



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

FOPO • NUMBER 029 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Friday, April 18, 2008

Chair

Mr. Fabian Manning

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

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• (1435)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC)): I call the meeting to order. My name is Fabian Manning. I'm a member of Parliament from the Avalon riding in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Before we begin our formal meeting today, I would like to first thank you for your presence here.

Out of respect for the sealers who were lost a short time ago, and for their families and friends, I would ask that all members and everybody present participate in a moment of silence. Our thoughts and prayers are with them. I would ask everyone in the hall to stand.

[A moment of silence observed]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Most members of Parliament you see around the table today represent rural parts of Canada, and many of us have many small communities with people who earn their livelihoods from the sea. The tragedy that you experienced here a short time ago is felt right across the country, especially in the small communities that we all represent.

We are the Standing Committee of Fisheries and Oceans for the Parliament of Canada. Over the past several months we have been conducting a study into the small craft harbours program, which falls under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Prior to Christmas, we presented an interim report to the House of Commons, outlining some of the issues and concerns that we see with the program. Before the summer recess we hope to present a final report, which will encompass all the meetings we've had, prior to Christmas and since. Over the past week we visited Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, and today we are here in Quebec.

Part and parcel of our final report will be the visits we've made this week, what we have seen in our tours of marine facilities, and what we have heard from witnesses such as yourselves. This is not just about infrastructure, it's not just about wharves, slipways, and breakwaters; it also includes the opportunity to hear from you, the volunteers and harbour authorities in the communities, about the frustrations you sometimes have or the opportunities that are yours through your work and through your volunteer work with harbour authorities.

• (1440)

[Translation]

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

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for having come here today. I would like to point out to you that the work that we are doing today is part of an ongoing process. This process started several years ago. We don't want it to take another few years before we're able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Over the past few years we have had an opportunity to examine this issue and over the past few months in particular we have had an opportunity to meet people during our hearings in Ottawa.

Going to Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, this morning, and Saint Majorique today, has taught us something new each time. We have been told about the lack of funding, problems with small craft harbours and needs considered to be essential. Meeting with you today will give us an even more detailed picture of what is happening. That is why it is important that the committee be here.

The purpose of the study we will be tabling soon is to put pressure on the department and the government. We don't need a miracle, we simply need a lot more money. Infrastructure will then be able to adequately and safely meet these needs. This is an issue of fairness.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

[English]

Mr. Fabian Manning: Thank you, Mr. Blais.

I understand our first witness will be Mr. Morissette. The floor is yours, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette (Vice-President, Regroupement des mariculteurs du Québec): Good afternoon. My name is Stéphane Morissette and I am the Vice-President of the Regroupement des mariculteurs du Québec.

The development of aquaculture in Quebec has been following a global trend that, over the next few years, will see aquaculture products displacing products in total volume.

Aquaculture has been growing annually by 15% in Quebec. This industry, that mainly involves mussel and scallop farming, now represents approximately 20 businesses that provide approximately 120 jobs. Over the past 15 years, an industry support network has been established in order to create an environment that fosters the development of marine aquaculture.

The marine aquaculture industry in Quebec is pleased to see, on paper at least, that the vision, guiding principles, mandates, and challenges of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans directly reflect the needs of marine farmers, especially in terms of port infrastructures.

On the north shore, four out of the six outfits that are operating or being developed own their own wharf. The two others are currently using municipal boat-launching ramps. In the Magdalen Islands, the outfits operating out of the Havre-aux-Maisons lagoon are using a private wharf, whereas in Grande-Entrée they're using the fishers' wharf.

The situation is very problematic in the Gaspésie. In this area, these businesses are all in the baie des Chaleurs, in Carleton and in the baie de Gaspé, in Gaspé itself. In Carleton, the DFO wharf's capacity has been exceeded—there are only two spots—and marine farmers have had to use Transport Canada's wharf. Furthermore, the fishers' wharf is in such a state of disrepair that the vessels' safety is not guaranteed. In Gaspé, there are no port facilities for fishers or marine farmers. Our marine farmers have to berth at the Transport Canada wharf, where they are tolerated. However, Transport Canada's wharves are not adapted to fishing. These wharves are made for large vessels and the heavy industry. Furthermore, Transport Canada's tariffs are much higher than those of the harbour authorities for DFO's fishing wharves. In both Gaspé and Carleton, the service that is provided by DFO and Transport Canada are not adequate for marine farmers.

