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• (1400)

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)): I call this afternoon's session to order. We're going to move along with the scheduled orders of the day. Once again, this is the extension of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the study on the northern cod, including the events leading to the collapse of the fishery and the failure of the stock to re-establish itself since the moratorium.

We have as witnesses a panel of inshore fishermen, representation from the Bonavista area—not just Bonavista but the whole area. Thank you all for coming.

We've allotted 10 minutes for each speaker. Will each of you be using the 10 minutes to speak?

Doug, you're going to be speaking for 10 minutes?

• (1405)

Mr. Douglas Sweetland (Panel of Inshore Fishermen): It could be possibly 8, 10 or 15 minutes.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Well, you won't go over 10 minutes.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: I'll take all 10 of them.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Albert? Okay.

George?

Mr. George Feltham (Panel of Inshore Fishermen): Possibly 10 minutes.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Pearce?

Mr. Pearce Burry (Panel of Inshore Fishermen): It depends on the information.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): I see.

Okay, we'll deal with it as it comes, but each of you would like something to say, so we've allotted that amount of time.

After that, we'll go through questioning. We'll start off with one round, from the Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois, the NDP, and of course the government side as well.

As we have to provide interpretation in French, it would help our interpreters very much if you could speak at a reasonable pace to give them enough time.

That said, we have representing us today, Mr. Douglas Sweetland, Hedley Butler, Albert Johnson, George Feltham, and Pearce Burry.

We'll start with you, Doug.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'll start off by reading from my written presentation. It will be interspersed with more information from my speaking notes.

For many years prior to the collapse of the northern cod in 1992, the only people with any idea of its imminent demise were the inshore fishermen. Politicians, DFO scientists, and bureaucrats never had a clue that the stock was in trouble until it was virtually too late to do anything about it.

It all began with the foreign dragger fleets that attacked the stock on a year-round basis from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, until they were stopped by the 200-mile limit enforced in 1977.

I've fished full time for the past 28 years. Prior to that I was a part-time fisherman. I drove a beer truck for 10 years for my father and made weekly trips to St. John's. Coming out in the night, from the time we got partway down the Bonavista peninsula, when you brought open any part of the ocean, all you could see were lights. The foreign boats and domestic boats were coming within three miles of the coast. The farther you got down towards Bonavista...I don't know, you may not be familiar with this, because you were just there once, but, Mr. Simms, you would be familiar with it.

When you come down by the police station, at the top of the hill, and off the Catalina area as you come down to Melrose, on this high ground, on the highway coming down there, it was just like a city, right into four and five miles of the land. This was going on continually—summer and winter.

So after the 200-mile limit was imposed in 1977, the stock started to rebuild. Then DFO started giving bigger quotas to foreign and domestic fleets. The cod were once again fished on the spawning grounds all winter, assuring its demise. Large Canadian fish companies were given a free hand to build larger ice-strengthened draggers, with federal government money supplied mostly by DREE, the old Department of Regional Economic Expansion.

External Affairs had more say over the management, or rather the mismanagement, of northern cod than DFO. They used this stock as a slush fund to appease foreign countries for their trade and investment initiatives with central Canada. Our northern cod never had a chance after central Canadian politicians and bureaucrats took total control over it, which I might add didn't take long after we joined Confederation. It didn't take long for them to see that central Canada could benefit from the northern cod resource and groundfish in general.

The collapse of this stock was not caused only by overfishing. There were other, mostly environmental, causes. The final collapse, in 1992, saw draggers stop fishing because the fish were too small and too scarce to make it economically viable. The northern boundary of the cod was moving farther south each year. In fact, in 1991, the last year there was an open inshore fishery, there was very little cod north of Bonavista Bay; that's in the inshore that I'm talking about. Within the three to four years prior to this, cod extended far up the Labrador coast. In fact, this morning, I believe someone alluded to the huge amount of cod that was in the Black Tickle area. I think that was in 1998 or 1989. I'm not quite sure of that.

This southern retreat made the destruction worse, because cod moved to the nose and tail of the Grand Banks where foreign boats had free rein to decimate the remaining stock. These boats were out there at this time and uncontrolled outside the 200-mile limit.

The rebuilding of the stock has been a lot slower than anyone could possibly imagine. The present biomass, although low, is a lot higher than that estimated by DFO scientists. Inshore fishermen are seeing cod in greater abundance than prior to the moratorium. DFO's estimate of the total northern cod biomass is between 50,000 and 60,000 tonnes. My own estimate is 150,000 to 200,000 tonnes. I'll be the first one to say my estimate is an educated guess and that's all. The scientist's one is 50,000 to 60,000. They're just guessing.

I say I fished for 28 years, and I want to give you some examples from 1991, the last year we fished prior to the moratorium: July 29, 1991: 14 nets, one night of fishing, 10 codfish, 40 pounds; July 31, 1991: 14 nets, two nights of fishing, seven cod, 25 pounds; August 31, 1991: 14 nets, three nights, 15 fish, 70 pounds.

All through the 1980s it was next to impossible to catch cod in a gillnet during daylight hours; that's in the inshore. But ever since the cod index fishery opened in 1998, cod nets set in daylight hours are producing a lot of fish—a lot of cod.

For example, the last year that fishing was open for us, the small index fishery on August 8, 2002, with one net, 6 ½-inch mesh, for two hours midday, they caught 241 pounds of cod; on August 9, 2002, with one net, for five hours, roughly at midday, they caught 460 pounds; and on August 14, 2002, with one net, 6 ½-inch mesh, in 20 hours—overnight, in other words—they caught 862 pounds of cod. You can't put out a net anywhere, and not just in the Bonavista area—Bonavista Bay, Trinity Bay, Conception Bay, Notre Dame Bay—without catching large amounts of cod.

Prior to the moratorium I never caught one codfish in a lump net, which has a 10 ½-inch mesh—just the minimum mesh size. If someone caught a cod in one of those nets it would be the talk of all fishermen for days—an amazing occurrence. In 1995, cod started appearing in lump nets, and this has now increased to a proportion that threatens to cause a shutdown in this fishery due to too high a bycatch of cod—which according to scientists don't exist, or practically don't exist, if you had to listen to them.

I'll give you this as an example. I think it was last winter—I'm not sure now because I'm up to the age now, I'm 55, and you never know when Alzheimer's might be starting to kick in. I heard on the broadcast one evening from a marine biologist—who wasn't an expert in cod or anything like that—that the total cod volume for

2J3KL was 10,000 tonnes. A couple of days after that, our present Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Mr. Regan, was on the fishermen's broadcast, and he alluded to this 10,000 tonnes as all that was left of the northern cod. It's the blind leading the blind, as far as I'm concerned. There are not enough actual surveys inshore to justify writing a stock status report on cod. I don't know—frustrated is not the word for me.

We have a large inshore stock in Bonavista, Trinity, and Notre Dame Bays that has been increasing yearly, in my view. Inshore fishermen cannot fish for any species with nets without having large bycatches. Last year, in a three-week blackback fishery, approximately 400 tonnes of cod were landed as bycatch. This year it was cut down to a two-week blackback fishery. We landed 1,000 tonnes of northern cod out of that fishery. In my view, this is a very positive sign of rebuilding—more fish spread over a larger area.

The rebuilding of the stock is hampered mostly, in my estimation, by seals. Seals may have played a small role in the destruction of this resource, but they are the main deterrent to its rebuilding. Approximately 6 million harp seal exist on a fish diet, with cod making up 3% of this diet. I might add that this 3% is a scientific assessment, based only on the actual amount of fish found in the seal's stomach. They don't figure in what we class as belly feeding, where the seals just snap out the belly of the cod and take the liver and part of the gut—the soft part of it.

Anyhow, there's another 1.5 million to 2 million hood seals, which are larger and can dive deeper than the harps. These hood seals, in my view, are the main reason why cod are not surviving past five years of age in the offshore.

Over the past six years at least, the estimate of cod eaten by harp seals has been 37,000 tonnes per year. This is the actual DFO scientific estimate. There are at least 1.5 million to 2 million hood seals that are eating another 12,000 to 13,000 tonnes, for a combined total of 50,000 tonnes per year.

If you believe DFO estimates of the total cod biomass for the past six years, which has been constant at approximately 50,000 tonnes, how in the hell have 300,000 tonnes been eaten by seals and we still have 50,000 tonnes left? By mere common-sense reasoning, you can easily see that their scientific estimates are totally inaccurate.

That's the end of this presentation, but I'd like to have a few more words.

Have I got a few minutes left?

•(1420)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Yes, but before you do, Doug, I'm sorry to interrupt, instead of doing the 10 minutes per speaker—and I hope this committee is okay with this—I've allotted a total time of...well, now it's about 38 minutes, shared amongst the witnesses. Some may not want to use the 10 minutes; Doug obviously wants more than 10 minutes, that sort of thing. Is that okay with everybody? Okay.

Carry on, Doug.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Now, I know you have nothing at all to do with cod being placed as endangered, but I've got to speak on that just for a couple of minutes.

In the first place, the way it was brought about, Jeff Hutchings, a member of COSEWIC, was hired by COSEWIC, and that's a conflict of interest right off the bat. Then, right from the time of the start of the cod moratorium, he was basically advocating classing it as endangered. The man should never have been picked to start off with.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Excuse me, what was that name again?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Jeff Hutchings.

Now, if cod is classed as endangered, I think it's going to lead to social unrest in Newfoundland like you haven't seen before, because in the first place, you've got to look at the way cod is part of our culture. That's the only way I can describe it. Once someone speaks of fish in Newfoundland, he's not talking about crab. He's not talking about lobster. If someone asks if you're fishing, it's no, boy, I net crabs or I net lobster, but when you're fishing, you're fishing for cod.

I was on a panel sent by the council, mostly council members, that met with the minister at Gander in late April, I think it was, where we tried to get a small inshore fishery for Bonavista and Trinity Bay. Maybe it would have amounted to 4,000 or 5,000 pounds per boat. The main reason given by the minister was, as I understood it, if he gave us cod to catch, how was he going to explain that to the foreigners, to the European Community? Now that's the basic extent of what I came away from the meeting with.

He listened to what information we had to give, how plentiful the cod is in this area. In fact, in Bonavista and Trinity Bay, the cod, as far as I'm concerned, is just as plentiful as when John Cabot landed there, if not more so. When the capelin come in there, the cod roll on the beaches chasing the capelin. In the years when there was plenty of cod, before the moratorium, we never saw that. Now I don't know if it's the actual overabundance of cod in the area that's causing it. They're not starved to death. They're healthy looking fish, and large fish, right.

I've got to speak to something else, too, and that's the independence of fishermen. This gentleman right here, Mr. Keddy, mentioned something this morning, right, about black boxes for everybody. Well, buddy, I don't want a black box on my boat. If you're going to initiate that, when you're operating within 20 miles of land, anything under 35 feet in the inshore should not have to carry a black box. That's another \$2,000 a year in expenses.

For small boat fishermen right now, there are no other words to use other than they are “financially crucified” by the federal government.

It's not only fisheries. The Department of Transport has now come out with a list of regulations for us as long as your arm.

I've got a small 31-foot boat. I bet you the cheapest amount for me to be able to meet their regulations, with extra equipment, is \$10,000. How am I going to do that, when the gross I'm catching in the summer is \$30,000? Explain that to me, if anyone can.

Another thing is the erosion of independence. You're not going to be allowed to work on your boat any more. You're not allowed to weld on your boat. You're not allowed to put fibreglass on your boat. You're not allowed to do anything.

