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—
Chair

Mr. Fabian Manning

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC)): I call the meeting to order and welcome our guests.

I will just make a quick comment to the committee members. We have a budget for our study on small craft harbours. The clerk is going to circulate that during the meeting. Hopefully we'll get a chance at the end of the meeting to have a few minutes to chat about that, realizing that we have to go back to the House for a vote.

Also, I have a request here from the Aquaculture Association that I need to talk to you about for a few moments before we leave. So nobody jump up and run away.

I want to welcome our guests, and the extra guests who are in the back here, to our committee. We discovered that you were going to be in Ottawa this week, so we decided to take advantage of having the expertise of you people here, to come and have an opportunity to have a chat with us.

We're in the process of conducting a study into small craft harbours across the country. We have heard from some regional directors. We will be hearing from others. We have had the departmental officials at our meeting discussing those.

We're hoping to present an interim report to the House prior to the Christmas break, because the budget discussions are ongoing and we want the minister to have the information we have put together as a committee, to assist him in hopefully seeking some extra funding to be applied to the small craft harbours budget.

We've had discussions among ourselves about inviting people like yourselves, the volunteers who are on the ground in those communities, and when we found out, as I said, that you were here in Ottawa, we decided to rearrange things.

We want to thank you for accepting our invitation, but also for accommodating us at a very quick turnover of time. We certainly appreciate that.

At most of our meetings we have opening remarks by our witnesses for ten minutes in a prepared statement, or whatever the case may be. Today, because of the short notice we have given you, we would like, if possible, to take the opportunity to start with Mr. Benson, or Mr. Burke as the chair, whatever way you want to do it, to introduce yourselves, your role, what area you represent, and then make a few comments on harbour authorities in general, or whatever you want to do, and then we're going to open the floor for questions

so that we can begin the dialogue between the committee members and yourselves.

Is the committee okay with that scenario?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Burke.

Mr. Osborne Burke (Chairperson, Maritimes and Gulf, National Harbour Authority Advisory Committee): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Certainly, on behalf of the National Harbour Authority Advisory Committee, I'm extremely pleased that you've taken the opportunity to invite us here. Our executive was here previously in March of this year, and you should have a copy of that presentation. Generally, that deck had a lot of the information about the harbour authority program with respect to volunteers.

My name is Osborne Burke, and I'm the chair. I am representing the Maritimes and gulf region, and I am located in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, in the Harbour Authority of Antigonish.

What I'm going to do is just make a couple of brief comments, and we'll pass it on to each of the individuals here. We'll also take a moment to introduce our two fellow representatives who are sitting behind us.

In addition to that, I'd like to take a moment to congratulate the chair on his recent appointment, and I believe we have Mr. Byrne and Mr. Lévesque, who are recent additions to the committee.

We're extremely pleased that the committee is undertaking this study. We certainly feel and believe that we're speaking to a group of committed individuals around the table here, from all parties, as we are from the volunteer perspective, in relation to harbours. So, again, thank you for that.

My two fellow representatives at the rear of the room are Bonnie Morse, from the Harbour Authority of Grand Manan, in the Maritimes and gulf region; and Clarence Buote, who is from the western end of Prince Edward Island.

In lieu of time, I will pass it on to Luc.

• (1540)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc LeGresley (Vice-Chair, Quebec, National Harbour Authority Advisory Committee): Good afternoon, members of the Committee. It is a pleasure for me to once again appear before you. I believe that we have invested much hope in this committee since our first meeting. This is our second such encounter.

My name is Luc Legresley. I come from the Gaspé Peninsula region of Quebec. I am accompanied by Mr. Laurent Normand, who also hails from the Gaspé, and Mr. Marvin Buckle, who is from the Lower North Shore. I will be making comments later on and I will do my best to answer your questions. That is all for me, for the time being. I will now give the floor to Mr. Bob Baziuk.

[English]

Mr. Bob Baziuk (Secretary, British Columbia, National Harbour Authority Advisory Committee): *Merci*, Luc.

My name is Bob Baziuk. I'm from Steveston Harbour Authority, which is located in the Pacific region at the mouth of the Fraser River. It's the largest harbour in Canada, a commercial fishing harbour. With me today is Elizabeth McLeod from Comox Harbour Authority, and also Ben Mabblerley from Whaler Bay on Galiano Island. Once again, it is a pleasure to be here, and we really appreciate the fact that we have a chance to help you in your process.

Here's just a little bit about B.C. We have 52 harbour authorities managing 70-some-odd harbours. I don't have the exact number, but it's in the seventies, so we have multiple management out there. For the most part, the Pacific region is running very well. I'm very proud of it. We also have a separate association that is at arm's length, called the Harbour Authority Association of British Columbia, of which I am a current director and Elizabeth is the current president.

With that, I will pass it over to Bruce.

Mr. Bruce Benson (Member, Central and Arctic, National Harbour Authority Advisory Committee): My name is Bruce Benson. I'm from a small town called Gimli in Manitoba on Lake Winnipeg. I'm a commercial fisherman. I'm the chairman of the Freshwater Harbour Authority Advisory Council, which is in the central and arctic region. The country is divided into five regions, as you are probably aware. My region is very huge and diverse. It's four provinces and two territories. If it were a country, it would be the fifth largest country in the world, which these guys are probably tired of hearing, but many of you haven't.

My compatriots are David Tomasson, from a small town named Hecla, and Al Matthews, from Wheatley, Ontario, on Lake Erie.

One thing I want to talk about—we are all volunteers—is the passion we have for these harbours, if you'll indulge me just for a minute. I'd like to tell you just a quick little story. I know I'm supposed to be brief. I fished commercially in Iceland, commercially in Australia and on the west coast of Canada, and the closest I ever came to death was on Lake Winnipeg. We were about five miles out and the wind picked up and we barely made it in. It took us about three hours to make it in on a little 20-foot outboard motor, and it wasn't until we pulled into the harbour that I turned to my buddy and said, "We're going to live". That's what harbours mean to a lot of us: life—the fishermen's lives and the life of the community.

Thanks for inviting us here.

Mr. Morris Fudge (Member, Newfoundland and Labrador, National Harbour Authority Advisory Committee): My name is Morris Fudge. I'm from Newfoundland.

We have a very large area in Newfoundland for harbours. The most infrastructure in the program is in the Newfoundland region. If you have a wheelbarrow full of money up here, we want to carry that to Newfoundland. That's the first thing.

My colleagues with me are David Duffett, from Catalina, and Larry Butt, who belongs to La Scie.

As you know, Newfoundland is a little different. We have ice on one side of the island and no ice on the other side, so we do have a lot of infrastructure and we do have a lot of damage. The program is really essential to us guys. In our areas now, what we're seeing is that the boats that start now are often getting bigger and everything else, so we need money, piles of money.

Fabian, you got it.

• (1545)

The Chair: Well, Morris, coming from the balmy side of Newfoundland, I know what you mean.

Mr. Osborne Burke: Mr. Chair, at this point, the one thing I neglected to mention is that in the Maritimes and gulf region we have approximately 242 harbour authorities and 282 harbours. Those are approximate numbers. We have three provinces and the ice as well to deal with.

