing. They check to see if there's a net on board. What is the net like? Is there obviously a liner? We've had occasions in the past when they've seen small mesh being used or a liner inside a regular mesh liner. Those are great concerns, and we're watching those things very carefully, photographing the vessels. So I've been very impressed with their work.

But to conclude, and in answer to your question, I must say I've appreciated my work with Mr. Taylor very much. We got along very well, and it's been very clear to me that the Newfoundland and Labrador Government's top priority in relation to the fishery is combating overfishing, and that in fact is my top priority as well. We've put a considerable amount of resources toward that effort.

There's no question also in my mind that the Government of Canada is committed to continuing to do that. The Prime Minister has made this a priority internationally and I have no doubt we're going to continue this effort.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Simms, thanks. Your time is up, but I'm sure we'll have time to get back to you.

Next is Monsieur Blais pour cinq minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, minister and ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to start with a compliment; the criticism will come later. I do have criticisms, unfortunately.

Minister, I would say that you are a nice person. But I would like you to add another quality to that: I would like you to be effective. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Where small craft harbours are concerned, your department is acting irresponsibly. The situation in which we find ourselves makes no sense.

In your opening comments, you presented your priorities or your vision. In your conclusion and the comments about your vision of the next few years, you unfortunately make no mention of small craft harbours or infrastructure.

You know as well as I do that this is a horror story. You do mention it on the preceding page. You also indicate that there is not enough money available to deal with this issue effectively and responsibly, and this is what I mean when I say I would like to be able to pay you the compliment of being effective on this file.

I consider the department's actions in this regard irresponsible. An evaluation done by the department showed that it would have taken about \$400 million to repair the docks in small craft harbours. The latest evaluation shows that it would take \$460 million. Those are also departmental numbers.

Unfortunately, I am sure that the reality is even worse than that. So this situation is getting worse and causing marine traffic problems as well as very serious safety problems. I do not believe that we should wait until disaster strikes before deciding that it is time to act. In my opinion, we must not wait for something deplorable to happen.

So I would like you to tell us that you want to be effective in dealing with the small craft harbours issue and that it was just an oversight that you made no mention of infrastructure when you talked about your vision for the short, medium and long term in a department that should be effective.

• (1205)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you for the compliment, Mr. Blais, but first of all it should be noted that there are a great many small harbours across Canada, both on the Atlantic and the Pacific side, and even in the Great Lakes, all of which are important. With the budgets we have, we have to manage the ports as well as we can.

At present, the department is examining the small craft harbours program. We are looking at ways of adapting the program to make it more sustainable and meet the challenge of the current and foreseeable demand. I consider this extremely important.

During winter and spring, we will consult stakeholders on the issue and listen to the kinds of improvements they would like to see. I plan to share the results of those consultations with the committee, to see how we can best deal with these issues.

Mr. Da Pont, would you like to add any comments?

Mr. George Da Pont: No, that covers everything.

Mr. Raynald Blais: But this does not solve the urgency issue. I'm all in favour of consultation, which does indeed provide a more comprehensive overview of the situation. But we have that overview. We have the overall picture. We know what the problems are. It is urgent to take action to ensure the safety of fishers who use these infrastructures, which are becoming degraded. We hear one story after another. Recently in Percé, a section of the dock collapsed—not a section of the rock, but a section of the dock. The rock—Rocher Percé—loses 100 tons a year. That's one thing. However, the dock next to it shouldn't be losing bits of itself. We have lots of horror stories to tell. Percé is just one case in point, but I could also talk about Grande Vallée or Rivière au Renard in my riding. In any case, you may have an opportunity to see this with your own eyes, Minister, when you visit us.

There are urgent problems that require urgent action. We must not wait for catastrophes before doing something. Right now, there are people putting their lives in danger every time they use these infrastructures. For the moment, the department's solution is to put fences around the docks. That is the department's solution. But in my opinion, this is an urgent situation requiring concrete action.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the member's interest in the issue. I myself share his concern for and his interest in fishers and harbours. We are trying to deal with urgent situations as the need arises, and we appreciate the member's raising these issues because it gives us an opportunity to determine whether we can respond immediately, or in the near future.

Nonetheless, as I said in my remarks, our priority is public safety. When public safety is at stake, we must take action as quickly as possible. If there are problems, cases where we did not respond as quickly as you would have liked, I am ready to take another look and see if we can make certain repairs a priority.

One of the officials with me has something to add.

• (1210)

[English]

Mr. Larry Murray: Thank you, Minister.

In using the money we have we give the greatest priority to addressing issues of safety and security. In terms of our priority ranking system and how we determine on a year-to-year basis what work gets done, that's the criterion that gets the greatest weight. As the minister said, we realize that it doesn't meet every need and that we can't address things as quickly as we would like, and we appreciate that point.

We also put a great deal of work into inspecting all the harbours, at least on an annual basis. We work very closely with the harbour authorities, and certainly, when we have matters of urgent safety, we address them as best we can and as quickly as we can.