It was part of our culture. You'd build your own boat and repair your own boat, because that's how you kept fishing in the inshore.

There is lots more I could go on with, but I'll leave it at that.

Thank you very much.

•(1425)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Doug.

We're going to move on to Hedley.

Before I do that, keep in mind that we have about 30 minutes left to share among the four of you. Please keep moving along.

Go ahead, Hedley.

Mr. Hedley Butler (Panel of Inshore Fishermen): First of all, I'd like to welcome all of you here today.

My name is Hedley Butler.

Over the past 500 years...we began with codfish. Doug said fish and herring. Bonavista is cod.

I'm looking around the table and I wonder how many of us know what a codfish looks like. I've been on some other panels. When you talked about crab and crab pots, they didn't know what a crab pot looked like. But I hope everyone here knows what a codfish looks like.

We began to develop a fresh fish market in 1939, creating jobs, using other species such as salmon, squid, herring, mackerel, and turbot, and we've even done berries here at this plant.

On June 2, 1992, the government shut down our fishery for what was to be five years. Remember that five years. When John Crosbie shut down our salmon fishery, it was only supposed to be for five years and things carried on.

Fishermen were telling government for years that fish were getting smaller and stocks were declining. Because of new technology, fishermen were now able to fish in winter months on the spawning grounds. New technology now gives our fishermen a chance to go to the spawning grounds.

The inshore fishermen, using smaller boats, had to wait for fish to come to them. If fish did not come to the coastline, for whatever reasons...fishermen have experienced bad summers in the past. We have always had bad summers. There was a summer that my father tells me about now. He's 88 years old. It was the summer in Indian Bay. He had to pack up from Bonavista and go to Indian Bay.

When the government announced the moratorium, some fishermen stated that they were finished, but then the crab took its place. Many fishermen did better financially because of the market price of crab. In recent times, prices have dropped to a much lower level and fishermen are once again experiencing hard times.

With the abundance of cod in Bonavista and Trinity Bays, we fail to see why there isn't a quota for a hook-and-line fishery. In certain areas, the experienced fishermen are telling us about finding crab in the stomachs of cod. If the codfish come back, as we can see now, the crab fishery is declining. We are seeing that now because the cod are eating the crab. We find them in the bellies of the codfish.

On November 9, 2004, the town of Bonavista, along with the chairman, Mr. Scott Simms, hosted a round table discussion. Also in attendance were Bruce Adkins, a representative from the DFO science department; MHA Roger Fitzgerald; Dave Decker, FFAW representative; Harvey Jarvis, sentinel fishery representative; Ray Andrews, FPI representative; and Todd Williams, who was a special assistant to the Atlantic Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Representing local interests were several long-time fishermen and plant workers. During that discussion, Mr. Adkins stated that there was no denying the abundance of codfish in Bonavista Bay and Trinity Bay.

FPI, the largest buyer of codfish, said they would prefer to see a hook-and-line fishery from August to October. This would result in a longer work season for employees.

Mr. Jarvis stated that the sentinel survey for Bonavista and Trinity Bay stocks show stock levels at or above levels of previous years.

We, as fishermen, while fishing for species other than cod, like lump roe, blackback, and turbot, find that the bycatch is well above acceptable bycatch quotas. The result: DFO shuts us down because of the great bycatch. We are averaging between 800 and 1,200 pounds of cod out of one gillnet, and these mesh sizes are between 6.5 inches and 7-inch mesh—and that's a bycatch.

You've all heard the song, "Oh, there's lots of fish in Bonavist' harbour". Well, we experienced this in July 2004. At the time, the codfish filled the inner harbour right to the plant wharf. We are finding that during the capelin spawning, codfish are rolling with the capelin on the beaches.

Fisheries officers have torn the knees right out of their trousers trying to apprehend offenders who are fishing cod from the rocks to fill their tables. Are they working that hard on the Grand Banks to apprehend the foreign boats that are overfishing? At this time, codfish are more of a nuisance for fishermen than a help.

In my opinion, fishermen like me are considered criminals even before we go on the water, because we're not allowed to bring in the bycatch and we're not allowed to throw it away. So what do we do with it? We're considered criminals before we even go on the water.

Three years ago, Bonavista was the sight of a cod sentinel survey. We lost this due to budget cuts. Fishermen are saying we lost our survey not because of the budget cuts, but because of the amount of fish that was landed.

Back in the 1980s, we as fishermen told government of the problems facing our fishery. It didn't move to act until 1992. By then it was nearly too late. Now we are telling government that fish are plentiful. How long will it take them to act this time?

We are not here to destroy our livelihood, the fishery. We are trying to help to keep our communities alive, as was spoken of this morning. We want to stop our people from having to leave to go to other parts of Canada for work.

We believe conservation methods are the key to sustaining a healthy fishery. An example would be that we have reduced our number of nets. I used to fish, at one time, 150 nets out of Cape Bonavista. When we had our last fishery of 7,000 pounds we were cut back to 6,000 pounds, and we caught that fish in two days—7,000 pounds of fish in two and three days, out of six nets. And the government is telling us there are no fish? I don't know who's up in Ottawa.

During our round table discussion we decided to contact communities, politicians, and the FFAW union to obtain support for reopening the cod quota for Bonavista and Trinity Bays. We received tremendous support for our efforts.

In March 2004, in a meeting in Gander, and Doug already spoke on that—Doug Sweetland was with me—representatives from the town of Bonavista, fishermen, and I met with the Honourable Geoff Regan, federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, to try to secure a cod quota for Bonavista and Trinity Bays. We presented Mr. Regan with letters of support from communities, politicians, and the union. We emphasized the need for a quota of cod. He replied with a question—and Doug just said it: "How can we open a cod fishery on the northeast coast while at the same time we're trying to stop the overfishing on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks?" His problem was explaining this to NAFO. That's what he told us.

We as fishermen are wondering, if there was a Saint-Pierre and Miquelon—I have nothing against these people—in our bays, would we have a cod fishery? In 1992 they took away our salmon quotas, but Saint-Pierre and Miquelon are still fishing salmon today.

We need to take federal politics out of the fishing industry. Foreign overfishing policies, oil exploration, politics, and NAFO should not play any part in deciding when coastal communities are trying to make a living. We are trying to survive here, and it's over 500 years that we have been here and surviving. At one time on this coastline, if you came to Bonavista in the 1930s and 1940s, all you would see is flakes and stageheads and people salting fish—men and women together and kids—spreading fish on the flake. We don't see that any more, but that's what we want. We don't want to go back to the salt fishery. They're telling us there's not a good sell now for cod, but there's a good sell for salt cod, and we can process that in our plant.

Newfoundland is the resource-richest province in Canada, and I hope you fellows from Quebec and New Brunswick, or wherever you're from, remember that. We've got the richest resources in Canada. Yet the people who are trying to make a living here are the poorest. The federal government, in the past, has traded away our resources and mismanaged our fishery. The coastal communities and their people have suffered because of this. No one else has suffered; only the people who are here.

There are a couple of other things.

One is COSEWIC. We don't want anything to do with them for the simple reason that if they pass this under SARA, the inshore fishermen off Newfoundland and Labrador will be finished. We won't be allowed to fish our lump roe any more. We won't be allowed to fish our lobsters any more. They'll close us down, because cod is an endangered species.

Regarding seals, there are 6.2 million seals out there now. I was told by a scientist at one time that each seal eats on average eight pounds of cod. So make it up; you don't have to get me to make it up for you.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to add my voice to this committee. God bless you.

And I have one of these right here. I got it from the sentinel survey. Right now he's closed down in Bonavista, but from 2004 each net was averaging 90 pounds and in 2005, this year, it's gone to 102 pounds. That's from the sentinel survey.

• (1435)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Hedley. We don't have photocopy facilities right now, but once we get them we will distribute to each member what Hedley is holding there and the graph he has. So please bear with us.

Albert, do you have a few words?

Mr. Albert Johnson (Panel of Inshore Fishermen): Thank you.

My name is Albert Johnson. I'm a fisherman and I have been fishing groundfish on the east coast of Newfoundland for some 40 years or so. I have also been fishing crab in these waters since the mid-1980s.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting me to speak briefly today about matters affecting the fishing industry, in particular from a fisherman's perspective.

It is common knowledge today that for some years leading up to the moratorium the Department of Fisheries and Oceans ignored the views and advice of fishermen about the terrible state of the fish stocks and the declining biomass of cod. In my view, DFO is now seriously running the risk of repeating their earlier mistake and ignoring the advice and stories of fishermen as to the significant renewed presence of cod in our waters.

In all my years of fishing I have never seen the cod so plentiful inshore as it has been in the last three or four years. The sentinel fishery, which is administered by the FFAW, which is our union, has been ongoing around the island for several years and shows catch rates unheard of years ago—for example, 1,000 pounds for one gillnet. One gillnet is 50 fathom of net, only a fathom and a half deep.

Despite the information, DFO has turned a blind eye to all the positive signs of this recovery. Why? Personally, I think DFO is still a little bit shell shocked from what happened in 1992, and therefore they want to see overwhelming rather than reasonable evidence of recovery before they act.

Part of the problem is that proper science is seemingly not being carried out to justify the position DFO is taking. They say there are no fish offshore, but they have not explained to the fishermen what scientific evidence or studies they have done to prove this. Nor have they explained what the connection or relationship is between the presence or lack thereof of cod inshore and offshore.

Here we are some 13 years since the moratorium and we still don't understand certain fundamental things about this fishery. Sometimes I think that maybe DFO has ulterior motives for what they are doing—mainly, using this resource crisis to reduce the number of fishers in the industry. This is pure speculation on my part, but in the face of the recovery evidence, why else would DFO be so adamant about not increasing inshore quotas?

I would like to make a further point about stock recovery. Over the past two months, many fishermen, including me, took part in catching a turbot quota in 3LNO. This test fishery took place some 25 to 200 miles offshore in waters greater than 160 fathoms and with 100% observer coverage. During this fishery, a fair amount of cod was taken of all different sizes. If my recollection is correct, back in the 1970s and 1980s, there was never any cod at these depths. What is the significance of this? Does DFO have any answers?

I would like to thank the committee again for letting me say these few words, and if any of the panel has any questions, I would be pleased to try to respond. Sincerely submitted, Albert Johnson.

• (1440)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Albert. I appreciate it.

George.

Mr. George Feltham: Yes. Good afternoon, and I certainly would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear here today. It's very hard not to resay some of the things that have already been said up to this point.

One of the things that I do want to stress is that one of the major causes that I believe—and a lot of the fishermen out there believe—contributed to the collapse of the northern cod was science. Science played a major, major role in the seventies and eighties. It overestimated the biomass grossly. The biomass that was there was kept on the upper side at all times to satisfy the greed of large companies—multinational companies like FPI and National Sea. There's no question about it. The individual owner-operator wasn't even listened to.

I'm sort of changing my notes here because I want to get around to some of the things that other people said, so bear with me.

I go back to what Mr. Sweetland said about the fish and the science in the bays. The fish is there. Can we quantify it? Oh no, because all the information gathered in previous years was gathered by the mobile fleet offshore. So we have no way of quantifying the stock of fish that was in the bay, no way of quantifying the inshore, because government and scientists back in the seventies and eighties didn't care what we did as long as the appetites of the big companies were satisfied. That's all they worried about.