There are certainly challenges across Canada. Overall in this national committee we're focused on the program, and nationally, the key frustration for the volunteers now is dollars in the aging infrastructure. The fact is that people are down on the wharves trying to get their fellow fishermen to contribute, and we're contributing approximately \$25 million on an annual basis, if you count the volunteer input into the program. It's frustrating to be committed, to be dedicated, and then have your infrastructure slowly deteriorating to the point that we need to put dollars into the program. We really need to stress that message amongst all the other challenges we have.

We'll certainly turn it over to you, Mr. Chair, and welcome any questions at all that we can address or attempt to answer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burke.

Just to give you an idea, most of the members here are fully familiar with dealing with harbours in their ridings. In my riding of Avalon, in Newfoundland, I have 68 harbour authorities. It's a very busy file in my office, and it continues to be. That's the reason I guess that we've all come together, to try to see if we can improve on the lot of you people who oversee those projects, and the fishermen who depend on them for a living.

Our process here is that we go around the table, so I'm going to ask Mr. Simms to lead off our questions this afternoon.

Mr. Simms.

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

Given the proximity of both our ridings, we both share in the same frustrations and problems, despite any political colour.

I want to say, first of all, that I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Byrne for the first five minutes.

Mr. Benson, I appreciate your comments about the passion involved and how harbours are a sign of life off in the distance. It's a fantastic illustration of what a lot of people here forget when we deal in dollars and cents, numbers and size, infrastructure, and you name it. So I truly appreciate that small analogy.

On aging infrastructure, we received some sobering news last week about the dollar amounts that are needed to get up to par—and that is just to get up to par.

I want to ask specifically now about the stress that the harbour authorities have, the two angles. First is volunteer fatigue. Can you give us a good illustration of volunteer fatigue, for the people who volunteer in a harbour authority, the pressures that they're under? And can you tell us what is needed from the Government of Canada—not just the dollars but also the type of program you'd like to see in place that will help alleviate volunteer fatigue?

Second, if you look at the progression of our fishery, if you go back 30 years, 20 years, up until now, you'll see that the small boats have now become much larger boats and have become an extra fatigue on the infrastructure itself. When it comes to the announcements and the money we're putting in to upgrade the infrastructure, how has it been so ineffective over the past little while that we're struggling to get only a fraction of what we had before? In other words, I guess what we're looking for here is your perspective on where the money should be going and when it should be coming in, with regard to tenders and that sort of thing.

Can I ask you to address the volunteer fatigue issue first, before you get into possible solutions for infrastructure?

Mr. Osborne Burke: Probably several of us will reply to your question.

In defining volunteer fatigue—I was here for Monday's session and somebody asked about that—what we're talking about is a kind of unique program. You have a number of volunteers, and these aren't paid people in many cases. They're fellow fishermen dealing with the stresses every day of trying to fish themselves and run the harbour operations—generate revenues, deal with fee collection, deal with waste oil, garbage removal, environmental issues—and

trying to put together projects and proposals and access sources of funding. They're doing that as volunteers, and they have to answer to their fellow fishermen in the community. And whether it's a harbour with 10 vessels or a harbour with 500, it's the lifeblood of those communities to have that harbour there.

Just the day-to-day stresses of trying to deal with those issues and answering, in some cases, on infrastructure, which they're putting time and effort into—in a lot of cases, volunteer labour—and not being able to explain to the other fellow fishermen that we're asking them to put more dollars into this, when at the same time, they're asking where in the hell is the federal government, it's a federal asset.... So it's day to day, everyday frustrations.

Added to that, there was a real push to form the harbour authority program. Some fishermen would refer to it as their having come with a gun to our heads and saying “Either form a harbour authority or maybe we'll walk away from the harbour.” So it was very successful in forming the harbour authorities. However, one thing that failed in the rush to form them, while they were still forming harbour authorities, is that there weren't a lot of the support services there in the form of training or assistance. You're running a day-to-day operation, no matter the number of boats, and trying to manage that. There's a real recognition of that now, and we're working towards trying to improve that in training, whether it be board development, day-to-day training, safety issues. And there are a lot more items that have come on the table since we took over as harbour authorities—environmental issues, contaminated sites, pollution, waste removal. There are a number of challenges facing us, but we're not prepared to give up on it, that's for sure.

I'll ask any of my other colleagues here to jump in on the volunteer fatigue issue as well.

● (1550)

Mr. Bob Baziuk: I would like to echo that. I've been on the front lines on these harbours as well. When you're walking the floats and trying to answer questions about why this isn't fixed and why it is like this.... Those people on the front lines get a lot of abuse. I got it first-hand myself, and sometimes you don't have the answers for them. There's the stress of that to add to the fatigue.

Also in life, and I think in every community, you see the same people who volunteer all the time. It's always those people who step up to the plate. They're starting to age, and it's hard trying to find new directors who will fill in. All of those aspects, the exposure and the safety that these people deal with as volunteers, are huge. It's asking a lot of people, but there's a lot of good people in the program.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc LeGresley: In Quebec, there are 45 harbour authorities. That represents some 52 sites that are considered to be essential and are recognized by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and approximately 300 volunteers. If you are somewhat familiar with Quebec and its geography, you are perhaps aware that its fishing harbours are situated in the Magdalen Islands, the Gaspé Peninsula and along the North Shore.

It takes approximately three days to cover the Gaspé region and visit each one of the fishing harbours. The Gaspé Peninsula is immense. As for the North Shore, it is the same thing, except that there is no road leading directly to the Lower North Shore. The fishing harbours are thus in a way the roadway of the people in this region. Without fishing harbours, these people are isolated. The situation is the same in the Magdalen Islands.

In Quebec — and the same also applies to all of the other regions —, the fact that volunteers are charged with the management of fishing harbours, with all of the responsibilities that entails, is a source of much frustration. This situation becomes hard to bear. It is not the government of Canada that risks being sued, it is the volunteers. This problem has often been brought up in Quebec. The situation has become so difficult that a few years ago, all of the fishing harbour administrators in Quebec wanted to withdraw. Why? Because they were protected by no insurance whatsoever. We now have one. Luckily for us, because otherwise, we would not be here talking about this today.

Furthermore, the federal government is more and more providing insufficient funding to the department. We are being asked to continue to do just as much with the same resources. It is an impossibility. The situation is such that many harbour authorities carry out work without going through Public Works Canada. Why? In order to get more done. But is the work carried out in accordance with safety standards? The question must be asked. A lot of people prefer volunteer work because the amounts of money available are limited. For example, if Public Works Canada were to build a road, it would cost approximately \$150,000 whereas otherwise, the cost would be of \$100,000. However, the fact of having saved \$50,000 might be a source of deficiencies. It becomes a waiting game.

Another frustration is due to the fact that, year after year, we are constantly being asked to do more. In the beginning, we were asked to manage fishing harbours. Today, we are being asked to carry out inspections, to deal with waste water, to take care of environmental issues, to not forget to draw up financial statements, etc. Volunteers are being asked to accomplish tasks that should normally be carried out by people paid to do so. How could we explain to a fisherman that we are going to send him an invoice simply in order to offer him a minimum amount of services, a presence, a certain level of safety, by insuring that the boats are properly tied up, for example? In fact, we are asking 5,000 volunteers to do this work.