A good example of that was the situation with Hurricane Juan, for example, not that long ago in Nova Scotia, where the department found extra money outside the small craft harbour budget to supplement funds for repairs on an urgent basis. In fact, over the last two or three years we have consistently spent more than what was in the initial estimates, making it a priority for any funding that lapses from other areas. We've tried to focus our funding as best we can on the urgent safety issues.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Da Pont.

Committee members, this is just to let you know we seem to be making really good time and we have time left. We're going to go with Mr. Murphy for five minutes, then Mr. Stoffer, then Mr. Simms, and then Mr. Kamp. Then, with the indulgence of my Liberal colleagues, I'd like to ask a couple of questions, and then we'll see how we're going.

We'll go to Mr. Murphy for five minutes.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Minister, I just have a couple of policy issues I want to get your comments on, and they very much relate to the estimates. First, I'm following up on the small craft harbours and this whole concept of what if any percentage the user pays in this whole process. It's somewhat foreign to the fishing industry, but I look at the situation with respect to public policy, where maybe a small craft harbour needs repair and there are perhaps 10, 15, or 20 fishing fleets there. In some areas of the east coast, as you know, Mr. Minister, fishing is very lucrative. If those fleets are netting \$200,000 on the average each year, is there any consideration given to a public policy wherein they would share a part of the cost of any repairs needed for the facility?

When you fly in an airplane and you land at an airport, you pay a fee. If you travel the roads, you pay something under the Excise Tax Act that is certainly more than the cost of a taxpayer's use of the road. Is this anything your department is considering? If you did this, you would get a lot more bang for the buck from the money you are spending on small craft harbours. I know it's a difficult issue because there are a lot of complaints out there.

The second question, Mr. Minister, is this—I'll put them both on the table. As one who follows these issues from a public policy point of view, I'd like your comments on the whole issue of sanctions. I personally have a problem when I see a licensed fisher, fishing a public resource pursuant to a licence issued by you, doing very well in some cases and then going out and violating the terms of the licence. Yet there doesn't seem to be a whole lot done in the process under the court system. I would think that a more effective procedure would be a loss of licence for two or three years on a first instance, and then if there was ever a repeat offender—though I don't think you would ever have a repeat offender—then of course their licence would be gone forever.

Are either of these policy issues under active consideration by your department?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, through you to Mr. Murphy.

First of all, in terms of the small craft harbours, as the member perhaps knows, there are in many cases harbour authorities who in fact collect funds from the users of the port. They raise \$11 million a year, which is an important component of the cost of maintaining those harbours. Of course, as you know, we prioritize as well in terms of our resources and how we respond in the case of small craft harbours, particularly those small craft harbours that are class 1 harbours, which have a large number of vessels. They are the first priority and you go from there, but we do obviously recognize the concerns about all small craft harbours and try to respond as best we can.

In terms of the sanctions, I would agree with you. This is a concern. We are going through a process of fisheries renewal with the idea of moving toward administrative sanctions, and I would certainly be interested if the committee wanted to look at this question in more detail and give its advice on how to move forward in this. For instance, if the committee feels there are changes to the act that would be helpful in this regard, I would be more than happy to see the committee look at that.

The act, we know, hasn't really been overhauled since it was brought into being in 1867. It's been tried once or twice, and clearly we have a minority Parliament, so maybe this is the time to make that happen. Who knows? I'd certainly be interested in knowing what the views are of this committee in terms of whether there is some consensus about how to move forward in that regard and whether we could get some agreement on how to revise, reform, or overhaul the Fisheries Act.

But as to the particular question, yes, we are interested in moving to administrative sanctions. That's one of the things we're working on and I think it's very important.

• (1215)

The Chair: Do you have any further questions?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: That's it for me, Mr. Chairman, but I would make the point that I think that is something the committee should look at. It's something that goes right to the heart of enforcement and the protection of the resource, namely the sanctions that are imposed on particular fishers who violate the terms of the licence or the laws.

The Chair: I'll make sure the clerk brings it to the attention of the steering committee when we meet next.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to say as a New Democrat that on a recent trip with the minister to the United Nations, knowing it was probably the minister's first time speaking before the UN on all the fisheries issues in terms of the Law of the Sea, I thought the minister did a good job on the presentation of the speech. When I'd listened to all the other countries with their presentations and their speeches, I thought he did quite a good job. I just want to say that as a parliamentarian; I thought he did well. Of course, he didn't mention custodial management, which is something I would have mentioned.

I want to start off with a few questions. Everyone is confused as to who is the lead minister with responsibility for Sable Island. I

assume it's the fisheries minister. A lot of folks on the east coast are very concerned that the funding may not be there to keep the station manned, as we would say. What they're looking for is about a half a million dollars per year in stable funding to keep people on the island in order to do the work they do. So my first question is, will that happen and what's the government's view on Sable?