You know, the thing is that finally—and before I go there I should ask, where else in Canada is a stock managed right from the tip of Labrador to the southern tip of the Avalon Peninsula? My god, we have a 3Ps stock that takes in Placentia Bay and Fortune Bay. What is it, a hundred miles across? It's about that, and out to the 200-mile limit.

We have another stock, 3Pn. We have another stock, 4R. All those little sections are being managed. But when it comes to 2J3KL, we have a stock that's managed for thousands of miles. That's the range of that stock. Science today is finally accepting the point that we do have bay stocks, we do have inshore stocks.

In the last assessment that I was privileged to review, they said the growth in the inshore was 40%. Forty per cent growth in inshore stock versus 2% offshore. Yet that's the answer to Mr. Sweetland's question. That's the reason the minister can give the fishery. That's the reason we have to look at these components. That's why we depleted the stock in the beginning. Science did not look at the different components. They did not look at the components on Hamilton Bank, the Funk Island Bank, the northern Grand Bank, the inshore stocks. What did they do? As soon as they depleted stocks in the Funk Island Bank or the northern Grand Bank, they transferred quotas for FPI and National Sea a little further south; they doubled their quota and took their quota from one area to another. That was one of the major, major things leading to the disaster in the northern cod.

We're still fighting today. We're still fighting today, as Mr. Sweetland and the rest of the gentlemen before me have said. We're fighting to get them to realize that we have cod in the inshore.

Some people, in the back of their minds, may say, "Can there ever be so much cod in the inshore as these guys are saying? They're blowing this out of proportion." But they're not; they're not. I'm a

lobster fisher as well, and I've seen days that all 200 lobster pots had 200 pounds of cod in them.

Now where is the government? I think this article in the paper here sums it up quite well. Even our own provincial fisheries minister is saying, we've got blood on our hands; we've got to put an image forward to make sure we can deal with this foreign overfishing. Well, by God, I don't give a damn what image I've got to put forward; I'm not going to sit by and let our communities die. The first thing we have to do is to educate our politicians about the fishery. Spend some time there—and that's no disrespect to the politicians.

I had a number of calls the other day about an article on the capelin fishery. It should be closed down. I never read the article, so I can't criticize it, but it was written by a politician. Yet there are thousands of jobs and man-hours in this province where the capelin fishery is carried out. That politician who made that statement, did he realize that fishermen only harvest 1% of the biomass? That's what they harvest. Seals take 910,000 metric tonnes a year. That's your government department telling us that. So we have to be careful where we draw the line on what we say, because our communities are not going to survive.

I had the opportunity to attend a meeting the other day, and people said, oh well, the cod on the east coast and the northeast coast only means one job—because we were closed down for the last few years. This is the COSEWIC committee. One job—so it's not very important. You tell that to a fellow who grosses \$20,000 or \$25,000 to keep his vessel operating, and ask him what the bycatch of cod meant to him and to his enterprise and to his family and to his community this year. You tell him.

The thing we can't lose sight of is that when we lose one fishery, we have a domino effect—and no one deals with the domino effect. I know that in my area where I fish in particular, once the cod is gone, there's a massive, massive input into the lobster fishery, and then you have more and more people fishing the full length of the season, rather than part of it.

I've got to speak on the COSEWIC issue, because I can't believe our politicians in Ottawa would let that get in the endangered species act—not to say where it's going now. It shouldn't even be there; we shouldn't be here talking about that today. Our politicians failed us, and grossly failed us, because you're going to shut down every damn fishery on this island. That's what you're going to do if that is allowed to happen. I'm scared, because I'm afraid this government and our politicians are going to allow cod on the east and northeast coasts to go on the endangered species list as a sacrifice to keep a fishery open on the south coast and west coast, so that they can be in-between to try to satisfy everyone. But that's not good enough. That's not good enough.

The inshore fishery here has a place, and it's going to keep its place and we're going to fight to keep it there. Sometimes I look around the room and see how many fishermen are here today. I can understand. I go home from some of these sessions I've been talking at and think, boy, oh yes, you got your point across today and it's going to make a difference; then the next week I see some politician come out with an article in the paper that rips apart everything I tried to do. Maybe he got his information from a person who doesn't even fish that fishery, or is not involved in that fishery, or doesn't have \$100,000 or \$150,000 invested in that fishery.

It's easy. It's easy for me to stand and criticize you as a politician. I've never been there.

• (1445)

It's easy as a politician, too, to stand there and make remarks about the fishery, because you haven't been there either. One of the things we have to promote in the fishery, if we're to survive, is shared stewardship.

Now, you talk about COSEWIC. The U.S. went into Iraq, and, by God, they haven't got them all out of there yet, with the latest technology and the best weapons there are. You put cod on the endangered species list, as someone alluded to earlier about enforcement. There's not enough enforcement in Canada that will enforce not taking cod in this province if it goes on the endangered species list, because it's going to be regarded as a nuisance fishery. That's how it's going to be regarded. It's going to interfere with you in making a living. If you put these together, we have a 40% growth in the inshore. That's what your science is saying.

We have to develop shared stewardship. Do we have examples? Yes, we have examples right here in Bonavista Bay of leading roles that have been taken. The lobster project in the Eastport Peninsula, shared stewardship and being a part of it. How do you change people? People have to feel a part of it; they have to feel they're doing things for themselves. That is the first key.

The other example is the crab fishery in Bonavista Bay. The committees have managed the crab to the point that yes, stocks are going down elsewhere, but Bonavista Bay looks like it's in good shape. Give us the right to manage or co-manage our cod stocks in the inshore. Give us that right to manage it. We can't do any worse than the government or other managers have done in the past. But at least we know who we're doing it for, what we're doing it for, because we're doing it for ourselves, our communities and our kids' futures. That's what we're doing it for. That way you'll develop the stewardship that is needed to build and grow in the future.

Thank you.

• (1450)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Mr. Feltham. Well done.

Mr. Burry.

Mr. Pearce Burry: I've deleted a few of the things I had to talk about because other buddies have spoken on them before, so I won't.

I will start by telling you I had an opportunity to be in the presence of a professional cod fish spawning scientist back in 1986, with NIFA, the inshore fishermen's committee. We were called to St.

John's to a Federal Court hearing. We answered questions from lawyers, from the court, and from the government, and the government found there wasn't enough evidence in our fishery. So we fishermen were wrong again. But in 1992, the government was right, with the same information we had given them in 1986.

I have one word of advice for Mr. Arthur May. When it comes to fish for food, we as natives of Newfoundland have all the rights in the world. In 1949, when we joined Confederation, we were given that right, never to be taken away from us. That right was to put a fish on your table, put a seabird on your table, and put seal meat on your table, because that's the staple diet of a Newfoundlander. Joseph R. Smallwood, our prime minister at the time, said it was never to be taken away from us.

Back in 1985 or 1986, Norway had a problem with their fishery. They were taking too much capelin, as they said, approximately 800 metric tonnes. They lowered their TAC, total allowable catch, and in 1988-89 they had a test fishery, hook and line, baited trawl, and it was a well-guarded deal; there were so many that were put into it. Their fishery has returned. Have any one of those politicians in the federal government found out how Norway got their fishery back? I'm wondering if there's information on how long it took their fishery to come back to the sustainability stage.

On the east coast we have lots of fish, but it looks like the government doesn't want to hear or believe what we are saying. Around three years ago, over 500,000 pounds was dipped or gaffed in Smith Sound because it froze, as the scientists said. No one really knows what is around here, only the fishermen, and they're tired of talking about it. Someone should be here during capelin season to see what old-timers haven't seen in their lifetime.

It's time the Newfoundland government took back the fishery, and if you are waiting to build up the fishery, offshore stocks, on the backs of our fishermen, we should not have to suffer for the offshore. If COSEWIC is looking for an international marine park in Bonavista Bay, our fishing in Bonavista Bay is finished. I will remind you now, no way will there be an international park in Bonavista Bay. That was brought around in the 1980s and they're still on the go about that.

That's all I have for you.

• (1455)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Mr. Burry.

To the committee, suffice it to say we just got an earful.

We will now go to the questioning part of the meeting. As I explained before, the Conservatives will ask the first question from the opposition, Bloc Québécois, NDP, and then we'll come to the government side.

That being said, Mr. Keddy is starting off with ten minutes.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for appearing. It's been a very informative, open, and straightforward session, I believe.

The first thing is how the system works and the fact that it has been ten years—and everybody in Ottawa, whether a member of an opposition party or a member of the government, deserves to take some of the flak for the difficulties in the fishery, without question. At the same time, it's a lot harder for a member in opposition to change government policy than it is for government to change it. You need to be aware of that. I'm not trying to take a political bye here; I'm just stating it the way it is.

The idea that cod might be put on the endangered species list or that a marine park might be put in Bonavista Bay is simply unacceptable, and it has to be unacceptable to everyone.

In the past, the fisheries committee has always been able to work as a cohesive unit. I'm not trying to defend government policy, but I will state, as a member of this committee in the past and today, that the majority of time we have come up with pretty good recommendations. They're not always followed by the Minister of Fisheries, so there is some difficulty and some lag there.

From what I've heard from you gentlemen who are actually out there fishing, I would expect there would be committee support. I can't speak for the committee, but I'm sure we'll have some great discussions later about the inshore fishery and Bonavista Bay. I don't mind telling you that. So don't think your thoughts and your words have gone unheard, because quite simply they have not.

After saying that, I still think there are some complications out there. There are the predator-prey of the codfish and the seal. And you know, there's not a lot of sympathy. Even though we've had to do a lot of arm-twisting with some of our members, we have come out, as a committee, to support the extension of the seal cull. The committee has supported that, and I expect they will continue to support that.

The whole issue of what's happened in the fishery over NAFO has nothing to do—you're absolutely correct, should have nothing to do—with the inshore. Our inshore fishery has nothing to do with what's going on outside the 200-mile limit. So for the minister or any minister to somehow imply that our inshore fishing practices—the hook-and-line fishery or net fishery or trap fishery—have anything to do with foreign overfishing is just incorrect.

We can easily defend our inshore fishery. That's never been a difficulty. It's never been the problem, and it's never been what NAFO decisions have been based on—at least to my recollection. I'm just trying to put a little parameter down.

I would like to speak to Mr. Sweetland for a second about the black box. I realize the inshore fishermen, especially the hook-and-line fishermen, can't afford an increase in their licence fee and can't afford the black box technology. I was referencing that as one way to keep track of our dragger fleet. If we had to trade that off in order to keep track of where the foreign fleets are, then, personally, I would trade it off. That might mean we would have to assist our fishermen to put in the black boxes.

All science isn't bad science. You guys are part of that scientific community. You're the grassroots and the mainstream gatherers of information the scientist relies upon. There has to be some cooperation and a willingness to work.

I, like the rest of my colleagues here, don't have the answer to what's going on in the fishery, but I think we're in agreement about a number of issues. We're in agreement about seals. We're in agreement about foreign overfishing. We're in agreement about the dragger fleet and overfishing, primarily from the dragger fleet, through the 1980s and into the early 1990s.

We're not pointing fingers at individuals here, gentlemen. We're just saying it happened. Our job is to hopefully make sure it doesn't happen again.

On the discussion of the inshore bycatch, I'd just like to get some hard numbers on what you believe an inshore fishery in Bonavista and Trinity Bay could support.

● (1500)

Mr. George Feltham: Mr. Chair, to answer that question, from what I'm hearing from fish harvesters out there, I don't think anyone is expecting levels they had in the past. I mean, we had 115,000 metric tonnes. If we take the science and we take the fishermen, I don't think anyone could come up with the magic number.