I find it deplorable that people, no matter what party they belong to, not have the courage to recognize this work. We are being told that it is recognized, but no positive sign or result has been communicated to the complement of volunteers. They are not being encouraged to stay put while waiting to be granted some help, some financial assistance. If this message is not communicated by the Canadian government and all elected representatives, what is going to happen? Ask yourselves the question. But we may no longer be here to provide an answer.

• (1555)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Legresley.

I will just ensure that you understand the process. What we do is we allow each party representative to have a question and we have a limited amount of time for each so we can get around to everybody.

So we're going to go to Mr. Byrne, and realize that everybody may not get to answer every question. So if you want to split it up among yourselves, you can do that, because I want to ensure that every party gets the opportunity to ask questions. We're trying to do two rounds.

Also, I'm asking the committee that we have a little leniency here today in regard to the answers. We're not going to have leniency in regard to the questions.

Go ahead, Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Thank you very much, gentlemen. Thank you for appearing.

We heard testimony on Monday from the assistant deputy minister responsible for the small craft harbours file, joined by the director general of the small craft harbours file. They told us very explicitly, very clearly, that there was a \$475 million deficit for immediate maintenance issues just to simply hold the line, to bring harbours basically into a maintenance level that they were originally engineered or designed for.

We heard there's a \$50 million deficit potentially within the department for new harbour requirements in the north, in Nunavut. The department said there's an \$82 million deficit required for a recreational harbour divestiture, which they don't have. So there's \$600 million in funding deficits within this department over the next five years, and we don't build one new harbour out of that whatsoever. We are just simply holding the line, except in the situation in the north.

To meet emerging needs in new fisheries, including aquaculture, aboriginal, and to accommodate vessel size changes, have you as a harbour authority, as a collective—because this is the information we couldn't get out of the officials—developed some sort of calculation of what you need as harbour authorities to build new harbours, to meet new demands such as in aquaculture and changes in vessel size, changes in the fisheries themselves?

•(1600)

Mr. Osborne Burke: I will kick that off. I think we spend so much time worried about the deteriorating facilities, we haven't had time to worry about new construction. That's been the priority: the day-to-day fishery, the day-to-day activities, the challenges you talk about and the lack of dollars. As we continue on each year, those facilities are becoming more difficult to maintain and more costly again. So I don't think we've had a lot of time to stop and consider new construction.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Given the warning the chair has given us, this is a piece of information that I think the committee really needs to have in the formulation of a report. I think we're facing about a \$1 billion infrastructure deficit within the small craft. My feeling is \$400 million, but I need to know from the experts, and the committee members need to know from the experts—who are you—what you need for major capital and minor capital for harbour improvements across this country so that when we report to Parliament we actually have a figure to be able to say, this is the money that's needed over the next short period of time to be able to meet your expectations and your needs as a professional industry and as people who are on the ground fighting this good fight.

Would you be able to endeavour to sit as a group to try to figure out, within a reasonable approximation, what your future requirements might be?

Mr. Osborne Burke: Well, I can speak currently for the Maritimes and gulf region. A lot of the harbour authorities are going through an exercise trying to come up with a five-year plan. The purpose of that is to try to take advantage of the dollars we have in general repairs, to plan better because of the regulatory requirements and environmental assessments, habitat. Those are challenges that are there now. Hopefully, with that planning we're certainly going to identify not only in each harbour authority what currently needs immediate repair but also what are the other items that need to be done from a construction point of view.

We're just getting to those stages of trying to do that planning in the Maritimes and gulf region, and I think that will give us a better handle on where we can go. We can do as much planning as possible in advance.

I don't know if somebody else wants to jump in here.

Mr. Bob Baziuk: Yes, I think that's what regional directors will do in accordance with the chain of command. They will figure out those numbers from a region-specific...how they gather their information through their area chiefs, or what have you. But I thought it would be more than \$475 million. I think we should go next door and vote on it right now and just get it done.

On top of that, that's just for repairs to existing harbours, you're right, but there's also the maintenance. Dredging is a huge thing all across the country. I'm no stranger to it, with the silting in the Fraser River currently, and in Quebec they have problems, in Comox, the whole schmeer. So that's another aspect. Those are things you don't even see as far as repairs go, but it's huge.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Burke, it would be hugely helpful to this committee if, in a short period of time... Because we do have a reporting requirement of trying to meet a deadline of December 12 to actually put an interim report into the House prior to the next budget

cycle, it would be very, very helpful.... The one shortfall we have in the information, Bob, that officials were not prepared to give us, was an estimate. You said they're planning and that's their role, but we need to hear from somebody, experts we can rely on, what would be the actual minor capital and major capital requirements over the next five years to actually meet expectations from your membership, your fishermen, on that major capital file, and to try to figure out....

We know there's a \$600 million deficit that's not being met. That's simply on one side of the equation. The other side of the ledger concerns how we can actually build new infrastructure. I think you would agree with me, there is new infrastructure that needs to be built.

We don't have that data, and without that data there will be a hole in our report. If you, Osborne, could work with your colleagues to get us that data, an estimate of what that figure is, that would be very, very helpful to this committee.

The Chair: Time for a short answer, Mr. Burke.

Mr. Osborne Burke: We will definitely do our utmost to do that. We will also work in partnership with small craft harbours staff throughout the regions and at the Ottawa level, because we have a good working relationship there. I think collectively we can come up with that number. If it assists in the process, we're all for it and we'll give it our best effort.

The Chair: Mr. Blais.

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

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

Good afternoon, everyone.

I fully support the statements made by my colleagues concerning the importance of these matters and of everything you underscored earlier. I would like to discuss another problem, which ties in with climate change. As you are aware, given the phenomenon of the higher tides associated with fierce winds, the work to be undertaken is much more major and it risks becoming even more so over time. I have never seen a wharf that has not been attacked by the elements. It is thus that, over time, wharves deteriorate further and further.

We must not forget that without massive and rapid intervention, this infrastructure risks disappearing. It is in such a state that it will simply have to be replaced or else abandoned for safety reasons. That is another factor that, unfortunately, cannot be estimated in financial terms. It however impacts upon the situations that we are seeing at present and that we will be faced with over the coming weeks and months.

In conclusion, I would like to hear from the representative of Quebec. You will, I am sure, understand my particular attraction to Mr. Legresley.

I have already had the opportunity to ask questions with regard to the fair distribution of funding for small craft harbours. As you are aware, year after year, some 80 or 90 million dollars are allocated for the work to be done. These funds are of course distributed in accordance with a certain formula. I would like to hear what the representative from Quebec has to say about this way of doing things.