The second question is about the coast guard. Mr. Da Pont said that safety and security are the major priorities. Well, that's what the coast guard does, and there's no question that the coast guard's fleet needs to be rebuilt and that it needs new vessels. That's quite an expensive venture, and we've asked before in this committee for over a half a billion dollars over a three-year period to replace and rebuild the vessels. Of course, that becomes a shipbuilding concern, and those ships can be built right here in Canada. I'd like to know the views on that.

As well there's the Atlantic salmon endowment fund. Mr. Murray, I agree with you: \$50 million would be a more appropriate number.

The last one I have for you is on the Baffin Fisheries Coalition and the recent deal of the reflagging of the vessel now called the *Inukshuk*. We're hearing information every day up there that this particular deal doesn't pass the smell test. Now, we knew that a Mr. Ben Kovik, who is the head of the NWB, is now part of BFC. We know that a Mr. Ward gave an incorrect fish CFB number to a Michelle Wheatley.

Now, you have to have a registration number in order to fish in Canadian waters. Either this was an error or it was done on purpose, but the information we have from a Mr. John Andrews, who wrote to the minister, is that this was an administrative oversight. But if you spoke to Canadian companies, they'd say that if that happened to them, they would be up the creek without a paddle and there would be severe restrictions placed upon them.

The question of this entire deal over the BFC and the reflagging of that vessel just doesn't pass the smell test. I'm asking you if you plan on doing a review process of how this all happened, making it open and transparent so various associations that are up there and our committee would have access to that information.

I have many more questions but very little time.

• (1220)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, four questions are a lot to start off with.

First of all, on Sable Island, I want to clarify that the amendments contained within Bill C-3 maintain the responsibility for Sable Island with my department. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans still has it. Bill C-3 really is designed to move the issue of marine safety to transport, which it does, generally speaking, and protection of the marine environment, as you know. That's what the bill does, but we maintain the responsibility for Sable Island.

We've been talking with environment and the Treasury Board about who should fund the supply of, and the protection for, Sable Island. In the meantime, until we find someone else to take it over, my view is that it's important to the Government of Canada that we protect Sable Island and take the steps needed to do that. Particularly, the big concern earlier this year was about supply. We continue to supply Sable Island, and we'll keep doing so. We're working on this issue, and it is a priority for me.

Someone expressed the concern that I haven't actually been there. I've tried actually. I attempted to go to Sable Island last February. I made it all the way to Shearwater, in your riding, to get on a helicopter to fly there and was told by DFO staff that in fact the weather window was wide enough to get there, but not to get back. As much as I would have enjoyed three weeks on Sable Island last winter, as it was probably, in some respects, more pleasant and more peaceful than Ottawa, obviously, I didn't think it was the right move and didn't get there on that occasion. This winter I hope to have occasion to visit, but it doesn't make me any less concerned about the issue.

On the coast guard, I mentioned earlier that it is a priority for me to make it a high priority. I think it's very important that we look after the coast guard. As you know, \$47 million was added to the coast guard budget last year. This remains a very high priority for me, and I think it's very important that we look after Commissioner Adams' work. I know he'd appreciate it.

We had some discussion already about the Atlantic salmon endowment fund. I don't know if that was really a question or only an aside.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: It was only an aside.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Okay. It was an aside.

In relation to the reflagging of the ship for the BFC, let's remember that we are working with the Nunavut government and asking for their advice. We are taking their advice on how we do this. It's important that the people of Nunavut benefit from this fishery, and they are deciding how it should be conducted.

I think it's important to note also in terms of these vessels that for a crew of 30 or so, in order for anyone from outside Canada to be on the crew, they have to have approval and a permit from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. My understanding is that only four were issued. There were only four people who are non-Canadians on that vessel, and the vast majority are Canadian. It was reflagged as a Canadian vessel, following the rules of Transport Canada to do so. That's important.

It's also important that the idea is to have up to 14 Inuit working aboard the vessel. It's important that people in the north get the experience of working on these vessels so that they can take over running them. That's certainly my plan. My wish would be that these vessels working the north be fully Canadian and run by the people of Nunavut. That's the direction we're attempting to go in.

Now I want to ask Mr. Bevan to respond to the more particular concerns you've described.

Mr. David Bevan: The registration of the vessel was an error that was quickly rectified. It's now covered by the normal licences and registrations that are necessary.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: With great respect, Mr. Bevan—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Stoffer. We'll try to get back to you.

Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

Mr. Minister, an event happened a few weeks ago where I organized a round table discussion in a town that is the largest inshore fishing town in North America—which is?

• (1225)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Bonavista.

Mr. Scott Simms: It's Bonavista. Right you are, sir, very good.

It was put together by the town council of Bonavista. At this round table discussion we had representation from the union, processors, harvesters, and plant workers, who were, of course, all suffering at this point. What they told us was quite unanimous, even though they had varying degrees of interest. They said the waters are teeming with cod fish and ground fish around Bonavista Bay, Trinity Bay, and you can extend that to Notre Dame Bay as well. They fully believed there's more than what science is led to believe, based on your acoustic and signal surveys.