The one thing that's quite clear is that fish harvesters want access to this fish. They want to take it with a very precautionary approach, and they want to work their way, year after year.

Say the starting figure is 3,000 or 5,000 metric tonnes. You build on that as time goes by and make sure we have something to pass on to our children and pass on for our future and our communities.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Anyone else?

● (1505)

Mr. Hedley Butler: I'd like to speak to that. When we met with Minister Regan in Gander—Doug was there with me, and we had the same thing in some of our notes—we told him we wanted a pilot project. Why not start a pilot project? You heard in my presentation that we used to use 150 nets, then we went down to six nets. Start a pilot project. We don't want to destroy the fish. Give us our 7,000 pounds of fish that we always had per enterprise, and start a pilot project.

You also heard in my presentation that the plant here needs a hook-and-line fishery. We are willing to do that. Who better than the people who live on the water and the fishermen? We have observers on the boats. We have monitors on the wharf. We're doing everything possible. Give us a pilot project for a year, and then you can look at it: did we destroy any fish?

A couple of years ago, 3 million pounds of fish went over that wharf in less than a couple of weeks, coming out of nets. That's what I always ask them for. Give us our 7,000 pounds of cod, let us do a pilot project, and then look at it at the end of the year when the season's over to see what we destroyed, or whether we did any damage to the cod stock whatsoever. That's all we're asking for. We don't want to destroy it, by any means.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: You talked about cooperation between fishermen and scientists. Based on what I've seen, it doesn't work. Right from day one of the moratorium I offered to help the scientists. They could come on my boat with me. I'd take them out and show them where the cod were and the amount of cod. They didn't want to be told. Anything I do is anecdotal; if the scientist does it, supposing he only does it once, it's the gospel. It doesn't work. And I've offered to help with more than just the cod.

All I have is a high school education, grade 11. I can't be put in the same class as someone with a doctorate in science, or whatever. But that's the way they look at it. That's the way I'm seeing it. That's not to say my level of intelligence or understanding of the fishery is any lower than theirs. Mostly what they know is from a sheet of paper in a book, but what I know is from what I've seen as a fisherman.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: The difficulty is this, Mr. Sweetland. The reason I say that we need more cooperation—and a lot of cooperation, quite frankly—between our fishers and our scientists is because at the end of the day, the government, rightly or wrongly, is going to listen to science.

I know a lot of fishermen. I represent a fishery riding. I know a number of fishery scientists. The majority of the fishery scientists were given as good information as they could when the downturn of the fishery came. The government, the political masters of the day, make the decisions based on politics. Scientists don't make decisions based on politics.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Mr. Keddy.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: I'm not defending science, but to a degree, it's important to understand who makes the decision at the end of the day.

I told you he'd cut us off.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): I do that with all the love in my heart.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Blais, you have up to seven minutes.

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

I would like to begin by thanking you for having come. I also thank you for your patience to some extent. I represent the riding of Gaspé—Magdalen Islands, a riding that, historically, had more fishing than is the case today. It is a region that also depends greatly on tourism.

I do not know who among you, Mr. Sweetland or perhaps someone else, might be able to give me more information. I would like to know if you believe the situation has evolved.

Since the moratorium, have the people from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans been listening to you more? As it happens, we have learned that you were most probably right from the very beginning with regard to what you have been living. Are you being listened to more now that people have realized that in the end what you do allows you to have a better idea of what is going on in the sea? Have you been listened to more over the years? Or else, on the contrary, is it your impression, as you stated earlier, Mr. Sweetland, that you are looked down upon and that the authorities are easy to forget that what you do on a daily basis is such that you really are witnesses to what is happening in the sea?

• (1510)

[*English*]

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: I'll respond to that—part of it, anyway.

I don't feel like I've been listened to, and I've been at this since before the moratorium. I was a union representative before the moratorium, at the local level. In all my meetings and everything else I've been to, the only positive thing has been within the last 12 months. We had a round table discussion last fall here in Bonavista between the fishermen, DFO, the company, and provincial fisheries. I believe we were listened to at that time, but in general, no way, especially by science. That's the way I see it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I nevertheless believe that it would not necessarily be very complicated nor very difficult to improve the situation. All that is required is some good will, perhaps on the part of the scientists.

However, apart from the round table you recently had the opportunity to participate in, what would give you some hope of being listened to? What kind of signs are you expecting on the part of Fisheries and Oceans or of the scientists?

[*English*]

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: The sign I'm looking for from DFO will have to come from the top, and that's that this class in the endangered species act be turned down. That's the main thing, in my view. The least I thought would come out of that round table discussion last year was for us to get a small inshore fishery, a hook-and-line fishery, because that's what we proposed. It was only for 4,000 to 5,000 pounds per boat; that's all we were looking for, which wasn't a lot of fish.

You've got to remember that at the last FRCC meetings in early 2003, when we were shut down, they recommended a 1,500-tonne northern cod fishery. That could be bycatch, but it was left open for a fishery. There was no fish caught in that year—maybe 100 tonnes in the sentinel fishery, and nothing else in 2003. In 2004, there were approximately 500 tonnes caught: 400 tonnes of bycatch and 100 tonnes in the sentinel fishery. This past year there was a bit, because 1,000 tonnes were caught in just the blackback fishery alone—you know what I mean, right? But I'm saying we're looking at 3,000 to 4,000 tonnes, if we had a small, limited inshore hook-and-line fishery.

Another thing with this endangered species thing...one of the main things with the Species at Risk Act, is that it states—in my words, now, not the exact wording of it—that cod does not have to be placed as endangered if the minister is actively trying to stop the decline. Now, Jesus, we've had a closure of this fishery since 1992, apart from these minor index fisheries. You know what I mean? There has been no amount of cod taken out of it in that length of time, over the past 13 years. For the past three years, there has been practically nothing taken out of it. So if the minister is not doing something about it, or he is doing something about it by not letting us fish, then there's no need of him classing it as endangered, because that is already what part of this act describes.

That was explained to us last year at another meeting I was at—because I go to lots of meetings—one in Bonavista, with DFO officials. This was one of the things, something that just came up by accident, that the minister can refuse this thing if he's actively trying to stop the decline. He doesn't have to act on this. So in that sense, I figure it could be thrown out.

• (1515)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Did you have a quick point, Mr. Feltham?

Mr. George Feltham: Yes. One of the things I want to point out is that the minister was quite swift in acting on the salmon on the west coast when it came up on the endangered species act. He's certainly dragging his feet on this one. This is one of the things that really has got people weary.

There are a couple of other points I want to make here as well.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): I'm sorry, I hate to do this, but Mr. Stoffer has the next turn.

Mr. Stoffer, are you okay with this?

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Yes, let him finish.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Okay, carry on.

Mr. George Feltham: There's one thing I want to add here as well, concerning the stock biomass in the inshore.

They had a tagging program, and science came out with this idea.

I think science is starting to listen, because it's only this year they acknowledged the difference between the inshore and the offshore. It was only this year they separated the increase in the inshore versus the increase in the offshore, but we have tagging programs, and they came up with this idea of the inshore populating the offshore. There's absolutely no indication whatsoever of any movement in the tagging program of the inshore to the offshore. So there is a lot of ammunition there for the minister to use.

The other thing I'd like to comment on is that when you talk about round table discussions and they talk about a hook-and-line fishery... a fishery, what we proclaim as a fishery, is a fishery of whatever gear type is natural to that community, because you go from one community to the other and there's certainly a difference, a conflict in gear type and a conflict in gear technology. There's no reason there cannot be a fishery, as my predecessor said, of 4,000, 5,000, or 7,000 pounds per individual, but it would be the fishery of the gear type that is commonly used by that community.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Mr. Stoffer, for allowing Mr. Feltham to finish. Now it's your five minutes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you very much.

I have several questions to ask. Perhaps you could just jot them down, because I know my time will be short.

First of all, when we were back and did the east coast report years ago, we did a paragraph on ghost nets. Could you tell me what effect ghost nets are having today on the fishery, and is Newfoundland or the federal government doing anything to recover those nets that are out there?

Mr. Sweetland, in what you talked about, you can't bring the fish in, and you can't keep the fish, the bycatch. So can you honestly tell us what happens to those fish?

We know what happens in the Bay of Fundy. A lot of fish are dumped overboard. The World Wildlife Fund indicated in a report that tonnes and tonnes of cod are thrown overboard as bycatch in the offshore. Does that happen on the inshore as well?

George, you said your provincial fisheries minister—I assume Trevor Taylor—said you had blood on their hands. Would you like to elaborate a bit more on what that means?

Also, we were with the FRCC a year or two ago and they talked about something called field exclusion zones, although they never really explained how that would have worked. How do you keep the seals away from, say, Smith Sound, or something of that nature?

I was wondering if you could elaborate a bit on what you would presume to be a seal exclusion zone. If an area of 2J3KL, for example, was identified as a breeding ground or a nursery for cod stocks, should there be any activity, either oil and gas or fishing activity, within that nursery? In terms of a marine-protected area, and I'll say this as naively as I can, would that not be grounds to have an MPA in that specific area to protect the nursery of the stocks?

Lastly, Mr. Sweetland, you said that DFO has said their biomass is 50 to 60 tonnes. You've estimated almost double the net, from your own anecdotal evidence, and you're asking for 4,000 to 5,000 tonnes of cod, I believe. It seems fairly reasonably, even with DFO's estimates, that you should be allowed to do a pilot fishery of some kind in order to ascertain some of the fishery by hook and line. Yet you don't seem to be getting a positive answer from DFO. My final question is this. Why do you think DFO are doing this? What is your gut reaction as to why they are doing this to you?

• (1520)

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: We wouldn't answer all these questions in order, Mr. Chairman.

Do you want to go first, George?

Mr. George Feltham: Well, I'm going to be quite brief. Blood on our hands—I assume he figures that is changing. There are things we can do in our own zones to make it more presentable, more responsible, seen in the eyes of other nations.

The thing about gear technology is this, and I don't care what technology you use: it's not the technology that destroys fish; it's the people. It's not the gun that kills; it's the person. Unless you have a responsible attitude toward the fishery and responsible fishing activities, where a person uses open line and beats it over the side because he's too small to bring in...or where a person leaves a gillnet out for two or three days, then you've got problems with fish. So it's the individual. So what we have to do is treat the fishery responsibly and treat the gear responsibly.

On the other question, you can tell I'm lost. I'll pass to someone else.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: With regard to what you mean by this cod not being brought in, that you pitch, with me, I haven't caught cod that I couldn't bring in. There's always been some type of bycatch where you can.... The only thing now is we're not even allowed to release live fish under DFO regulations.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Sweetland, correct me if I'm wrong, but you said you're not allowed to bring it in.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: I said that.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: You can't have it. So what do you do with it?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: I'm not killing any fish. We're not allowed to dump it either. We haven't had a problem with that—not me, personally.

Mr. Hedley Butler: Well, the regulation states that we're not allowed to dump and we're not allowed to bring it in. Anyway, we take a chance and bring it in. We had people charged; they had observers on board their boats. They took the live cod and placed it back in the water, and they got charged for doing that.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Mr. Stoffer. Thank you, Mr. Butler.

Mr. Hedley Butler: One more thing on that ghost net—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): One second.

He wants to make a point. We have time allotted here, gentlemen. Are we okay?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Okay, carry on.