Mr. Luc LeGresley: With regard to storms, in 2005 and 2006, 40% of the budget for Quebec was devoted to dredging. We have a budgetary envelope of approximately 2.5 million or 2.6 million dollars. I am sorry, but I do not have the exact number. In 2007, 50% of the budget was devoted to dredging. In 2008, 60% of the budget for minor capital expenditures will be devoted to dredging. Imagine a 2.2 million dollar envelope of which 60% are taken up by dredging, precisely because of bad weather. This information could be confirmed by the Director General for the Quebec region. There therefore remain 40% of the budgetary envelope for minor projects, and minor projects only. There is not much left for the maintenance of the 52 fishing harbours.

We also face another problem that I am not sure exists in the other regions: that of the estimation of costs. There is at present in the Gaspé region a harbour that is undergoing repair work. The submission is 30% higher than Public Works and Government Services Canada's estimation. Imagine what is left over in Quebec. There is not much left over. Given the dredging and rising costs, there is not much money left for Quebec.

With regard to the budget allocation process, I can tell you this. I have sat on the National Harbour Authority Advisory Committee since 1999-2000. This matter is quite sensitive for all the committee members. However, it is true that in 1999 or 2000 the budget was cut and the budget allocation method changed. What happened as a result of that? Quebec lost a million dollars that year. Since the year 2000, Quebec's budget for minor projects has been cut by one million dollars. Since then, we have been trying to get more money. Why? Because we have been hit with storms and dredging is constantly increasing. With the storms we have recently had, it is quite frightening.

For your information, a study was done on the fishing harbours in Newport. Public Works and Government Services Canada did a study. In the study, it was determined that the breakwater was adequate for dealing with the storms to come. When we charged Genivor, an independent engineering firm, with carrying out a study, it estimated that the present breakwater is insufficient for what we expect to see in the future. Some \$100,000 to \$150,000 should be invested to ensure that the breakwater meets the demands the future holds. But the breakwater remains unchanged to this day. Proof of this lies in the fact that the last two storms inflicted such damage on the breakwater that it is falling apart. This despite the fact that Public Works and Government Services Canada had said that the breakwater would hold. Such is not the case. Additional monies must be invested in order to protect our wharves during storms.

The budgetary situation in Quebec is threatening the program. It is impossible to meet the needs of harbour authorities when 60% of the budget is taken up by dredging.

There you have the situation as to budget allocation.

• (1610)

Mr. Raynald Blais: If you will allow me, I would add that this is not the first time that we have heard talk of volunteer fatigue. I have had the opportunity to meet with wharf and infrastructure administrators in my riding.

You talked about this earlier, and you might have further comments to make in this regard, but this fatigue is related to another phenomenon, that of the stress that you are subjected to given the frustration of fishers and others who use the wharves, and given the fact that you do not have enough money to deal with the situation. When someone somewhere lets off steam, it is you who are hit with it because you are the first responders. That must add to the fatigue element.

[English]

The Chair: We have time for a short answer, if you want to answer, Mr. Legresley.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc LeGresley: You are absolutely right. We could go over each one of the various elements, but in the end, there is a lack of money and a responsibility surplus. The situations brought about by storms and increased dredging create a lot of frustration.

Two weeks ago, the Quebec branch of the advisory committee met. The first thing the member from the Magdalen Islands told me was that he was stepping down because he could not take it anymore. In the Magdalen Islands, when someone decides to resign, it is the entire harbour authority that resigns. This member of the committee is predicting that the seven other harbour authorities from the Magdalen Islands will also resign. It is unthinkable; there is nothing they can do. It is simple: their hands are tied. They are unable to do anything.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Legresley.

Thank you, Mr. Blais.

Ms. Bell.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really appreciate the passionate comments you made, Mr. Benson, and also, Mr. Legresley. I think you're absolutely right. It's unfortunate how volunteers are not being valued in our society. Basically the government is saving money on the backs of these volunteers. In real dollars, what you would have to spend on these people as employees of DFO or anyone else, if you had to pay them yourselves....

I think it's also at the expense of our small communities, where these harbours are in place, because I think what we're hearing of is a building up of frustrations and stress and anxiety and a lot of burn-out. So I'm curious, because when we met with the ADM the other day, he mentioned there were workshops put in place and that the issue was being addressed, but from what I'm hearing it's not being addressed satisfactorily and there's still not enough money going into it.

So for my first question, I'm just curious to know, from your perspective, if there's more that can be done or if there should be a greater infusion of money, maybe into hiring some of these people and making these paid positions. What we see with volunteers is that they are usually working at one full-time job and volunteering at another one almost full-time. I think that's probably part of the pressure that's put on people.

• (1615)

Mr. Bruce Benson: You're absolutely correct that hiring somebody to do some of these roles, such as financial statements and that, would really help. One person could do eight or ten or twenty harbours. It could really ease the burden.

I think the volunteer problem might be somewhat of a societal problem, in that there aren't that many people volunteering, and perhaps the government could launch a promotional campaign to promote volunteering in communities. That may be a long-term solution to some of the problems, but, yes, the frustration is there, no doubt about it, and something has to be done about it. More money would definitely help, but it's not a panacea. As I said, I think it's a bit of a societal problem.

I would like at this time, Mr. Chairman, to beg the indulgence of the committee. I just found out about this meeting last night, but two weeks ago I had another meeting set up with another MP for 4:30 today, so could I get David Tomasson to take my place here?

The Chair: Yes, sir.

Mr. Osborne Burke: If I may just add a couple of comments, they are working with us within the department on training and doing this regionally, as I mentioned. There is a harbour authority recognition program we're working on nationally to recognize volunteers.

You have to appreciate that in all these communities you see the same faces volunteering at the harbour authority, the fire department, and at the local legion or local hall or community group. I think somebody said earlier that we're probably some of the younger folks on the harbour authorities sitting up front here.

The Chair: You wish!

Mr. Osborne Burke: We wish! Exactly.

We used to have hair when we became volunteers with the harbour authority—at least I did.

Yes, Bob.

Mr. Bob Baziuk: One good thing that's happening out in B.C. with the HAABC is that we build our annual conference around our annual general meeting, where we provide workshops on governance, marine law, and all of those other things to help people better

themselves in managing these harbours and to be knowledgeable. So in that way, it has worked really well.

Ms. Catherine Bell: I asked earlier about what were the biggest issues for you folks, and the answer was maintenance and dredging and volunteers.

With dredging, is that part of the money for repairs or is not? Of this \$2.2 million that you get, \$1.2 million or 60% is for dredging. So how much does that set you back? I'm just thinking of this \$475 million. Just to get up to speed, is that figure realistic given the amount of dredging?

We talked about climate change and silting, and so many other things. We are seeing more violent storms; I know we just had another one on the west coast. What impact are those kinds of things going to have on that dollar figure?

Mr. Osborne Burke: It's going to have a major impact on some of these harbours. You're seeing infilling storms. As I believe the ADM explained here the other day, there is a set number of dollars in the budget. I believe this year it's \$99 million. Whether it dredging east, west, or in the centre of the country, that's coming out of that dollar figure.

You can appreciate that in some of these coastal communities and areas you're talking about mobile units coming in, very expensive dredging operations. You're not talking \$10,000; you're talking hundreds of thousands of dollars. And where we're trying to collectively work together and maybe do a number of areas at the same time, trying to be creative and assist with small craft harbours, a major part of the dollars is the dredging that has to come out of that overall budget. That's all they have. When the dredging gets done, you'll see what's left in each region.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burke. I realize there are other things you may want to answer, but to give everybody an opportunity here, I have to keep the ball moving.