In the discussion on the three years prior to 1992 and the moratorium, their opinion was again unanimous at that point. They said there's something wrong out there. The cod are not showing up, and we have problems. Three years later the moratorium was called.

They feel now they're in the same position, where they're saying there is fish to sustain an inshore fishery, on a limited scale or whatever. They're frustrated because they feel this is a critical time, especially in this particular town and also for the whole region in my riding, which is around the Bonavista Peninsula. Do you have any comments about that?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Mr. Simms, through you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I want to congratulate Mr. Simms for having that meeting. I think it was a good initiative. We had people from the department present at that meeting, as you know, as we did at consultations across the province on the issue of the listing of cod under the Species at Risk Act.

I think when you say the waters are teeming with cod, when you hear those reports, clearly, one gets excited and one gets encouraged that people are seeing cod in the waters. When you look at the way things were a decade ago or so, there have been grave concerns. But when you listen to the top scientists, including those at Memorial University, who tell us that cod in northeastern Newfoundland and Labrador are still at historic lows, we have to be concerned about that. They are saying they are at 3% of their historic levels, according to what information they have.

A gentleman from Newfoundland, who I saw recently, sent me a copy of one of the recent issues of *The Independent*, in which people were talking about the fact that we have to be careful about this. The fact that we see some quantities in the bays doesn't mean we should start fishing right away. They say that whenever you see some, people want to get fishing. Of course, then you don't get the stock rebuilt.

I think it's also very important that we err on the side of caution. I think most people, if they think about it, would agree that's the wise thing to do, that we have a science-based approach. In fact, when we are trying internationally, when we're talking to other nations and talking to them about the importance of basing our quota levels, in the NAFO regulatory area, for example, on science, I think it's important that we do it also within our own waters. This is a case where we have to have empirical evidence, not just anecdotal evidence, that supports a fishery. At this stage, it's not there yet.

It may come. Perhaps, as we hope, the stocks are rebuilding and we'll find information scientifically that provides us support for a fishery at some time in the future. I don't know when. And I appreciate the fact that you and other members from Newfoundland have brought this issue to me and have been concerned about this. At the same time, I think you'll appreciate that it is vital that we err on the side of caution and take a cautious approach.

I want to ask the ADM for science, Wendy Watson-Wright, to add some more.

Dr. Wendy Watson-Wright (Assistant Deputy Minister, Science, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chair and Mr. Simms, actually, the minister has answered it exactly as I would have. In fact, the fish, as you know, aggregate differently. Now, the aggregations do seem to be inshore, but that does not necessarily mean, or it does not mean, that overall the stock is in good shape. It is the feeling of science, both DFO science and academic science, that the stocks are still in very bad shape and that to open any sort of fishery at this time would be a very unwise thing to do.

You're aware, of course, that the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada is recommending it be classified as endangered and things like that, but aside from that, our evidence thus far would not lead us to recommend reopening a fishery. It's somewhat similar, or the analogy has been made, in terms of taking the census of Newfoundland by looking at only Corner Brook and St. John's and saying you have an overall sense of what's happening overall on the island.

Mr. Scott Simms: If I may—

The Chair: Last comment.

Mr. Scott Simms: —the COSEWIC hearing you mentioned, about trying to explore whether cod fish is indeed endangered or threatened, is causing a lot of concern across Newfoundland and Labrador, which I'm sure my colleagues will agree with. The general fear is this: if it is declared an endangered or threatened species, is this a precursor? Is this good enough reason to say, that's it, no more?

The Chair: David.

Mr. David Bevan: I think it's important to keep in mind that under the act, should one of those species be listed, there is a possibility for continued fishing on other species and even for the possibility of directed fishing under the auspices of a recovery plan. So it's not that that's it, it's over, if they were listed. There are fears I think that not one single fish could be killed, in terms of other human activities, and that's not necessarily the case. Provided science can tell us that incidental harm permits are something that can be issued

and that the stock can take the incidental harm, then other fisheries could be prosecuted, and indeed if we have a rebuilding plan that can demonstrate that we are on track to rebuild the stocks, there's the possibility of continued low-level fishing.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

Just to be clear, though, I suppose all of these issues depend on what historical goalposts you are using. If people are remembering 15 years ago and then comparing the fish stocks with 15 years ago, that's entirely different from what the fish stocks were 50 years ago or a hundred years ago. Compared to a hundred years ago, they would still be infinitesimally small, whereas perhaps compared to 15 years ago they seem to be doing well.

Would you not agree with that?

Mr. David Bevan: I don't think anybody's using goalposts that are very old, and in this whole area we're looking at relatively recent history. People who were involved in the fishery are still hopeful that it will be there again. We're not going back generations; we're looking at it relative to what it was a few years ago. Unfortunately, as the minister noted, the northern cod stock in particular is a mere remnant of what it was just a short time ago.