They have essentially the same needs as the fishers in both the Carleton and Gaspé regions: the wharves can accommodate approximately ten boats that have a one to two-ton capacity crane, wharves that can provide fresh water and electricity, and that have the facilities for disposing of waste water. Furthermore, an 150,000 square feet plot is also necessary for the purposes of storing equipment, providing access to fuel supplies, and allowing for a boat-launching ramp.

The marine aquaculture industry in Quebec would like the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, whose mandate it is to serve marine aquaculture clientele, to resolve this problem and find satisfactory short-term solutions for businesses involved in marine aquaculture. DFO could look at the situation in the Maritime provinces and the Atlantic, where aquaculture is well established in the marine environment, in order to provide marine aquaculture businesses with the marine services that they are entitled to. The marine aquaculture industry is calling on the department to play the role it is responsible for in order to create conditions that are conducive to the consolidation and development of marine aquaculture in Quebec, especially in terms of port facilities.

Thank you.

• (1445)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morissette.

Ms. Collin.

[Translation]

Ms. Anita Collin (Spokeswoman, Quai de Saint-Georges-de-Malbaie): Good afternoon. I represent the wharf in La Malbaie, a

harbour with 19 fishers—15 who fish lobster, and 4 who fish crab. They employ about 30 people. Fishing is their sole source of income. There are two fish plants that employ on average about 50 individuals who count on this seasonal employment to qualify for employment insurance, which is their only income for the rest of the year.

The income people receive from these jobs is what allows local businesses to survive. In addition, we live in a tourist region that has an outstanding view of the Percé Rock, and this is the pride and joy of our town. One of the two plants is among the oldest in Eastern Canada.

We must preserve our heritage.

The pitiful state of the wharf is catastrophic for this little community. People are afraid there will be a terrible accident and that they will lose someone close to them. During the tourist season, some days there are over 100 people on the wharf, even though the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has closed it to pedestrians. People walk on the wharf to fish mackerel and to admire the fabulous view.

We are simply asking that our government do what is required so that we can earn our living safely. We hope that it will understand this plea from the people of our town—they want to continue living in the beautiful Gaspé Peninsula and to keep the few young people we have left. This wharf could collapse at any time. Please do not wait until one or several people die there: that would be the end of these little towns. And who would be responsible for this? Our government.

For several years now, these people have been trying to get their message across and to say how distraught they are that the government is doing everything it can to close down their little region, the Gaspé, and to force our young people to move to major cities to find work, leaving their families and their hearts behind.

We are calling on the government to take the appropriate steps so that we can continue to work and to carry on for our seniors, who gave everything they had to preserve their region, which is such a good place to live. We are calling on the government to assume its responsibilities and to rebuild this wharf. Some of our fishers have to leave their boats in towns that are several kilometres away from where they live. As you know, gas prices have become a major factor at the moment.

The people, the fishers and the counsellor of these small towns thank you for taking the time to come and listen to us. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts, and we hope that something positive will come out of this.

• (1450)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Collin.

I'll try my French. The floor goes to Ms. Mathurin. Is that close enough for a Newfoundlander?

I understand you have two statements to make, so feel free.

[Translation]

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin (Administration portuaire de L'Anse-à-Valleau): My first presentation is on the port authority in L'Anse-à-Valleau. I will be making the second presentation for Mr. Luc Legresley, who is currently at a meeting in Quebec City for the national level. He wrote a presentation, and I will be making the points he wanted to raise with you.

The port authority in L'Anse-à-Valleau has been in place since April 2, 1991—some 17 years. Initially, there were six active members, but for five years, there have only been two: Marcel Mathurin, the president, and myself, the secretary. The fishing harbour in L'Anse-à-Valleau is used by fishers and by pleasure boat owners. It is located between Cloridorme and Rivière-au-Renard. So it can be used if there is a storm, because of its sheltered geographic location.

There is only one employee during the summer, a student funded by the government under the Summer Career Placement Program. This employee performs the following duties: watch-person responsibilities, recording the boats for invoicing and garbage collection. Other responsibilities—wharf inspection, invoicing of users, work to ensure that the wharf is functional for the opening of the fishing season, keeping the accounting up-to-date, calculating the summer student's pay, closing the wharf in the fall, and so on—are performed by the members of the port authority on a volunteer basis.

Here are the points the port authority would like to raise. One wharf was closed for five years. The port authority had to apply pressure for it to be demolished, because it had become very dangerous. The break-water entrance on the north side was broken and the captains of the large boats are afraid to tie up at the wharf, because the sea has thrown up some large rocks at its entrance. The wooden frame is broken and should be replaced by large protective rocks.