Mr. Kamp.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming. For a few of you it's for the second time, and I appreciate those who haven't been here before.

I will share my time with Mr. Calkins, if there's any left over.

Can you help me understand the structure? I know you're one of 15 directors on this national body. Can you help me understand it from the top to the bottom? I assume you're there because of a role you play within your region in some sort of leadership capacity. When we go beyond that, you each are a part of some harbour authority, I assume. Are you a volunteer member of that harbour authority? Are you employees? Let's start there.

• (1620)

Mr. Osborne Burke: The National Harbour Authority Advisory Committee is comprised of 15 individuals from five regions, three from each region. We are here through either being appointed by the individuals back in our region or elected from regional advisory committees or associations we have. So ultimately the harbour authorities, the end users, identify individuals, and we have regional committees where we meet, and that feeds into the national one.

The make-up basically is that somebody has to be a member of a harbour authority. It could be active fishermen, it could be a harbour manager, or it could be a community volunteer who's on the board of directors. But they basically have to be a member of a harbour authority somewhere in the country to participate and to volunteer their time, up to and including this level.

Mr. Randy Kamp: The normal harbour authority is composed of what?

Mr. Osborne Burke: Normally, whether you pick, 10, 20, 50, or 200 vessels, each fish harvester or each user in that harbour would be a member of the harbour authority, including possibly processors, buyers. In some cases, where it's a combination aquaculture industry, all those individuals would be members. The harbour authority would hold at least an annual meeting, and hopefully regular meetings, and conduct our business in day-to-day operations. At each annual meeting they would elect a board of directors. Basically, that is the typical operation. Some of the larger ones may have some paid staff. Some may have people paid to do a bit of wharf work on a very limited basis, but the vast majority of time is totally volunteered.

Mr. Randy Kamp: The chairperson....

Mr. Osborne Burke: The chairperson or the president of your harbour authority is typically where the buck stops at the door in the local community. If you look around, he or she is probably chairperson or president of six local organizations.

Mr. Randy Kamp: And that board, in some cases, hires a harbour master. Are any of you employed members?

Mr. Bob Baziuk: Yes, I am, Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Are you the only one?

Mr. Luc Legresley: For my harbour authority, and most of the authorities in the Quebec region, they are volunteers. Some people might be doing some other job, but most of them are volunteers. To be able to be part of what they call the original committee, they have to first of all be part of the harbour authority and volunteer. They cannot be working for the harbour authority.

After that, in the Quebec region, we are eight people coming from four sectors. Those eight people form what they call the regional harbour authority or the regional advisory committee. Then, from these eight people, there are three people who are elected or appointed to be part of the national committee.

Mr. Randy Kamp: So in this stereotypical harbour authority, every fish harvester who uses that harbour becomes a member of that. When you refer to volunteers, are they that group of people, these 50 fish harvesters? Is that your group of volunteers? Or are there some other people who are simply community minded who might volunteer for you as well?

Mr. Morris Fudge: Not really. In our area there are doctors on the board of our committee. The way this was set up, whoever was at the first meeting you had when you formed a harbour authority automatically became a member.

Mr. Randy Kamp: That means I could become a member of a harbour authority without being a fisherman or using the harbour.

Mr. Morris Fudge: Yes. All you do is write a letter to the chair of the committee and they would see if you would be accepted onto it. You would then become a member on the board.

Mr. Osborne Burke: Some harbours, though, are limited to commercial fishing, because that's the primary operation. Some will include recreational; some will have associate memberships for the greater community. There's more of a recognition of that, because it doesn't begin and stop with just the fish harvesters; the whole community depends on that, and it becomes the central point of activity.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Mr. Luc Legresley: I think there's something else we have to consider.

We had the occasion to go around all the harbour authorities within the Quebec region because of the situation presently with the lack of funds and so on. We had a lot of problems finding volunteer people to be part of the harbour authority. As of now, I know there are some harbour authorities that have maybe one or two people who are taking care of the wharves; those people are getting tired and don't want to be part of the harbour authority. We are telling them to stay there and that maybe something will be coming, but if there is not a strong message coming from the government, I think we might be losing a lot of people.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

As a point of interest, I was one of the founding members of the harbour authority in my own community of St. Bride's. You could put what fish I've caught in the bathtub, but I was very interested in the community as a whole, and that's why I became a member of the harbour authority.

Mr. Calkins is next.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, gentlemen, for being here today, and thank you to everybody else who is supporting you as well.

As a member of this committee who does not have a coast, I'm very much interested in the freshwater aspect. I know Mr. Benson has had other obligations, so I'll probably direct most of my questions to you, Mr. Tomasson.

In looking at the base budget and the regional breakdowns, we see that the central and arctic region, which is large enough to be the fifth-largest country in the world, gets proportionally the least amount of the budget. Given the fact that so many of those harbours are probably of mixed use, could you explain to me, for my benefit and for the committee's benefit, whether you feel it is proportional? I'm not trying to drive a wedge or anything here between your colleagues, but is it fair, based on the amount of work and effort it takes to maintain freshwater harbours?

Obviously you're not dealing with some of the same issues you're dealing with on the coast, but you will have ice and you will have dredging issues, I would imagine, in some of these places. Could you comment on some of the challenges being faced specifically by those in the freshwater areas?

Mr. David Tomasson (As an Individual): To answer your question, in our region we have generally felt that we were underfunded. We've raised this constantly. My colleagues here are going to get tired of hearing me repeat it, but yes, we felt that in our region we were underfunded. We recognize, though, that money is limited.

We've raised it many times from our region to the federal government, and they've made some adjustments.

I have to say that the whole program got some money from the fatigue moneys. They never broke that down according to our formula under the budget; they shared it equally among all the regions. We were very pleased with that. They did seem to recognize that we had the same problem as any other region, and they made some positive amendments or changes, but we still feel we are underfunded.

I may also add that not many people think there's much of a commercial fishery in the prairie provinces, and that's maybe how the formula originally came about, but Lake Winnipeg alone is I think the twelfth-largest freshwater lake in the world. It's a very dangerous, treacherous lake. As Bruce mentioned, the harbour program is very important to us. The majority of our fishers by far are, I would say, aboriginal or native fishers. For a lot of our harbours the infrastructure money is crucial to us.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: When it comes to the mandate of the small craft harbours program, the vision statement expressly says that it's there to support the commercial fishery, but I've heard some testimony here today indicating that these harbours and wharves, or whatever else, are used for recreational purposes. By "recreational", do you mean recreational boaters, or do you mean recreational fishers, or do you mean commercial sport fishers? There is a bit of a difference there.

I am also curious, from a liability perspective, does the harbour authority have to take out insurance for people using these wharves? Can you elaborate a little about what some of the trials and tribulations of that have been? As demand for usage increases or broadens, what are some of the obstacles you may see there?

Mr. David Tomasson: Basically, by far the majority of our harbours in our central and arctic region are used by commercial fishers. In all instances there are recreational boaters who use the harbours, but to a much lesser degree—in our region, anyway.