The Chair: Never mind a hundred years ago.

Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to thank the minister and his officials for coming before us.

I am from B.C., as some of you will know, and the Fraser River runs through my riding. In fact, I grew up very close to the banks of the Fraser River, so let me begin with some comments and questions back to that issue.

Many are calling what went on in the sockeye fishery this season an ecological disaster, and I think there's much truth to that. I think we're left with a couple of simple questions: what went wrong and how do we find out what went wrong? What went wrong... it seems to be that the minister talks about empirical evidence and there's one to two million fish missing. I know the explanation—we've heard it already—is the warm water temperatures. It's interesting to me that this is the same approach that was taken for the 1992 and 1994 problems on the fishery. In fact, it was a more scientific approach to a post-season review than is being recommended this time. When they were done, in both cases, that theory was pretty much largely discredited. I'm expecting to find out that that will be discredited in this case as well. In fact, a friend of mine, who crosses the Fraser River as the captain of a ferry every day, and has done it many times every day for 30 years, monitors the fishing situation, anecdotally I understand, and there aren't the bodies of the fish coming back down the river as there would be if it was simply a matter of warm water temperature, as it was in some other years.

I know a post-season review has been announced, and I want you to know that there's a fair degree of pessimism out on the west coast that this is going to produce any results. I read the report this morning, of the chair being appointed and so on. It's interesting to me that also included in that report is that he's a life-long Liberal. Maybe that shouldn't surprise us, but it does contribute to the pessimism.

Let me say that even if there are some good results from that, the key problem is not lack of good recommendations, but lack of good responses. We're not the only ones saying that. One example is the 2001 report on the Fraser River, tabled in 2003. There were at least ten good recommendations in there, and I don't know if the minister considers this committee chopped liver, but it appears to us that none of those recommendations were implemented. I'd like to know why.

The stakeholders are saying that any kind of long-term solution requires a judicial inquiry, and I agree with that, and our B.C. caucus agrees with that as well. I think this would be a really good opportunity for the minister to announce that he agrees with that as well.

•(1235)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, through you to Mr. Kamp.

I appreciate your interest in this important issue. There's no question it's of great concern to British Columbians, as it is to me and to the department. I think it's important that this public, post-season review will be led by an independent chair. There's no question that a former chief justice of the province is a distinguished and independent chair of that panel. It's also important to note that it will be made up of stakeholders, that it is conducted by the integrated salmon harvest planning committee, chaired by the honourable Mr. Williams.

All stakeholders involved are represented on that committee, and that committee in fact is one of the recommendations of the committee you referred to in 2003. We've been waiting for nominations to come forward of the people who will be sitting on the committee. Those have come forward now and that committee has been formed. That's a key recommendation that we have accepted and put into place.

It's important for me that this review be done properly, that it be open and fair, and that it will provide timely advice in the management of the salmon. I intend to take their advice very seriously. I'm looking for solutions, and I want to know exactly what happened. If the advice I'm getting about what happened is wrong, I want to know that so we can act appropriately.

I want to ask if Mr. Bevan wants to add some more.

Mr. David Bevan: I think one of the points raised by the minister is that stakeholders are going to be involved in the review and that DFO will be there only to provide information and support, etc., not running this at all. The stakeholders are going to be the ones looking at the information and coming forward with recommendations.

The other issue is that we need to know what happened before the 2005 season is put in place. If there are problems that weren't anticipated, if it's...depending on what it might have been, we need to

know so that we can correct those before 2005. Therefore, we need to have something that is very timely indeed.

The Chair: We have 20 minutes left, and there remains me, Monsieur Roy, Mr. Simms, and Mr. Stoffer. Could we consider this the lightning round, with some really short questions and some equally short answers?

Let me just ask a couple of policy things on estimates, Minister. At the end of every fiscal year departments that have a surplus are permitted to carry forward 5% of it into the next fiscal year. Did your department have a surplus at the end of the last fiscal year?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'm going to invite Mr. Da Pont to answer that, if you don't mind, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. George Da Pont: Thank you, Minister.

Yes, we did have a surplus at the end of the year. It was a surplus of a little over \$28 million. A little over \$8 million of that surplus was actually a planned carry forward under the Marshall program. The remaining \$19 million was a carry forward that we could reallocate to other priorities this year.

The Chair: Have you done so?

Mr. George Da Pont: Yes, we have, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Where did they go?

Mr. George Da Pont: It's a rather long list—

The Chair: Can you provide it to the committee?

Mr. George Da Pont: I can provide the list, yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Second, for the first time this year DFO presents, on page 66 of the report on plans and priorities, a list of statutory reports it has to table in Parliament. For example, in accordance with the provisions of section 42.1 of the Fisheries Act, you as minister are required to table in the House of Commons the annual report on the administration and enforcement of the fish habitat protection and pollution prevention provisions of the Fisheries Act.

Can you give, for each of the reports listed, the tabling date and the period covered by the report? I don't expect you to do that now, but we would ask you to provide that to the committee. Is there a problem with that?