Mr. Albert Johnson: I just thought people might be interested in ghost nets. To me, it's dramatized. I don't think ghost nets create a problem at all, because we've retrieved nets that have been down on the bottom for less than a year and there has been absolutely nothing in them. What happens to them is they sink, eventually, down to the bottom, and they don't catch any fish. We've proven this. We have evidence of this. So I think the ghost net thing is dramatized by the media and by different organizations. That's my thought about ghost nets.

Mr. George Feltham: I'll make it quick.

Last year they had a program on the northern peninsula to retrieve ghost nets. What they brought back was practically nil. They didn't find the ghost nets there.

One of the things that created the problem with ghost nets was, if you remember back in the seventies, the gear replacement program the government put in place at that time; I believe it was under

Roméo LeBlanc. At the time they brought in the gear replacement program, it was cheaper for fishermen to go out and cut their nets and come in and claim the gear and have the government replace it. This was a big thing back then.

Not only that, sir, but even in 1985, 1986, 1987, I was fishing 120 or 130 nets for cod, bringing in 5,000 or 6,000 pounds. Now what am I fishing? Six nets?

Come on, boys, be realistic. I've lost two gillnets in 26 years of fishing; that's what I've lost. Anyone who's responsible is not going to lose their nets, unless for some weird thing when we have problems with draggers hauling through our gear. Other than that—the last few years we haven't had a problem with draggers—it's more or less just some excuse to do down a certain type of technology.

• (1525)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Mr. Feltham.

As one point of clarification on a point my researcher brought up earlier, Mr. Sweetland, you mentioned something about proposing.... Did you say 4,000 or 5,000 pounds per fisher, or was it 4,000 or 5,000 tonnes for the fishery?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: It was 4,000 or 5,000 pounds per boat, per fisher.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you. That's going to clarify that.

Mr. Murphy.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Just to put everything in perspective, I'd like to go down the line.

I know some of you did peripherally, but could you describe what species you're catching right now? You're all in the fishing industry. We know it's not cod.

Mr. Sweetland, you fish crab, is it?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Yes.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: And what's your quota?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: It's 13,500.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: And that's basically the only fishery you're in right now?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: I'm fishing lobster, too, and I've added toad crab and lumpfish and mackerel.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Butler.

Mr. Hedley Butler: I fish crab—13,500 pounds—and I fish lobster, and I fish a bit of blackback and lump. I have a mackerel licence, a herring licence, and I also have a salmon licence that I'm not allowed to use.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes, I fish crab, and turbot this year. I have a 105,000-pound crab catch.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: How much?

Mr. Albert Johnson: It's 105,000.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: It's 105,000 pounds?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Pounds, yes. And I fish turbot.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Feltham.

Mr. George Feltham: I have crab—12,300. I fish capelin. I fish blackback, herring, lobster—whatever species is available to me to fish.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Burry.

Mr. Pearce Burry: I'm retired.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: One thing that hasn't been brought up here is that when you look at the statistics over the last 15 years—and I don't know if there's any correlation at all—when the finfish dropped, as we saw starting in the eighties, I guess, and it may probably have started in the seventies, we saw an increase in the shellfish, predominantly crab, snow crab, shrimp, lobster. They seem to have done well. Not only the catches have gone up, but the TACs have gone up, and the prices have actually gone up, except this year in the crab.

Do you people as fishers who are out there every day see any correlation, that perhaps when the finfish goes down, the shellfish goes up, and that perhaps if the cod comes back, we're going to see the shrimp and snow crab and lobster go down? Do you have any comment or suggestion?

Mr. Hedley Butler: In my presentation, sir—I think you weren't there, but later sat down. I had the question you want answered in my presentation, that once you see the crab fishery go down, fish—

Hon. Shawn Murphy: I heard you say that, but it was kind of a loose....

Mr. Hedley Butler: We see it. We've been getting large cod. The mesh size is unbelievable; you're using six-and-a-half to ten-and-a-half-inch mesh, as Doug said. And in the big fish we're getting, and we've been getting northern cod, we're finding female crab—female crab, now—

Hon. Shawn Murphy: In these large cod?

Mr. Hedley Butler: —in the large cod, as high as six and seven in their stomachs. This is going to take the decline of crab down.

Mr. George Feltham: Over the last few years, that has been quite noticeable, what you're saying, there's no question about it. It seems like crab has been on a sliding slope. Shrimp is still quite abundant. When it comes to finfish, the environmental problems that existed in the mid-nineties have certainly caused a lot of problems over the last number of years—problems in growth rate when it comes to capelin, growth rate when it comes to herring, and a lack of mackerel.

This year we're seeing capelin return to their normal size and we're seeing spawning come back onto the beaches. A lot of people sort of indicated that because capelin wasn't showing up on the beaches, then they weren't there. But the capelin were still there; they were just off in deeper water. They were there in quite a bit of abundance.

We're seeing the mackerel returning this year to the east and northeast coasts, which again is a strong indicator that finfish are back.

We're seeing cod. Hedley mentioned that the large cod are showing up, but it's not only the large cod. Some of the public rapped people on the knuckles this year because they had a five-and-a-half-inch gillnet in a blackback fishery. But you know, that served a purpose. Not only did it show the big cod that Hedley is talking

about there; the person who indirectly got cod with the five-and-a-half-inch mesh showed that there was also an abundance of different-year classes. Here you had a six-and-a-half, a six, and a five-and-a-half. Then in the sentinel program, we also used nets with three-and-a-half-inch mesh, which showed up a major component of different-year classes.

So yes, I believe finfish is on the way back. I believe there's a future in this fishery. I believe there's a future for our communities. But we have to get you guys and the science aspect of it to believe it as well. We need to bridge that gap to survive in our communities.

• (1530)

Hon. Shawn Murphy: You've talked about the need for a limited commercial fishery, especially here in Bonavista. One other request that's out there, and it hasn't been addressed by any of you, is the request, I guess, from the general population of Newfoundland for the general food fishery to be open to everyone.

Do you people support that as a group?

Mr. George Feltham: One of the things I want to make quite clear is that if it's recreational, yes. As for the food fishery, if a person wanted a food fishery, it would be a lot cheaper for them to buy it from the supermarket than it would be to have a food fishery or recreational fishery.

I've always said, and I'll say it quite clearly here today, that I support a commercial fishery first and a recreational fishery second. I'm not going to sit back—and a good many other fishermen tell me this as well—and see a recreational fishery and no commercial fishery. Whatever that comparison is, then that would have to be agreed to amongst the parties concerned.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Perhaps I'm misunderstanding the terminology here, because your classification of recreational fishery and food fishery is different from mine. The food fishery, as I understand it, is open to anyone who wants to buy a licence and go out and fish food for themselves. That's my understanding of it. I understand also that they issued licences here two or three years ago, and that they did have a food fishery and 90,000 licences were issued. Now, I know that a lot of them wouldn't use it, and that a lot of them who went out wouldn't catch cod, and I have no idea how many tonnes of cod would have been caught.

Do you support the food fishery?

Mr. George Feltham: I thought I was quite clear that I support.... I don't think a food fishery exists. I think it is a recreational fishery. You can call it what you like, but it's a recreational fishery. I support a commercial fishery first, then a recreational fishery. Yes, I support that.

The thing is, as a lot of people said earlier.... I mean, I hear talk about restrictions and tags and everything else in the recreational fishery, but by God, look at what a fisherman has to go through. If the capabilities for abuse are there, whatever restrictions are put on fishermen, you just can't open it up without some sort of control, I guess, in both sectors.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: I agree with you.

You all have very considerable experience, and I'd like to know what your experience has been—in, say, the last ten years—with illegal fishing, unreported catches, or catches for cash sales. I know in different areas it's rampant and in some areas it's non-existent. What is the experience here in Bonavista?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: I'd say very low.

Mr. Hedley Butler: Yes, I agree with Doug. There's not a big issue here.

But as I mentioned in my presentation, you've got fishery officers going after kids on the rocks who are crawling around with the knees out of their trousers. I think they can do better things than that. It's a little fellow with a tomcod, and they're charging him.

•(1535)

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: There is a fair amount of poaching on the part of what I call professional poachers.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: That's illegal fishing, as far as I'm concerned. It's poaching.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Yes, that's what I mean, but it's not fishermen.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: It's not core licensed fishermen.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: No, none of them are doing that. You know what I mean, right?

But there are people doing that, within our communities in Newfoundland, as far as I'm concerned.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Are they poaching?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Yes. You've got a few in each community who are making more from the fishery than I am, to tell you the truth, and they aren't caught.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): It's over to Mr. Hearn, for five minutes.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Again, let me thank the witnesses for being here.

I actually have a number of questions arising from their presentations.

But before I do that, I should probably try to again reassure them, as we did this morning, that a lot of the people here have been around the block, as we say. In fact, four years ago today, I first sat on this committee. Some of these people were here then, and some have been here for years, like Mr. Keddy, Mr. Stoffer, and Mr. Matthews. For many of the issues and many of the things that we're hearing, when we talk about cod or any other species, they've been through a lot of it. It's not as if some of them are hearing it for the first time.

In some of the reports that we've done, certainly on overfishing, the coast guard, and others, we have seen action by government because our reports go to the House and not to a minister to be put away. They are presented publicly in the House and have to be responded to in the House. It gives us a chance to make sure the ministers are accountable.

On the question side of it, because I think it will be good for us to hear, Mr. Sweetland, you mentioned the new regulations by the Department of Transport, which are costly. I know about the black box and the costs they tried to put on last year, with short notice. Some of us were quickly involved in that, trying to stop it and delay it.

On the issue of the Department of Transport, you mentioned that costs may be up to \$10,000 for small boats. Could you give us a rough idea of what you're talking about?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Yes. It's life rafts, survival suits, and stability tests for every boat within the commercial fishery, even it's only 15 feet long. I've got to say that's too stupid to talk about. Do you know what I mean?

No common sense has gone into this. Common sense has been thrown out the window.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Do you know why some of that is occurring? We've now had a couple of instances in this province where we've had boats roll over. In one case, I would say, it was certainly instability, but we don't know yet for the second one.

It certainly adds to the argument, for the up to 45, around 45, and the 45 to 65 in particular, when people are looking for an extra 10 or 15 feet. They are told that instead of 15 miles offshore, they now can go 150 miles, but they can't lengthen their boats, they have to go up.

I was looking at some of the boats at lunch time. We're looking at actual tubs on the ocean, aren't we? That's dangerous.

But it's like everything else. They then go overboard. The pendulum has now swung the other way. I agree with you that it's crazy. It's something that we will raise.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Could I make another comment on that?

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Yes, sure.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: There are going to be people who drown when fishing or on the water; they can do whatever they like and they can change whatever regulations they like.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: They always have.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: I saw a program last winter on the American Coast Guard, where they have these boats that right themselves, and they'll even drown in those.

That's all I've got to say. You can do what you like, but the thing is to use common sense in the laws for fishermen.

They now want proficiency tests, or whatever, on everything less than 35 feet. In other words, I'm going to have to go to the Marine Institute. I'll use the word "fool". Some fool will come out and tell me in five days what I haven't learned after close to 35 or 40 years on the water. I've got to pay \$700 or \$800 for that.

I'll leave it at that.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Well, it's some person who probably was never on the water, as you mentioned, telling the person who has spent his life on it, and his father and grandfather before him. It's like somebody in 200 Kent Street, where they have 1,200 people working, trying to tell you whether there is enough fish here for you to go out and catch one. That's what we're running into.