As for the insurance, it was a very big issue for all of us in the program, because we didn't have third-party liability as well as other insurance, not only for the directors but for employees or volunteers or whoever, and we were able to get it. We worked with the federal government.

We do it on our own. We don't get the money from the federal government; we pay for it. It's a cost-shared formula; we contribute. But we have insurance now, which we just had implemented in the last year.

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

We're doing a second round now of five minutes for each of the parties.

Mr. Matthews, do you have a question?

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to welcome our witnesses, especially Mr. Fudge from the great riding of Random—Burin—St. George's. It's nice to see you, Morris.

I've spent more time as a member of Parliament on small craft harbours issues than I have on anything else in the 10 years I've been here. I have a coastal riding that's fishery-dominated, with a lot of harbours and a lot of problems.

I think all members of the committee recognize in the testimony we've heard to date that there's certainly a need for significant infusion of dollars into the small craft harbours program—that's not in question.

The regions usually prioritize the list for funding on an annual basis; then it's sent up here. As harbour authorities, do you feel that the people you represent have adequate access to small craft harbours staff? Do you feel that you're fairly treated by the regional people—the directors general and their staff—in your funding requirements? Do you think there's fairness in the assessment of problems and in how the priority list is done?

Mr. Morris Fudge: Bill, I'd say for the Newfoundland region—and I'm talking about the Newfoundland region—we have excellent cooperation with the small craft harbours program. In our district it's not the problem.

The problem is that in our area we have 225 harbours, with 205 harbour authorities operating 225 harbours. The problem is not with the small craft harbours program. We don't have a problem with them; I must say that. They do it as fairly as they can, under the circumstances, with what they have to do it with.

I heard Fabian say last week that he needed \$40 million in his area—on the Connaigre Peninsula they need \$40 million just for aquaculture—and we get \$27 million approximately.

So, no, we don't have a problem with the small craft harbours program; the problem is we just don't have the money to do the work.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I ask that question because as members of Parliament we have continuous representations made to us about respective harbour needs. Of course, we liaise and communicate with small craft harbours regional offices as well. I just wondered what your impression was.

You represent the harbour authorities in Newfoundland and Labrador; that's what you're doing here. I just wondered what the general feeling of those harbour authority representatives from around our province would be as regards the relationship. Do they feel they're treated fairly and adequately in terms of access and of making the priority list? If you don't make the region's priority list, then you're not going to be funded.

That's the only reason I had. I'm not playing down the need for more money—we need every dollar that Mr. Byrne said and more—but I wondered what your feelings were on this. I appreciate your honesty.

The Chair: We have time for Mr. McGuire, if you're sharing what's left of your time with Mr. McGuire.

You have time for one question. You're under two minutes.

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): I want five minutes.

The Chair: You're not going to get it; I'm sorry.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Joe McGuire: Well, thank you for the two minutes, Mr. Chairman.

I've been around long enough to see the old way it was done and the new way, and I think the new way is far and away the better way. The fishermen have more pride in their place of work, they take much more interest, and I think it's a better situation all around.

Before, there would be planks missing from a harbour, and they were scared that kids were going to fall in. But there was nobody around to repair, to put in a couple of planks; it just wasn't done. I think the harbours overall are in much better shape now that the fishermen have gotten involved and have put pressure on to get repairs done.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask maybe two people this question: who pays for the operation of the authority itself? I know the fishermen put moorage fees in. I was wondering whether, besides the fishermen, the province is involved. I know they're getting involved in other aspects of the federal jurisdiction in fisheries, but are they involved and helping out at all, Morris and Luke? Or is any other federal department involved in the operation of any of your harbours in your zones?

• (1635)

Mr. Morris Fudge: We charge the companies, the fish buyers, that come in to the wharves. This is where most of our revenue comes from; when the fish buyer comes in to the wharf, we charge them a quarter of a cent per pound for everything that comes over the wharf.

Then the fishermen have their berthage. We have berthage for fishermen.

This is where most of our revenue comes from for the operation of the harbours and minor maintenance.

The Chair: Mr. Legresley.

Mr. Luc Legresley: Yes, please.

What we also have to realize at this time is that we are facing a lot of problems. For example, in the Magdalen Islands—just one harbour authority—they have to find \$25,000 to get rid of the garbage.

They are also facing increased municipal taxes. Our harbour authority is going to have to find \$22,000 from the fishermen. How are they going to find it?

Hon. Joe McGuire: Maybe your province would help you out here?

Mr. Luc Legresley: No. I had some discussion with Nathalie Normandeau, who is the minister for the Quebec region, municipalities, and she is willing to talk about the municipal taxes and maybe do something for us, but that's about it as of now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McGuire.

Hon. Joe McGuire: When I was chair, I never behaved that way.

The Chair: There's a better chance of getting a wharf than getting more time.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Lévesque.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Given that I am a new member on the committee, I will be sharing my time, which I do not have much of, with my colleague.

My view is that the number of volunteers working in this area is phenomenal and that they account for an awful lot of time. We know that, in 2005, a study indicated that Canada was saving some 7 billion dollars thanks to volunteer work. Taking into account inflation, we may now be up to 8 billion dollars. We could perhaps adopt a motion granting you 10% of these 8 billion dollars.

The Department presently applies a formula that takes into account five criteria in the distribution of the funds. You are familiar with it. Could you comment on this formula?

Mr. Luc LeGresley: That is a very delicate issue. Do not forget that there is a budget and that several criteria are applied in its distribution. If tomorrow it was decided to grant me one million dollars, I would be forced to take this million dollars away from another region. That is unfortunate.

In 2005, the Quebec region decided to exert tremendous pressure on the government. We told the government that if we did not receive more money, it would be game over. We would simply withdraw. What did that result in? The Quebec region and the Central and Arctic region received \$500,000 extra, on top of the budgetary envelope. The message I received is clear. I am prepared to exert further pressure as early as tomorrow, and it does not bother me whatsoever to tell the government my way of thinking in order to obtain one million dollars for harbour authorities overall and to not penalize the other regions. Why take money away from other regions to give it to that of Quebec or to the Central and Arctic region, whose present financial situation is disastrous? That is not right. The government has already found \$500,000 for the Quebec region and \$500,000 for the Central and Arctic region. Why could it not find a little bit more money in order to help us?

If it is not ready to do so, sorry, but it is obvious that the Quebec region will react, because we are in need of money. Sixty percent of our expenditures are for dredging. That is inconceivable. But that is the situation, and that is without taking into account the asides that you are not aware of. You should spend one week in each fishing harbour and administer them. You would find that fishers would talk to you, would tell you that they want money and would lay out their problems before you. You would understand the situation. You have to go into the field.

For 12 years now, I have sat on the municipal council of the second most important city of the Gaspé and I have never seen a government devote as little attention to fishing harbours. In our regional county municipality, there are seven important fishing harbours and the money is just not there. It is the same thing in the Magdalen Islands and in any other region. As an elected municipal politician, I am disappointed. And I am being very polite in my choice of words. When we talk about the regions, in Newfoundland or elsewhere, we are not talking about big cities but about small regions. The federal government could inject a given amount of money, and that would help the economy of these regions. They are on the decline, and, today, we are seeing a reduction in the amounts allocated. Why would the government not invest in fishing harbours, in order to help fishers and the economy of the regions? But it does not do so.