The port authority has had some pontoons with walkways built, has had the surface of the wharf repaired over a distance of 400 feet and has had the access road to the harbour repaired as well.

Our port authority is asking that some digging work be done at the harbour, that the launching ramp be repaired and that more money be provided to support volunteers.

In closing, we have a beautiful fishing harbour and we want to keep it for a long time. However, in order to do that, we need more assistance from the government. If my father were to resign, the port authority would probably cease to exist.

Thank you.

Shall I continue, or may I take a break to catch my breath?

[English]

The Chair: You can wait if you want to and let Mr. Dufresne go, and then we'll come back to you. Catch your breath and have a glass of water, and we'll be back to you in a moment.

I'll try my French again: Mr. Dufresne, it is your turn. Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Dufresne (Administration portuaire de Rivière-au-Renard): I am Jacques Dufresne of the Rivière-au-Renard harbour authority.

About a month ago, the media reported that Rivière-au-Renard was doing very well because it was a large port with a high volume. Let me tell you why. In 2001, Fisheries and Oceans allocated \$700,000 to plan a rationalization project, including the rock filling of wharves, and the demolition and installation of pontoons within the harbour. We were technically ready and had properly defined our needs. We had also drafted the things that were to be done. We were lucky to have everything we needed.

At the meeting that dealt with the rationalization, the harbour authority presented its project, which was rather well developed. Everyone supported it and we began to rebuild the facilities. Of course, that represented a lot of work. Things just didn't come out of the blue. The harbour authorities had to work very hard. We did, however, receive a lot of technical support from engineers and harbour authority managers. In the course of the process, we came to realize that harbour authority managers at a regional level were more concerned with slashing budgets or managing in a very cost-efficient manner. In my view, there was a lack of vision for the development of the port and a lack of technical assistance.

I came away from the discussions that were held in the Gaspé with the sense that harbour authorities do not have the vision and technical assistance needed to make project proposals. The people who manage those administrations, whether they come from Quebec City or Montreal, also lack the required technical knowledge and basically work to maintain tight control over operations, save money and make use of volunteers to carry out all the work. That might be one of the problems.

A wharf can hold surprises. I'd compare it to an iceberg: one-eighth of it is visible above the surface, but the rest is under water. It is quite difficult for a harbour authority that might not have the required skills to estimate how much it will cost to repair part of a wharf or paving stone. If there is a tear or a gaping hole under water, you might well repair the wharf, but it won't solve the problem. A number of wharves are in a bad state. I had an opportunity to get an underwater view of every single wharf in Quebec. I think everyone is full of good intentions, but we should perhaps change the way we do things.

Up-to-date, we have invested \$11 million in Rivière-au-Renard and we'll need to inject another 4 or 5 million. Because we submitted structured and well-founded projects, we were able to carry them out without any problems, contrary to what we might have thought. But in order for a harbour authority to carry out such projects... Few people have what it takes to carry them out. In my view, that's a problem.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans no longer offers that service. In the past, Public Works Canada regularly came to conduct structural analyses and hold discussions with harbour authorities. However, that is increasingly no longer the case and harbour authorities are less and less aware of the state of their wharves. They try to carry out minor repairs as best they can, which explains the results we are seeing today. If we are to save harbour authorities, technical assistance has to be provided and creative solutions have to be found. That would change a lot of things.

That's all.

• (1455)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dufresne.

We'll go back to Ms. Mathurin.

[Translation]

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin: In 2001-2002, a decision was made to change the budget allocation formula, which made Quebec lose \$1 million a year. Quebec's share amounts to 8.74%. Since that loss of \$1 million, Quebec harbour authorities asked that the budget allocation formula be changed, but it wasn't, out of fear of reprisal from the other regions. And yet, studies clearly showed that the Quebec region was disadvantaged by the new budget allocation formula. It is interesting to note that as a result of a decision Quebec lost \$1 million. But since that time, the Quebec region has to continually justify itself in order for the formula to be reviewed and adapted to its needs.

To date, Quebec has lost \$7 million, which is a lot of money for its fishing harbours. However, with regard to those \$7 million, I must point out that the current formula has been applied for each dollar invested by the Government of Canada. Consequently, Quebec's shortfall over the past seven years amounts to more than \$7 million.