I have one quick comment to Mr. Butler. You mentioned salmon licences, and this, again, shows what goes on within the department. Back when they closed the fishery, around the same time the salmon fishery was closed—to be reopened in five years or so—some people held on to their licences, about 81 I think is the number in the province.

After 13 years, nothing has happened. So we had a stab at it last year, met with the minister's office, saying there were only a few and what could we do. They said, "Talk to them and give us options". We gave them two options: buy us out or let us back in. And "back in" could be with a limited number of tags just to see if the fishery is coming back. It could be used recreationally or with a 100-fathom net, whatever. There were different options.

We went back with them to the minister, and they just threw the whole thing out; they weren't going to touch it at all. That was after asking us to develop options for them.

Anyway, that will be picked up.

One other—

• (1540)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Mr. Hearn, I just need you to wrap up. Is it a comment?

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Yes. I just want to throw in COSEWIC, because it hasn't been mentioned.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Okay, just a few seconds, please.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: By the way, it has not been raised in the House at all. It was done by the department outside, I guess—no involvement whatsoever, no input from any of us, no questions, no time for any input unless the report comes back through the House. We have been to the minister on it, but it's not an issue that you or Bill or I or anyone has had a chance to have any input into. And it's scary when it happens that way.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Blais, you have five minutes.

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

A review of the Fisheries Act is due. I hope we will deal with it soon. One of the aspects that really concerns me is the discretionary power of the minister. It does not matter who the minister is nor what is the colour of the government of the day, the minister has the power to scrap the fishery for purely political reasons.

What would be your recommendations on this? Should we reduce the discretionary power of the minister so that he is no longer be able to rule at will on 90 percent or 100 percent of the resource? Should we restrict his powers in such a way that he is still be able to act but not with as much discretion as at the present time?

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): May I remind you before you start, gentlemen, to try to speak as slowly as possible.

Mr. Albert Johnson: If I could give my personal opinion, I don't think one man should have that power—no way. I think there should be a group of people who decide, not one man. That's my opinion.

Mr. Hedley Butler: I kindly agree with Albert. I've been beating around at this for a long time, too. I go to committee meetings and there is a panel set up. As I said in the beginning, I went to a crab meeting. We even had to explain to the people what a crab pot looked like and what we used for bait. Some of these people are making decisions on our lives, and I don't think that's fair.

If there is any decision to be made, I think the Minister of Fisheries should have at least some fishermen or plant workers or whatever on that committee who know the ins and outs of the thing. It's not much good for me to go to the prairies as a farmer. I don't know anything about it. I know how to plant potatoes here in Bonavista, but to go and work on a farm, I couldn't do it. That's the reason we should have guys like us fellows sitting around this table, experienced fellows, giving them information, and have him sit down with us or whatever.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you.

Mr. Feltham, do you want to comment on that?

• (1545)

Mr. George Feltham: Yes. It is certainly a concern. But again, any minister holds a lot of power, whatever department he's in. That power was there.

I've got to agree with Albert. How do you put this? When it comes to it that you're working in the fishing industry and just one man can make a decision to wipe out what you've worked at all your life—26 years in the fishery, 40 years in the fishery—it's hard to accept.

So I agree with Albert.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I would add that the minister of National Defence is not able to wage war as he pleases. Nobody, in any country, should have such power, in any department, as you mentioned earlier. The minister of Fisheries and Oceans should be no different. Other countries have shown us the way in this regard. This would prevent political decisions that amount to interference and that fly in the face of logic and common sense.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Mr. Blais.

[English]

Mr. Stoffer, five minutes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, again.

To go back to a couple of questions I asked earlier, the FFRC met our committee a year or two back and talked about seal exclusion zones, although they themselves never really described how one would be enacted. I was wondering if you could possibly fill in the blanks of how it would be developed or how it could be done, a seal exclusion zone.

Also, on the aspect of everything that was said earlier about DFO and the 50 tonnes to 60 tonnes and your doubling that amount for what you think the biomass is, and how so far getting the okay for a pilot fishery or a test fishery or continued sentinel fisheries hasn't been possible, what does your gut tell you about why DFO is doing this to you?

And Mr. Burry, you look, sir, like you're about 30 years away from retirement. I'm just wondering if you could tell me who the next generation of fishermen will be in the Bonavista area and here, because we've heard from the council of Canadian fish harvesters that they're very worried about the next generation of captains and fishermen. It doesn't appear that the younger generation is interested or has the financial capability of getting into the fishery. I'm just wondering, sir, based on your experience, if I was a person 22 years old, why should I get into the fishery?

Mr. Pearce Burry: Right now, I wouldn't even think twice about it.

As for me, my son won't be at it. He's too old to go at it now, or pretty close to it. He's in his forties, so I'm climbing there. I'm retired from the fishery, but I wouldn't even think about going into the fishery in this day and age now, unless there were an awful lot of changes made.

You're crucified with regulations. Every time something happens, you've got a paper coming in the mail saying this has changed, that's changed, you can't do this, you can't do that. You're in your boat and you've got a fishery boat that comes up alongside of you with a gun on its side, stops, jumps aboard your boat without asking permission to get aboard, just jumps aboard. You wouldn't know whether or not you were in the wild west. We're law-abiding citizens.

Fishermen are out there making a living, trying to make a living. If the fishery officer wants to see me, he should wait until I come in to the wharf, then come and see me. I've got to land in the port where I'm out of, same as all the other fellows. It doesn't make sense for them to come out there with their sounders on, their radar going and what have you, come up and stop you. And here I am, hauling in fish, and all of a sudden, boom, the fish is gone. I've got to wait another two or three hours before I can get a fish because of what the fishery officers are doing or the RCMP or whoever it is who's coming around checking up on me.

If it's safety equipment, every man knows that he's got to have the safety equipment. He doesn't have to be told. He doesn't have to be checked. When he goes out there, when he comes into the wharf, if they check and he hasn't got it, charge him. They don't have to come on the water where we're at; we've got to come back in to the land. If I'm in a 20-foot, 28-foot, or 30-foot boat, I can't go anywhere else. I can't ship my fish anywhere else except into the port that I'm out of.

• (1550)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: George, how would you see a seal exclusion zone?

Mr. George Feltham: I think the only one I've seen that was probably enforced to any degree was in Smith Sound. Basically, if you've got an aggregation of fish in a confined area, then I can see how killing or shooting or scaring these seals eventually will help. Will it eliminate? I don't know. Other than that, I don't know how you would work a seal exclusion zone.

The other question I want to.... And probably your comments and Mr. Hearn's, as referenced here earlier, are related. You talked about fishermen, and Mr. Hearn was talking about the restrictions on vessel sizes. I'd be certainly interested to know what recommendations there are, or if this committee has had any talks on the individual owner-operator policy, and what they see as protecting that policy, because it's easy to say take barriers out of it. I'd like to know what this committee is willing to recommend if they're talking about the future of Newfoundland in dealing with trust agreements so the minister will deal with that issue.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Sweetland—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Just under the bell. Sorry, Mr. Stoffer, but your five minutes is now up. I apologize.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: For me, but not for him.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): What's that?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: He was going to respond as to why he thinks DFO is doing this to him.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): I'll tell you what. I'll ask Mr. Matthews. He may want to ask the very same question. That's a possibility.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Go ahead.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you.

Mr. Matthews.

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Do you want to answer it?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Because they're afraid of the foreign countries; it's for no other reason.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Can you explain that? As Gerald said earlier, what does your 4,000 or 5,000 tonnes of fish just in Bonavista have to do with 200 miles off the coast?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: I think you'd better ask that to the minister instead of asking me.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: We will.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: As I see it, that's the only reason. That's the way it was explained to us at the meeting last year, the one up in Gander, and that was the only reason he gave. I don't know who brought it up this morning. I think it was the mayor. I was present at that same round table discussion where Bruce Adkins, who at the time was head of the science branch for Atlantic Canada, was present. He agreed with everyone else at the meeting, and in fact he figured if there was to be a fishery, there'd be one in Notre Dame Bay too, plus Bonavista Bay and Trinity Bay.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Is it in writing?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Of course it's not in writing.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Mr. Matthews, did you want to speak?

Mr. Bill Matthews: I have a couple of quick questions, if you don't mind.

One of you gentlemen made a reference to a 40% growth in the inshore biomass, I believe, when you made your presentation. Did someone reference that, a 40% growth in the inshore biomass?

Mr. Hedley Butler: It was George, I think.

Mr. Bill Matthews: And where would that figure come from? How did we arrive at that 40% growth?

Mr. Hedley Butler: It's from scientists working on the fishery. As I said, I've got a graph here that shows—

Mr. Bill Matthews: So you're comfortable with that, is what I'm saying.

Mr. Hedley Butler: Yes.

Mr. Bill Matthews: All right.

Again, someone else said in their presentation that people say there are no fish offshore and where is the evidence? I think that's the question someone asked.

I don't want to jump to conclusions, but I believe what you're really saying there is that DFO is not doing adequate science offshore to be able to come to that conclusion. Is that your point? Would someone like to comment on that and tell us what your opinion is on it? I know you're preoccupied with the inshore, but being on the water, you must have a feel for—

Mr. Hedley Butler: I'll speak on it, because I had a fisherman who fished turbot offshore, 50 miles, and he was closed down because of the bycatch of cod. It's as simple as that, right?

Mr. Albert Johnson: I'd like to make a comment on that. I fished turbot this year, and we fish in waters, as I said in my presentation, greater than 160 fathoms. We fished the turbot fishery totally on the test fishery, which was never heard of. We caught the quota on the test fishery. The quota was something like 1,367 tonnes, I think. The reason there was a test fishery was because the department got a lot of complaints from people fishing crab. And the bycatch from crab was really down. It was a little over 2%, as a matter of fact.

We found cod down in depths that were unheard of years ago. I mean, to go out well offshore and catch cod, usually you went down—except for certain times in the year—over the edge of the ground. Say you put your nets out 115 fathoms and went down to 140 or 145; you never caught cod down in those depths of water, but only at certain times of the year, in the spring and the late fall.

I really think, or my personal thing, as I said in my presentation, is that the agenda of DFO is to reduce the harvesters by not opening the fishery. Inshore, nowhere is there not a sign of recovery; this is common knowledge. I think what they're doing is they've got an agenda to try to reduce the harvesters to get people out of the fishery. There are too many harvesters. That's one way they've got, because when some of the politicians were trying to get a quota of crab for the inshore, they privately wanted their total. The union was fighting for it and they finally gave in and said, okay, on the condition we give you a quota. They would like there to be no quota on crab. So the inshore small boats would be history by now if it were only for the crab.

Those are my thoughts on this. Thank you.

• (1555)

Mr. Bill Matthews: I have one final question.

There was a lot of controversy about the blackback fishery this year—at least on the public airwaves. I guess some people saw it really as a way of having a bit of a cod fishery without officially

having a cod fishery. I don't know how you people feel about that. What was your reaction to that, and how did it work out?

What I gathered was that a fair bit of cod was caught in the blackback fishery. I'd just like to hear your impressions of it, because as I said, it was very controversial publicly on the airwaves of the province. I just wondered if you participated in it and what your experience was, and what you thought about how it was done.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: I participated in it. I've fished blackback prior to the moratorium too, and right up through the years.