As an elected municipal representative, I am extremely frustrated and unhappy with the elected federal representatives, because they are abandoning the regions. As proof of this, I would mention the fact that they are no longer even there for the post offices and fishing harbours. If that is what they want, we will not vote for them, we will simply vote at the provincial level. That has become my philosophy. It is frustrating and there are a lot of people today who think like me. The federal government is not present in the regions. We are talking about the poorest of regions. I apologize for my frustration, but that is what is happening right now.

•(1640)

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Chairman, I will now give the floor to my colleague, from the second largest municipality in the Gaspé.

[English]

The Chair: That's very gracious. You have 45 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I too will say my frustration and conclude with these words.

Yes, we will provide a report and continue to exert pressure. For my part, I have for several years now been exerting pressure on the various governments in order for them to invest more money. I believe we are now at the stage where there will need to be broader mobilization and much more intense and sustained action in order to have visibility, in order that there be sufficient funding in the next budget for the small craft harbours file. When we talk about sufficient funding, we are not talking about 35 million dollars more per year, but of a minimum of 100 million dollars extra per year over a long period of time. In that sense, and in order to achieve that, there is a need for broad mobilization.

As you are aware, there are farmers from the West and elsewhere who come here with their tractors. I am not saying that people will have to come here with their infrastructure, but, somewhere, there will have to be this broader mobilization in order to succeed in influencing the present government.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blais.

It'll be very interesting to see the boats lined up on Wellington Street.

We'll go to Ms. Bell.

Ms. Catherine Bell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Well, I think last year, when I was a new MP here, I saw a bunch of tractors in the first couple of weeks of my shift. So I don't see why we couldn't have the boats here. The river comes all the way.

I must say that it's very refreshing to hear from the people who do the actual work on the ground in our communities taking care of our small craft harbours. What I've heard from this whole session is that a lot more money is needed—it seems to be the overarching theme here—to assist with volunteers, to assist with maintenance, to bring it up to speed, and for a whole lot more if we're ever thinking of building more. And then there's the dredging.

I just wonder, when we have a \$14 billion surplus in federal coffers, why there was no mention of small craft harbours. The amount you need, really, \$600 million out of that, isn't too much to ask for. It begs the question of what the government's priorities are in this.

Having said that, we know what happened, and we know we'll work towards the next budget, I suppose. I did ask a question about dredging, and I think we sort of got cut off in the last go-round of questions.

Mr. Legresley and Mr. Baziuk, you can answer if you can remember my question, or maybe just make some comments on that. I actually find this quite interesting.

Mr. Bob Baziuk: I'm sorry, I just can't quite recall the question.

Ms. Catherine Bell: I guess I was talking about the cost and how that relates to the figure that was mentioned, the \$475 million for maintenance. Of the amounts you get every year, you're spending 60% on dredging, if the figures are realistic. I think Mr. Burke answered some of it. I know Mr. Legresley had something he wanted to say.

• (1645)

Mr. Luc Legresley: The figure I know is with regard to the other regions. Most of the budget from the Quebec region goes for dredging. In regard to the other regions, it could be between 10% and 15% of the budget. If you look at whatever figure you have, the Maritimes have a lot of money, but they need the money to get the work done. They have less dredging.

The problem is that the cost of dredging is getting so high. The direction the Quebec region is taking is that they're going to have to say they cannot spend more than \$1.3 million per year on dredging. So what's going to happen if they cannot do the dredging at some of the wharves. That's the problem they are facing. They're going to have to have a number, saying that now they cannot spend more than that. That is the solution on the table. Does it make sense? I doubt it. So you may see that maybe, because the dredging is not done, it will be difficult for the boats to come to the wharf. Yes, we will be facing some problems in the near future.

It doesn't make sense that we have to say that we cannot spend more than that, and we are facing that.

Mr. Bob Baziuk: The costs of dredging can fluctuate based on things like fuel costs. Mobilization is huge. To mobilize a dredging rig you're probably looking at about \$30,000 out of what comes your way. So there are other things that just add to it. It's a very expensive job.

Mr. Osborne Burke: One other thing on dredging is that disposal of the spoils is becoming more and more of an issue all the time, whether there's any potential contamination in it and where you can dispose of it, and that is a major cost, never mind the environmental assessments and habitat and regulatory requirements that are required by law.

Mr. Luc Legresley: If you're asking for a solution, the way I see it—because I do represent the Quebec region—is, why don't they put money aside and say this money is for dredging for all regions and this is what it costs? Put it there, and then maybe they can use the formula in order to give the money to the region. We are facing a huge problem; some of the regions are not facing that problem.

Ms. Catherine Bell: Thank you. That was interesting.

The Chair: There's plenty of time for a short question.

Ms. Catherine Bell: Very short. Oh boy.

The Chair: Very short. You're lucky. I'm being as lenient as possible.

Ms. Catherine Bell: You mentioned something about taxes, and maybe just for clarity I'd ask, are these municipal taxes that are being charged to the port authorities? Is that what you're having to come up with?

Mr. Luc Legresley: Yes. For some reason, in the past the municipalities were not taxing the infrastructure. For example, if we had a shed or something like that, they were not.... But because the

municipality needs more money, because they are also facing problems—don't forget the federal cuts, and the provincial officials are cutting the municipalities. Citizens are paying more and taxes and so on. In the Quebec region now, each harbour authority, if they own something and it belongs to them, will have to pay for it. One harbour authority in the Magdalen Islands—and I was told this two weeks ago—is going to have to pay \$1,000 extra just for this year. But each harbour authority is going to have to do it.

I know in the Maritimes they have the occasion and the opportunity to have discussions, and they are not paying municipal taxes anymore, if I'm not mistaken, which is good.

I'm having some discussions with Natalie Normandeau. As you all know, she's a very important person within the Quebec government. She's open to discuss this situation. If she says no, my God, I don't know what's going to happen.

Mr. Osborne Burke: Just for clarification, in the Maritimes and gulf region you're basically exempt for the harbour wharf itself; however, if there are structures there, fish sheds, gear sheds, there is an assessment on the actual structure—but not on the piece of property; that's federal property. At one point we had the municipalities attempting to tax us, because they used to get a grant in lieu of taxes when the federal government had the facilities, although they still owned them, and we had taken them over as harbour authorities. But we were able to address that in the Maritimes and gulf region with all the provinces so that their legislation was adjusted—and Nova Scotia already had it. As long as there was public access, we didn't face the tax issue on the actual structures, which would have been impossible.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burke.

Mr. Allen.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, gentlemen, for being here, as well as all your colleagues.

I'll try to keep to my time, just in case I want a wharf in my riding, Mr. Chair.

I do appreciate, Bob, your comments with respect to volunteer fatigue, because there's a tremendous number of organizations across the country, no matter what you're into, and you're really tapping the same people again.