Hon. Geoff Regan: We can do that, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Larry Murray: Mr. Chairman, we have been working hard to improve the initial report that you mentioned. I just wonder if the ADM for oceans and habitat might update the committee on where we're at in terms of that annual habitat report. I know that was a concern of the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

Ms. Kirby, go ahead.

Ms. Sue Kirby (Assistant Deputy Minister, Oceans and Habitat, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We've just recently tabled the 2002-03 report, and the 2003-04 report will be completed before the end of the fiscal year. We have put steps into place to accelerate our provision of those reports.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's it for me. Let's move on to Monsieur Roy.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, since we have been talking about small craft harbours—I mentioned them, Mr. Cuzner mentioned them and Mr. Blais mentioned them—there are a couple of sentences we have heard at least three times. Allow me to quote them: “With the budgets we have, we deal with the most urgent problems. We have to live within our means.” I have heard this three times. It seems to me that you are simply becoming resigned when faced with catastrophe.

You also mentioned managing taxpayer dollars efficiently. I heard that three times as well. But we are seeing costs climbing—the second-last study assessed repair costs at \$400 million, while more recent assessments put them at \$470 million. That is what repairs would cost. Next year, they may cost \$600 million, simply because we didn't make them in time and didn't invest enough in managing small craft harbours.

So if you genuinely want to manage taxpayer dollars efficiently, you should bear in mind that a leaky roof needs fixing. The roof is leaking, Minister.

I'd like to use the same image Mr. Asselin did when he came here on Tuesday. In some places—Mr. Blais mentioned them—it is difficult to see whether the boat is moored to the dock, or whether the dock is moored to the boat. If this goes on, the Coast Guard will have to bring its ships to stop docks floating off on the tide. That's how things are in my region.

And when we talk about efficient management, we need to fight for the money to ensure we make the repairs needed, so that the infrastructures don't end up costing a fortune by the time repairs are made. At present, small craft needs are increasing constantly because no repairs are made and problems are growing. Docks are deteriorating even further. That is what we see out there.

Minister, I would like you to make an official commitment to fight for more money so that we can see some results and see improvements in small craft harbours. We do not want you to be resigned to the situation.

• (1240)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, in answer to Mr. Roy's question, I have already said that the department is examining the small craft harbours program. We are reviewing all departmental budget expenditures to determine how we can manage our finances and resources more effectively, and how we can ensure that the needs of fishers and other stakeholders are met.

I have said that I plan to share the results of the review with the committee. If we conclude that more money is needed, we will ask for it.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Do you know the answer you will get when you consult with stakeholders? You will be told that repairs are needed urgently and immediately.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I know your answer, Mr. Roy, but I'm waiting for the department's answer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Roy.

[English]

Mr. Simms, five minutes.

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm not sure if this is a comment or a question, but it concerns the recreational fishery and the food fishery existing all over Atlantic Canada.

I guess some of the frustrations flow from the fact that there are different rules in different areas about how to police this program. I'm wondering if we could have a blanket policy for all of Atlantic Canada concerning the food fishery. Why is it that we do have different rules in different areas? I know there are petitions currently going around Newfoundland about re-establishing the food fishery, but some of the biggest complaints also concern how DFO administers this particular type of recreational or food fishery.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Through you, Mr. Chairman, to Mr. Simms, first of all, I think it's important to note that not only the all-party committee that worked a few years ago, with both federal and provincial representatives on it, in Newfoundland and Labrador... made recommendations in terms of that province. They made the recommendation that there not be a food fishery. They recommended maintaining the closure of the food fishery. That's also the recommendation of the FRCC for this year in terms of the cod fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So we're following the advice of important bodies that have looked very carefully at this. We talked earlier about the state of the stock. We're concerned about that and are acting accordingly.

In terms of different rules, I can tell you that we are examining the question of the rules across Atlantic Canada and we're looking at doing this in a harmonized fashion, having similar rules across. We are having consultations in other provinces on doing just that.

The Chair: Okay?

• (1245)

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Kamp, just to let you know, I also grew up in Steveston on the Fraser River. The frustration is definitely real.

I think that frustration would be eased if the minister said here today that the report of that esteemed gentleman and that stakeholder committee...if those recommendations would be binding on the government. Then I think you'd have a much more positive feeling on the west coast in that regard when it comes to the Fraser River sockeye and the salmon.

Sir, I also want to mention that today the Supreme Court of Canada ruled on the Haida and Taku-Tlingit people in British Columbia on the aspect of responsibilities of corporations or the Crown when it comes to dealing with aboriginal people and their land claims, when it comes to consultative process on the use of resources. As you know, there's great concern up in the Taku watershed of the Tlingit people regarding a proposal by Redfern Resources to reopen the mine that is the Tulsequah mine and having a road go through the last untouched watershed, or last roadless watershed, in British Columbia.