This year I never got that much blackback; I only got about 3,000 pounds. I caught about another 800 pounds, I think it was, of cod. It's very hard to catch blackback without catching cod in your nets. This was a real bad year for blackback because of water conditions, weather, and whatever, right? It was really bad.

Mr. Bill Matthews: So how much cod were you allowed to catch?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Two thousand pounds round. I think it was 1,600 pounds or 1,660 pounds.

Mr. Bill Matthews: So are you telling me that most people didn't catch that or that most people did?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Oh, a lot of people caught it.

A witness: I caught mine.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Yes. Ask them how much blackback they caught.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Yes, but there are people who think it was just a way of allowing you to catch cod without saying you had a cod fishery. I don't know how you feel about that, but those were the accusations that were made. It's a roundabout way.

Mr. Hedley Butler: Mr. Matthews, I put out my blackback nets there and I never landed one blackback, but I did land 1,600 pounds of cod.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): I'm going to have to leave it at that, Mr. Matthews.

Mr. Bill Matthews: That's why I asked the question.

Mr. George Feltham: I want to make one comment on this one, if I can.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Go ahead.

Mr. George Feltham: The thing is that 430,000 metric tonnes of blackback were caught. There was a small amount of cod caught; I'm not sure of the exact figures for the cod, but I think it was 1.3 million pounds of cod landed.

When you're talking about people with low incomes, it doesn't matter if there's 433,000 pounds of cod. Every damn dollar counts to them. What we've got to do.... If the cod are there so you can land 1.3 million pounds of cod in two weeks, using six nets, three nets, or four nets, what do you say about the cod that are there? What do you say about the cod that are there?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): We started late, so we do have time for another round of questioning of five minutes each. Is everybody agreed to that?

We have Mr. Matthews' and Mr. Stoffer's stamp of approval, so we're all set to go.

We also have a gentleman who's going to do an extra presentation, because we do have time. Mr. Glen Little, who's a councillor here in Bonavista, will be making a short presentation as well. That will be followed by a round of questioning.

I'm going to start here with Mr. Hearn

Mr. Loyola Hearn: We'll take a short question of a minute or so each.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Okay. You have a five-minute allotment. I'll let you share and share alike.

• (1600)

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Feltham mentioned the owner-operator trust agreement. That's a big issue, and it has been raised here. Mr. Stoffer is high in this also. We've had Earl McCurdy in front of us. It's been an issue with the union. That whole area is in the total mix. It goes back to the arrangement, I guess, when you had the licence buy-out. All of you were together in the....

I fished for 15 or 20 years myself—traps, gillnets, the works. On traps, there were five in the crew, and the skipper had two shares because of the boat, whatever. We all shared equally. If it were now, the only fellow able to get a licence would be the skipper because he was the enterprise holder.

A lot of people are being pushed out, but three or four companies in this province own half of the licences. That is having a very adverse effect on the fishery.

This whole issue has to be cleared up. I have a feeling it's going to be one we will be taking up very soon, and it'll be interesting to see what we have here.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: I have just a comment. I'm interested in what you gentlemen said about them fishing 50 miles offshore and not really targeting cod, but they ended up being shut down because they were getting too much cod.

I'm not talking about northern cod in this instance, but certainly in southwestern Nova Scotia, in that 4X fishery that goes down to Georges Bank, they have the same problem, the same situation this year. The guys who are targeting pollock—pollock and cod will school together—just can't catch their pollock quota because they're catching too much cod. So it's not just here in Newfoundland.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Randy.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Thank you.

Let me thank all of you for your presentations.

I'm the newest member of the committee and a politician who does need to be educated, so I appreciate that. I have just a comment and then a quick question.

On the Species at Risk Act listing, COSEWIC makes its recommendation, if I understand correctly, to the Minister of Environment. Then they sort of wrestle it out—the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

What happened on the west coast, with that subspecies of sockeye salmon, was that the Minister of Fisheries had to agree to some pretty strict management techniques or it would have been listed. That was no great solution either, because if you followed it at all you'll know that there were commercial fishermen sitting on the banks watching 8 million sockeye salmon swim by so that 200 or so of these other Cultus Lake sockeye salmon could make it to their spawning grounds. That was pretty frustrating for them, as I'm sure you can understand.

I've heard about 4,000, 5,000, or 7,000 pounds. You do make a very compelling case for a pilot fishery inshore, so we'll certainly take notice of that. But if it was 5,000 pounds each or something, how would that affect you financially? I don't know the price. How would it affect you economically?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: There's not much of a price for it this year, but it is a big help, especially to me. There are two of us; my son and I fish. My wife also fishes net crab. This year, for the first time in seven or eight years, I qualified for employment insurance, but I didn't qualify for top employment insurance. This is my first time.

This year the season was delayed because of the provincial dispute on crab, which never helped the price or anything else, I might say. We started out in mid-May with crab, lobster, lumpfish, blackback—and I'm into toad crab now and mackerel. It won't even help me top EI, which means my gross now is not \$14,000.

Mr. Bill Matthews: How much?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: So that's pretty bad, \$14,000 for a skipper. You have to have \$14,000 because 25% automatically comes off. I don't have that.

I'd like to make one short statement, just on something that happened, that was brought up this morning, about the Kirby report.

• (1605)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Is everybody okay with that?

An hon. member: Go right ahead.

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: At the Kirby hearings...I went to one of them, right. I believe it was in Gander. Basically we were told as inshore fishermen, and offshore fishermen were there too, that if we didn't catch the fish that were going to increase over the next three or four years—I think the report came out in 1982, and this happened in 1981—then what we didn't catch would be given to the foreigners.

I'll say this in defence of Kirby. His report was based primarily on scientific evidence, which wasn't worth the paper it was written on. So that's the way you can keep the Kirby report in your mind. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Mr. Sweetland.

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

[Translation]

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

I would like you to talk about the advantages of line fishing over gill nets, especially in terms of resource conservation.

[English]

Mr. George Feltham: One of the things that there has always been a conflict on around the island...a lot of it depends on where you fish, the type of bottom you have, and the gear type that is being used. The Bonavista area, especially, has been always noted for its long lines and its hooks, because this is shallow water, and the availability of ground. There are a lot of areas around the island that don't have that. They have steep cliffs, they don't have the room to accommodate fishermen, or they don't have the ground for handlines.

Some of the problems with both gear types...I go back again to the fishermen. The downside of gillnets is sometimes, yes, you do target non-targeted species, and yes, sometimes if the weather is bad you do have maybe some fish that are unsuitable for the market. When hauled on a regular basis, the gear type is not a problem. Fish responsibly. On hooks and lines, again, if your hooks or your trawls are set overnight and you can't retrieve them the next day, I guess they don't keep fishing, but the fish that are on there can be discarded as well.

The size of fish you get depends on the area you're in. If you're selling to a plant, market size is usually 18 inches and longer. When you go into any given area at any given time, some of the fish that are retrieved may be only 16, 17 inches. What happens to these fish? There are discards there as well.

Some of the sentinel programs have seen just as high numbers of discards from hook and line in certain areas, at certain given times—I stress that, from hook and line—as there are from gillnets, because of size.

So it has to go back to the responsible use of the gear and the individual. That's what it boils down to. In my mind there's no difference.

Mr. Hedley Butler: I just want to make a comment on it. When we had our round table discussion, the plant that buys the cod from us told us that they would prefer a hook-and-line fishery, and as George said, Bonavista is well known for its hook-and-line fishery. Through the years, that's all we've been doing here. When the gillnets came on stream, some fellows went to the gillnets, but he told us that the best kind of fish caught was in August and October, and handline, hook-and-line fishery, or longline would be the best yield of fish and the best quality of fish. So if we have to sell to these people, we want to give the best quality and get the best dollar for our product.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you.

I would now like to deal with a species that is not endangered: seals. I believe it was Mr. Sweetland who talked earlier about hooded seals that catch fish and have a much greater impact than one might think, at least compared with harp seals. Could you elaborate on what you said about the hooded seal?

• (1610)

[English]

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: The hooded seal basically is not hunted. You are allowed to hunt it, but it's only the older ones you're allowed to kill. You're not allowed to kill the young ones, the beaters, like

with the harps. Those are the only ones that are economically viable in a hunt, the younger ones. There's no market for the old hoods. For the younger hoods now, like the young harps, there's an excellent market, but the federal DFO won't allow a hunt for the younger ones.

As I said in my presentation, they dive deeper, they're a larger seal, and they take more cod. As far as I'm concerned, that's one of the things out on the Hamilton Bank, off Labrador. That's one of the reasons that herd has grown a lot faster than the harps. There's less of them—I know that—but there's no control over them, basically, whatsoever. They're just out there eating everything that's there.

I'm saying this as a fisherman and as a hunter too. We hunt seabirds in November—murre, or turre, or whatever you want to call them. Back prior to the moratorium, you never saw seals in November, when we started hunting turre, but over the last 10 or 11 years, seals have been coming earlier in the fall and leaving later in the summer. This is especially true of the hoods.

Wherever they come to in the fall of the year... The last year there was a fishery was in 2002, and we were fishing in the middle through the last of October, because the later you wait with handline fish, the better the quality you get and the larger the fish you get. So we waited until later in the fall, the middle to the end of October, to catch them.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Mr. Sweetland, do you want to finish up, very quickly?

Mr. Douglas Sweetland: Yes.

Anyhow, wherever we fished on the end of it, up to the last of October, all the cod were driven off the inshore grounds by the seals, as far as we're concerned, because cod were showing up that early.

This year—and we're still in September—I'm starting to see hooded seals around already. This was unheard of 20 years ago.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Okay, thank you.

Mr. Stoffer, you have five minutes.

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

Mr. Hearn just put in my ear a very good point and a question that hasn't been asked yet, so I'll ask it on his behalf: what have energy prices and the price of fuel now done to your livelihood? Obviously with the higher price of diesel and gas and everything else, plus all the equipment you require and the trucking costs to get it here, it must be exorbitant. You are obviously having to absorb those costs. Could you give us an indication of what that's doing to you as well?

Mr. Butler, you talked about the fact that, in your opinion, DFO more or less would like to get rid of the independent commercial fisherman. There are a lot of guys on the west coast who think that exact same thing, especially after the so-called Mifflin plan of 1996. So you have similar opinions on that across the country.

My point for you is on the sentinel fishery, which you had talked about earlier. Is DFO a continued supporter of that sentinel fishery? Are there adequate resources and manpower within that to assist you in that fishery?

With the changes you want and with the DFO management that you've experienced over the years, do any of you gentlemen have any faith or trust in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to accomplish the changes that you think are required to sustain your livelihood?

Thank you.

Mr. George Feltham: One thing is the cost. There's no question about it. You're talking about black boxes and everything else—that black box being introduced into the full-time fleet and the large supplementary fleet. These boxes went to a cost of \$5,000 to \$6,000. I had the understanding at that time they would replace some of the observer coverage and there would be less cost to them. What happened is that last year the observer coverage went up by 300%. Fuel has practically doubled in cost, and there are dockside monitoring fees. Now the government has put pressure on every port, and you have to pay more and more to harbour authorities. When the price of crab was \$2.50 a pound, enterprises could maintain that, but now it's at \$1.20 to \$1.30, and with the cost of fuel, if nothing changes, you're going to see bankruptcies, no question about it.

I'm a firm believer that the government would rather see fewer people in the fishery because it's easier to manage if they have to deal with fewer people. That is going to create a chaotic situation in this province for our communities.