When it comes to infrastructure—and I suspect the timing of the volunteer fatigue probably really started when the infrastructure started going downhill—when did the regions start to see the tipping point when this thing really started getting serious and bad and you started hearing a lot of flak from the people in the regions?

Mr. Bob Baziuk: That's a difficult question to answer. I think it's based on our national forum, this network in the NHAAC, and that's when we started hearing about it on a national basis. But I think you hit on it. When it starts to depreciate so bad that it causes the stress levels to go up, that's when we started to see all this. I don't know, it's probably in the last five to seven years when it really started.

Wood is biological, and if your wharves are wood and they start to deteriorate...once it starts, it's rapid. The deterioration really accelerates.

Mr. Osborne Burke: Just to add to that, next year will be the 20th year of harbour authorities. In probably the last 10 years we've had advisory mechanisms that we've put in place. As that process started there was the opportunity for the clients of the harbour authority members to begin to voice their concerns and bring their issues forward. So that would probably play a part in it, as well as when the infrastructure started to deteriorate and there was more and more stress. If you look at most of the harbour authorities, 20 years later there are a lot of the same people in the room, and they're getting tired.

Mr. Mike Allen: In a previous incarnation of this committee in 2001, a recommendation was made that the federal government allocate \$400 million over the next five years. I know we got \$20 million per year over those five years and brought it up to speed. I have a couple of questions on that.

Was there any dredging component in the \$400 million at that time? If not, how do you see these costs escalating?

I really appreciate that you're going to give us some numbers from your perspective. But when you look at budgeting for this kind of thing, how practical is it to do this in a five-year plan? We all recognize the human resource pressures of getting some of this work done. In reality, is it practical to say you'd spend an extra \$100 million over the next five years? Are we going to be able to get the work done anyway?

Mr. Osborne Burke: We just saw the end of the five years with \$20 million each year. We were able to work with small craft harbours, spend that, and make major improvements. Now it's permanently part of the A-base funding, so we're very appreciative of that.

I believe the ADM explained here on Monday that if you have \$500 million on the table tomorrow, the reality is you can't use it all in one year. There needs to be planning and time to implement the dollars. But put the dollars there and spread them over five years or ten years. If there's a commitment from the federal government and all the parties to put the dollars there, I'm sure we can work with small craft harbours. In trying to do planning for individual harbour authorities, that all feeds into the recognition that we have to be better prepared.

We're always going to face the challenges of storms and environmental conditions. However, if \$32 million is there on an annual basis there will be a will and a way to use those dollars to address, as much as possible in the timeframe, the challenges we have in different areas with weather conditions and limited times to do the work. A key factor is recognizing that it comes down to the planning.

So if the government wished to put the money on the table, I'm sure we'd gladly take on that challenge with our fellow partners in the small craft harbours program and be very happy.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc LeGresley: What worries me the most today is that for five years the government spent 100 million dollars. All of the

money was well spent, I have no doubts about that. The regions were fighting amongst themselves in order to get as much money as possible.

Furthermore, one must understand that the work had been estimated at 10 million dollars but that it cost 4 million dollars. And so, with the 4 million dollars that were spent, will the structure be able to withstand the storms over the course of five or ten years? We would normally be expecting some 20 storms.

At Rivière-au-Renard, it was a 10 million dollar project, but they obtained a little more than 4 million dollars. The structure that was put in place will therefore stand up for some time. However, down the road, everything will have to be done over.

The 100 million dollars were so stretched out and reduced at one point in time that we are wondering if the work is sufficient to respond effectively to any and all circumstances, be it with regard to operations, to the needs of the harbour authorities or, most importantly, to the bad weather we are now seeing. The question must be put.

If today you are saying that you will be giving out 100 million dollars over five years, it is the same situation. However, if you are going to be carrying out work in fishing harbours, make sure that you are granting 20 million dollars if the cost is of 20 million dollars. Do not go putting 15 million dollars into the pot to save money when we know full well that what will be built will not be up to standard, according to Public Works and Government Services Canada or the engineers. We must be careful. At the monetary level, prudence is key. We can invest 100 million dollars in infrastructure elements that will not last 20 years as planned, but rather 10 years. This is where we have to be prudent.

• (1655)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allen.

That completes our two rounds. I'm sure we could spend quite some time on more questions and answers.

I want to thank the witnesses for your presence here today and your straightforwardness and honesty in your comments and answers. I realize this meeting was quickly organized, and we certainly thank you for your cooperation in assisting us in our work here as members of Parliament. I also wish you the best in the next few days here in your deliberations.

I would ask if there's an opportunity for Mr. Burke to give some closing remarks to the committee.

Mr. Osborne Burke: As a group, we certainly appreciate the opportunity to come here and speak to the members and answer the questions.

I guess, in summary, it is a program, the harbour authority program. I heard Mr. McGuire talk about the pride in the harbours. It's there, and it's probably a program that's second to none in Canada. It does have its challenges, and maybe it's not necessarily always dollars, but in infrastructure it is dollars. We're facing that.

I heard some talk about a budget allocation formula. That's better left to the bureaucrats in the department to decide when the dollars are there, in my estimation. Our focus is to get the federal government to put more dollars into that program. How the dollars are divided up, that's for another day.

Let's be clear to all the group here. We're committed, as a group, to doing whatever we can to assist in getting the government to make that decision to put the dollars there. How the dollars trickle out afterwards, we'll deal with that and the regions will deal with that. The small craft harbours regional directors, the director general, and the ADM can sit around...and they are probably better prepared to answer to some of the dollars and some of the numbers and to deal with the distribution of funds as much as they can, by realizing they have challenges as well.

Even now, with the dollars they have in each region, they don't have enough. If you look at our region or any other region, they may get several hundred major projects over \$50,000, and that could be very clearly across the country. They only have limited dollars for their region to deal with. They have to make decisions at the end of the day, and you have to respect the decisions they make. However, probably 20 harbour authorities get some money and the major projects and the other 50 are quite upset and they're calling their local member of Parliament, saying "Where are my dollars?" I'm sure I wouldn't wish to be in the shoes of the small craft harbours program, having to sit there making the decisions as well. I think we can all collectively work together to put more dollars there for them.

Some of those dollars can be used to address and improve the training and the initiatives we have under way with the small craft

harbours program, which will, at the end of the day, assist the harbour authorities. Where harbour authorities can, they are trying to work together if they're in a particular area. We have some harbour authorities managing five and six harbours, where possible. It's not always a reality that you can do that everywhere. But all those are tools that can assist with each one of the harbours, and overall, collectively, they contribute to the package. We're trying to find funds from anywhere we can find them.

I would just mention recreational harbours very briefly. If you have a launching ramp for your commercial fishing boats and you can generate an extra \$1,000 a year in a little harbour because the local guys and community people want to launch their boats, well, that's great. On revenue generation, we're very creative in where we can try to find the dollars. Anywhere we can access those dollars to assist...because somewhere overall that helps everybody in the program, and that's what it's about.

Thank you.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burke.

Thank you all again.

We're going to take a five-minute break to clear the table and we'll come back and discuss our other business.

Thank you very much.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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