I'm just wondering if the government, through DFO, will be ensuring an open and transparent process, prior to any development going on, for the Tlingit people and the leaders of the Taku area.

As well, Mr. Brison, the public works minister, has indicated that there will be some department review in terms of staffing, resources, and the possibility that some departments may be allocated to other regions of the country. You had mentioned the "right-sizing" of the coast guard. I just spoke to Mr. Adams, and he indicated that this may mean another term. I hadn't heard it before.

With regard to that, Ms. Watson-Wright, will some scientists from 200 Kent Street be reallocated back to that great institution in Bedford, the BIO? That would be wonderful.

Also—

The Chair: Mr. Stoffer, can we hurry?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I'm almost done, sir.

The Chair: All right. A lightning round.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: With the recent environmental report on the effects of global warming on the Arctic, will the coast guard be monitoring or doing surveillance from vessels up in that area regarding the thinning ice?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and through you, Mr. Stoffer.

Let me see now. There's quite a list here for a lightning round. In terms of the recommendations being binding, I meant to say that we'll take the recommendations very seriously, and I'm looking forward to them. I think we have people doing that review whom I have great respect for, and that's all the more reason why I intend to listen and hear what they have to say and to take very seriously their recommendations. That's what I meant, and I obviously want to wait and see what the recommendations are and make my own conclusions. That's my responsibility as fisheries minister, as you know, but it's also important that there be a public process, which we're going to have.

In terms of the decision in the Supreme Court of Canada today, clearly we have to study the decision before commenting on it.

I would ask Sue Kirby to comment on the other issue in relation to the Tulsequah mine project.

Ms. Sue Kirby: Thank you, Minister, and Chair.

The DFO, along with Transport Canada, is currently finalizing the environmental assessment screening report for the Tulsequah mine project that you mentioned. Prior to releasing that, however, we will ensure that it conforms with the decision that came down today. In

addition to conforming with that decision, and consulting with the first nations peoples in an appropriate way in accordance with that decision, there will be a further 30-day public consultation period on the screening report once it's released.

Hon. Geoff Regan: If I could just respond to the rest of the questions, Mr. Chair.

You mentioned the Bedford Institute of Oceanography. Of course, I live in Bedford, Nova Scotia, and the BIO is actually in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, as you know. It's next door. I grew up not far from there and had a neighbour, Dr. Bosko Loncarevic, who was a leading scientist there for many years and for whom I had great respect. I'm certainly familiar with the institute; it's an important one and does very important work in many, many areas.

In terms of the question of decentralization, I noted earlier that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is one of the most decentralized departments in the country, with less than 15% of its personnel in Ottawa. It is important that our people be out in the regions of the country providing services they're supposed to provide. That's very important, and I want to make sure we do that. As we look at our department, if there are personnel who ought to be more in the regions and less in Ottawa, it's important we examine that.

If the committee wanted to take a close look at the department, at what personnel were where, where they ought to be, and what the costs are of moving people to other locations—because there certainly would be costs associated with that—I think it would be worthwhile. I would certainly welcome the advice of the committee on that topic, as on many others.

In terms of the coast guard and examining the question of ice in the Arctic, I share the scientific concern. As we look at the issue of global warming, we are seeing more concern about Arctic ice levels. I've heard that concern from my colleague, Nancy Karetak-Lindell, in terms of the caribou herds and the impact it has on them; if they can't cross bodies of water where they normally could in the past, that's a grave concern.

But again, I'm going to turn to Wendy Watson-Wright, the ADM for science, to give us more of an answer.

● (1250)

Dr. Wendy Watson-Wright: Thank you, Minister, and Mr. Chair.

Mr. Stoffer, we in fact do work very closely with the coast guard on the science program in the north, as well as with other government departments who are implicated in science in the north. As I say, that would be our wish.

We do take advantage of the icebreakers that are going up to the north to accomplish the sciences there. As you're aware, there was recently an icebreaker that was refitted to do just science, or pretty well science, for six months of the year in the north. That's the *Amundsen* out of Quebec City, so it will be there.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, this summer in fact the *Amundsen* was in the north doing some important science work.

Did you mention that, perhaps?

Dr. Wendy Watson-Wright: It overwintered there.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I also think it's important to know that the Prime Minister and the Speech from the Throne have talked about the importance of our northern strategy. I can tell you that when I made decisions concerning the north, I have in mind the fact that he's made that a priority and that I'll be judged in some respects by how we respond to that priority.

The Chair: Mr. Hearn, a couple or three snappers.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. They will be snappers.

To the minister, I've been advised that the appointee to your panel in B.C. does not have the respect of industry. You might want to check that out.

Your officials mentioned today there are three boats on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks. How many would have been there this time last week?

On the COSEWIC hearings that have been going on around our province, who has the final say in whether or not there will be an effect on the cod fishery? Is it the minister, some panel, or the do-gooders?

Why has the minister's department not settled the dispute between P.E.I. and New Brunswick regarding the herring fishery?