•(1615)

Mr. Hedley Butler: Speaking on the sentinel again, back a couple of years ago I did a sentinel area in Bonavista. As I stated in my presentation today, they made cuts. DFO came out and said there's not enough money, we've got to make some cuts. But what the fishermen there didn't understand was why cut Bonavista? In the last two years that I fished it, it had one of the best and highest catch rates on this island. And that's the one they took. The fishermen there said it was not because of the cutbacks in DFO; they just didn't want to hear talk of what fish was out there. We could set six nets, but all I ever fished was four, and then we would probably cut down to two because of the abundance of fish in these nets. There's no doubt about it, the sentinel is getting good results, but good results are no good if the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is not looking at them. You might just as well have nothing, and that's what we're worried about.

I don't know where else to go. Like I said, we sit down to meetings, we sit down with you people, we sit down with the union, and we sit down with the Minister of Fisheries. It's just like taking our head and running into a brick wall—there's nothing coming out of it. It's in our blood, I suppose, because a few of us have got to keep on fighting, and that's what keeps us going. But it's very frustrating.

I'm on the town council here in Bonavista, and in the fall of the year our council chambers fill up with plant workers. It's filled to the door with plant workers who haven't got enough hours to qualify for EI. We've got fish swimming off our shores here. They're swimming ashore, you can catch them from the rocks, but you're not allowed to catch them. It's very frustrating.

I don't know what you people go through, but we are on the firing line; we are on the front line. We don't want carload after carload

going up over what we call the fishermen's drop, where you come in, going to Alberta or Toronto. This is what we're running into. It's time for someone to take a stand. We're trying to take a stand, but no one is listening, and we've got to get somebody to listen to us. We don't want to destroy anything; we just want to make a living here like our fathers before us and carry on. My two children are gone.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Hedley. I appreciate it.

Carry on, sir.

Mr. Albert Johnson: I'd like to relate to what this gentleman said about expenses. As far as I'm concerned we're the one industry in the world that's paying for our own policing. We're paying all kinds of money in observers, dockside monitors, and graders. We buy our licence and we pay a tremendous amount for that too. We buy our black box and have a rental fee to pay.

We've got to get our little black box activated, which is costly. We have to get it deactivated in the fall. We're paying a monthly rate of \$100. We had to buy it in the beginning for something around \$4,000 or \$5,000, and it's just gotten ridiculous. Now the price of fuel has gone through the ceiling. Insurance has gone through the ceiling.

We're making money, but the net profit is nothing, especially with the crab now and the price of crab having gone down. A little bit of turbot was all...I've had fellows from large vessels talk to me in Catalina this year, saying they hoped they could get another couple of trips of turbot to make their payments on their boats. They're desperate. They're at this shrimp fishery; there's no money in that. They're going out and burning up \$7,000 or 8,000 worth of fuel by the time they come in. There's no money there.

It's getting a little bit ridiculous. I think we're the only industry in the world that's paying for our own policing. We're paying for everything, and DFO has gone from one extreme to the other.

Anyway, that's all I have to say.

•(1620)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Mr. Johnson. That's a good point.

I guess that concludes it for us.

I want to—one moment.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: In relation to Mr. Johnson's comment about some people not making money, I'm hearing that basically nobody in the cooked and peeled shrimp section of the business, which a lot of plants are starting to depend on, is making money. It's only because of the crab they keep it open, but there isn't any money. Are you hearing that? If that is factual, it is a pretty serious situation.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): It's not pertaining to northern cod, but nonetheless, go ahead. It is a valid question.

Mr. Albert Johnson: Are you referring to the processors or the harvesters?

Mr. Loyola Hearn: No, I'm talking about the processors. They're not making money on cooked and peeled.

Mr. Albert Johnson: I don't agree with you, because I remember being to the opening ceremonies a few years ago of the shrimp plant at Port Union. I think Vic Young was there then. I remember he was saying they'd spent just about \$12 million on that plant, and they were hoping to get it back in five years. I think they are making money. I think processors are making money; of course they are making money.

When I referred to not making money, I was referring to the harvesters, because it's so costly. The shrimp fishery is an expensive fishery. I think the processors are making money, yes.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

I would like to thank all of you very much. Before you get up from the table, though, I'd like you to accept a round of applause from all of us.

I think, Mr. Sweetland, you made the comment earlier about your education. You said you wouldn't put yourself in the same class as a Ph.D. Sir, I can probably speak for many of us when I say that I would, given what you've told us today—and the rest of you as well.

The insight you've given us also shows us, and will show people who should be here as well, that your level of education—your experience—goes well beyond your own harbours. You gave us good insight on the industry. You talked about Kirby reports. You talked about the international situation and NAFO, and each and every time—I think this is our third time, Hedley and Doug, that we've sat down in this way—I'm always amazed at how much I learn from it, and I'm always amazed by how much you know about the industry. It should be heard in much bigger forums, in my humble opinion as chair.

Again, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us. It has been an incredible learning experience, and I think it will be fruitful at the end of the day. Thank you again.

Before you leave, I want to say we have one five-minute presentation, so hopefully you can stick around for that. Thank you, gentlemen.

At this point I'd like to invite Glen Little to come up and make a short presentation.

I will suspend proceedings for two minutes. We'll see you then.

• (1600)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1619)

We're now going to reconvene for a final presentation. I call all members to the table.

We have a few spare moments left at the end of this presentation, and I thought it would be fitting to call upon an individual I've heard from quite a bit in my travels as member of Parliament here. I think the story he tells and the way he tells it are second to none, so I thought I would let him come here and share his story with us and just give you a good picture of what is happening here in this community. Glen Little is a councillor here in Bonavista, and I'm sure many councillors would echo his sentiments, him being a local politician.

So we have a five-minute presentation, and Glen, you have the final word of the day. It is your honour, and over to you, sir.

• (1625)

Mr. Glen Little (As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson, for your kind words. Hopefully the people of Bonavista will look at it the same this evening, but here we are.

I'd like to thank the committee, Mr. Chairperson, for coming to the historical town of Bonavista to listen to the concerns about the fishery and issues related to the fishery.

There are a number of aspects within the fishery that are very complex, in my opinion. I'm not a fisherperson and I don't work in the fish plant, but I'm a community leader and I serve on the fisheries committee of council. I pay close attention to the fishery because, after all, it is the backbone to the rural economy in Newfoundland and Labrador. Without a viable fishery we will not exist as a people. We will not, and it is important that we have a sustainable fishery in the future.

I listened to the fishermen here today and I listened to some plant workers earlier. I think they brought forward a strong case on behalf of people in rural Newfoundland and Labrador on the issues raised today, in particular issues in relation to opening a commercial fishery and a food fishery. I believe they gave legitimate reasons why there should be a commercial fishery based on conservation. They're not a greedy group of people. They're asking for a limited commercial fishery based on what the cod stocks are out in Conception Bay, Trinity Bay, Bonavista Bay, and Notre Dame Bay, and the evidence was put forward today in a professional manner.

I'd like to make one statement here today concerning professionalism and people who know the industry best. It's not the politicians around this table. It's not the politicians in St. John's. It's not the politicians in community council. It's the people who are actually on the water, the fisherpeople, and the people who work in the plant. I believe they've been ignored in the past, and I'm hoping, through this committee and through the future reports that are going to be done, that concerns coming out of this forum will be listened to and addressed.

I'm hoping there will be a future fishery that will be viable enough to put people back to work, because our council in the past has been knocking on the doors of the politicians looking for handouts, and it's not what we want as a people. We're a hard-working people. We proved it in the past and we're going to prove it in the future, but what we need is somebody to listen to the fisherpeople in the industry, the people who know best, people who are out on the water making a living. In the past these people weren't listened to.

As Councillor Butler said earlier, out-migration: people are leaving on a daily basis. And they shouldn't be leaving, because there's an industry here in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, which is the fishing industry. It can sustain people, give them employable weeks of earnings, and they can make a good living, the way they did in the past.

DFO scientists don't know the fishery like the fishermen do. The federal government has certainly reduced money in that department and created a problem. Evidence was put forward here today, and I'm hoping this committee and in particular the federal Minister of Fisheries will listen to what comes out of this report today, because we are a dying breed in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. It's sad to know that the resource is right next door and is not being utilized, and it should be utilized to the maximum.

Companies, big corporations, in my opinion, are looking out for one thing: profits and greed. If they get their way, what you're going to see is factory freezer trawlers. The people who sat here today go out in the small fishing boats making a living and bringing work to the plant workers. That won't happen if the government allows a future fishery under a program such as one for factory freezer trawlers, which I believe corporations would want. That's one area I would like this committee to look at.

We need people working in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. We don't need to come to the federal government for programs and assistance. We want to work and make a living here the way we should and the way we did in the past. That's what we're asking for. We don't expect programs or what I call the crumbs you've been giving us in the past; we want to work for a viable living. I don't think that's too much to ask for, knowing there's a resource off our coastline in abundance. It's been proven—proven—by the fishery people.

I'd like to thank our MP for bringing our concerns forward. I think you've done an outstanding job in that department, Mr. Simms, and you certainly worked hard with our community council. Our community council in Bonavista certainly supports the fisherpeople 100%. We played a major role in setting up the committee meeting and round table discussion that took place.

I can tell you the community council in Bonavista is going to continue to fight; we're not going to give up. You people may never be around, but we will be and we're going to keep the fight up. We're going to make sure we get the cod fishery open the way it should be, based on the resource that's out in our water. We're certainly going to make sure that conservation is a factor included when that fishery opens again.

Thank you very much for your time.

Voices: Hear, hear!

• (1630)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Well, that's what I call ending the day on an exclamation mark, right?

Glen, thank you so very much. I couldn't think of a better summation of the day than what you have done. You've also brought forward another big point, which was today we filled up our heads as politicians, but we filled up our hearts as well.

Thank you very much

Mr. Glen Little: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): By the way, good luck.

We're going to ask everybody to sit for a moment as we adjourn because we're going to take a few action photos, as we call them, showing us in action and what we're all about.

I would like to thank everybody watching. Thank you so very much for coming and showing your interest. We appreciate it. Of course, we'd also like to thank the Bonavista Lions Club for providing the facilities and giving the volunteer hours. Thank you very much, Mr. George Clements and Lewis and Bill Fifield.

Thank you again, all, and thank you for coming to Bonavista.

Mr. Keddy, you have a remark?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Chairman, you might tell the ladies and gentlemen here that all of our meetings are on the public record. You can visit the federal website and log on to the committee, where you can read the committee minutes and hear what your members have to say, and what all of us have to say. It might be a point of interest for them.

• (1635)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Yes. Good point. Thank you.

Any other quick comments to make?

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I would like to say this to the people who came to meet with us and provided information. I am from the Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine area, a region which is very similar to yours. What I heard this morning and this afternoon made me feel quite at home because I am sure I would have heard the same things in my riding. If you get a chance, members of the Committee, to visit the Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine region, you will hear very much the same discourse. In that sense, I believe that your testimony reflects very well the life that you have here. What I gather from all of it—and this we must remember—is that you want to be treated with respect and dignity, that you want not only to survive in your community but make a decent living and that we must therefore work on development. I fully agree with you and I will be on your side in this fight that we will have to engage in over the coming weeks and months.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Scott Simms): Thank you very much, Mr. Blais. It was very well said and I agree.

[*English*]

Thank you again, all of you, for joining us.

We will be in Port Blandford tomorrow with the same hearings on the same issue, and then in St. John's on Thursday and Friday.

We now stand adjourned.

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