Finally, the committee wrote to the minister two years ago recommending that DFO designate Tors Cove as a protected harbour, a core harbour, eliminating nearby Burnt Cove. Burnt Cove is recommended to be eliminated. No decision has been made on Tors Cove. I don't believe we've had a reply. When will the wharf be built in Tors Cove?

Hon. Geoff Regan: First of all, Mr. Chairman, I think I'll reserve judgment. I think you'll find that British Columbians will appreciate the fact that the Honourable Bryan Williams has been appointed the chair of that panel and that it is made up of representatives of the industry, of all the stakeholders. It's a very distinguished panel.

As the member knows, the final say on whether to list cod under the Species at Risk Act is in the hands of the Minister of the Environment, who must consult the Minister of Fisheries—in other words, me—as he will do. I will provide my advice to him in due course. As you undoubtedly also know, this decision will be made next fall, which is the process the act provides. That's what will happen.

It is important, as I said earlier, to hear from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians about their views on the socio-economic impacts of a possible listing. That's why I'm very pleased that we've had the hearings this year. I appreciated the input I received from colleagues like Scott Simms, Gerry Byrne, Bill Matthews, and John Efford. They urged me to change the times of those hearings, which were in the daytime at the beginning. We changed it so that most of those meetings were in the evening. I know you appreciated that as well. It was more appropriate, so people could attend.

On the dispute between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, there have been great attempts over the past year. You'll

recall that my predecessor, Robert Thibault, appointed Allister Surette to talk to both sides, hear them out, and try to see if there was any common ground. He did a report that was certainly helpful in setting out the views that were very strongly held on both sides, but it certainly did not show a lot of room for compromise.

The department met with the groups all through the summer many times to try to resolve this. There was agreement this fall between the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association and the seiner group on a scientific fishery over the next three years within the area between 17 and 20 fathoms. You'll recall also that last year the line was moved from 15 fathoms to 17 fathoms. That was an important measure in terms of the concerns of the inshore fishermen of P.E.I.

But I think it's very important to note that the scientific evidence we have is that the fall run of herring off P.E.I. is in a very healthy shape, and we've seen no evidence that there has been an impact on the lobster grounds. If there were otherwise....

The seiners have moved to Cheticamp this year, where they're based off Cape Breton, fishing in that area when they can fish—because of course one of the reasons they can't always catch their quota is that the weather doesn't always cooperate, as you know. Now that they're there, the P.E.I. part of this is finished, and it's time for the science to be looked at and analyzed. We'll start to get some of the information over the next while. That'll be valuable for us to see where it is, what it says about the stock from this year's fishery, and where we go from here.

That's important, but in the meantime I believe our approach has been reasonable and fair, and it's important we take into consideration the concerns of both sides in this. Remember that when the Fathers of Confederation met in Charlottetown long ago and decided that the newly created federal government should have responsibility for fisheries, they could have decided to draw lines in the water between the provinces and among the provinces and say, "Okay, the provinces will run the fishery issues, and we'll look after them in each of our zones". They didn't do that because they knew that fishermen from P.E.I., for example, fished off Nova Scotia; that from Nova Scotia, the *Bluenose* fished in the Grand Banks up in Newfoundland and Labrador; and that fishermen go to different provinces and near different provinces, and have for years. They knew what we know today—that fish really are a Canadian resource that belongs not to any particular group or province, but to all Canadians. It's important to recognize that.

If another player in this wanted to come in to try to negotiate among the parties in this and find a solution, more power to them. I would welcome that solution. I don't feel the need for it to be me who solves the problem, although we would like to do that. Anybody else is welcome to try.

● (1255)

The Chair: Is there any comment on Tors Cove?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Who can answer this question about Tors Cove?

Mr. Da Pont.

Mr. George Da Pont: Tors Cove is one of six active fishing harbours I know of in Newfoundland that are not owned or supported by DFO. At the moment, as I'm sure the committee is aware, under our current policy we limit our funding to harbours that we own.

As part of the review and sustainability strategy that the minister talked about for small craft harbours, he's asked us to look at the options for providing support to essential fishing harbours that are not currently owned or supported by DFO. So that will be one of the items.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, I misspoke earlier, and have been reminded that in fact the Minister of Environment doesn't actually make the decision. He consults the Minister of Fisheries and then makes a recommendation to cabinet. Cabinet decides the question of whether to list a species under the Species at Risk Act.
[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Blais, a last question, and very briefly please.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let's come back briefly to small craft harbours. We cannot go into this today since we have so little time, so I would ask you to forward to committee members more details on the consultations you plan to conduct within the department. How broad will those consultations be, what is the timeframe, what will they include, and so on. This would enable us to consider the consultations in more detail.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, we can provide that information shortly after the meeting. We are also interested in obtaining your views.

[English]

The Chair: That's it.

Thank you very much, Minister, and all of your officials for coming. Thank you, members, for the succinct questions and the succinct answers. It's very much appreciated.

The meeting is adjourned.

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