In 2005, during a forum that was held in Gaspé, all of Quebec's harbour authorities expressed their profound disappointment and demanded additional funding from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. A press conference was organized and a letter was sent to the minister for that purpose. Quebec harbour authorities threatened to resign if the Canadian government did not allocate more funds. We also talked about insurance for volunteers and directors. We obtained \$500,000 to meet the demands of Quebec harbour authorities and, today, we have the necessary insurance to meet their needs.

On March 18, 2008, the APQQHA (Administrations portuaires du Québec—Quebec Harbour Authorities) held a press conference to denounce the Canadian government's inaction with regard to the small craft harbours program. We set out the needs of Quebec harbour authorities and indicated the measures that could be taken if our demands were ignored. The press conference was held in the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands sector. As for the north shore, a press release was sent to the appropriate media.

The following are the needs of Quebec's harbour authorities: additional funding to maintain our wharves so that they are accessible and safe; an immediate change to the budget allocation formula to take into account Quebec's real needs; given that there is a greater need for dredging in Quebec than elsewhere and that the

current budget is insufficient to meet the minimal requirements of harbour authorities, additional funding is needed to put an end to the divestiture program in Quebec; more money is needed to support the managers of fishing harbours who are now exhausted by too much volunteer work; and the Canadian government has to show that it will take our demands seriously.

The following are the measures that could be taken if our demands are ignored: stop doing volunteer work; receive compensation for all the work carried out by volunteers in a fishing harbour and send the invoice to the department; no longer participate in sectoral, regional and national meetings called by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans; no longer contribute financially to the maintenance of fishing harbours, which means that all expenses incurred by a harbour authority will have to be paid by the department; no longer report back to the department on damages caused, which will force the department to conduct its own inspections in order to check the structural conditions; the resignation of all members of harbour authorities in Quebec.

Here are some interesting statistics with regard to Quebec. As of March 1, 2007, according to the department, Quebec had 45 harbour authorities that managed 60 ports, 82 fishing harbours and 32 recreational harbours, 55 essential harbours and 59 non essential...

• (1500)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathurin.

We'll begin our questions now.

I understand Mr. MacAulay is going first. You have ten minutes.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I must tell you I am very pleased to be here with my colleagues in Gaspé. We've heard a lot of problems about small craft harbours over the week. We have yet to hear about a port that had too much money. It's an ongoing problem to convince governments that they need to spend more money on small craft harbours.

Mr. Morissette, this is a little off topic, but you did mention the mussel industry you have here. Do you have any problem with invasive species?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: Yes, as in many other places, we have to deal with invasive species. However, we have not yet had to deal with major species from Prince Edward Island, such as the tunicate. We are above all concerned with marine traffic.

Last year, in the Magdalen Islands, when a Transport Canada barge came infested from Prince Edward Island tunicate, we were able to resolve the problem, but we were still very concerned.

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I thank you very much. That barge came from somewhere else before it came to Prince Edward Island, and we didn't have it. That's the problem we're all facing.

Also you mentioned—and I'd like you to expand on that—that in Gaspé they do not have wharves to fish out of, or they don't have any infrastructure in place. There are no wharves. Did you mention Carleton wharf? I'd like you to expand on that and just explain the situation to us and what is missing.

• (1505)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: I am a mussels farmer and I work from two docks. Therefore, I have two boats: one in Carleton, and the other here in Gaspé. In Carleton, I have a fishing dock but it is a very small spur wharf large enough for only two boats. Right now, there are seven mussels vessels in Carleton. Therefore, there is not enough room for everyone. We have to use the dock that belongs to Transport Canada, that the department wants to divest itself of. There has been no agreement between Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Transport Canada with respect to common usage.

I will give you an example. Three years ago, officials from Fisheries and Oceans Canada brought in some equipment to collect waste water, but were unable to unload on Transport Canada land. No agreement was possible. The equipment, therefore, had to be unloaded elsewhere. Currently, there are two mussels farmers who use the spur wharf, but it is very low. When the tide is high, the boats land on the dock. It has to be completely overhauled. This is what is going on in Carleton.

The situation in the Gaspé is worse because there is no Fisheries and Oceans Canada infrastructure. In the past, the department had one dock which has since been abandoned. It was ultimately divested to Transport Canada. There is no plan to rebuild it. In the Gaspé, mussels farmers like Jacques and I have no role to play. We operate off the Transport Canada dock. There is no service: no fresh water, no electricity, no water ramp, no crane. And yet, each boat has to pay \$200 per month to use the dock.

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass it on to my colleague, Mr. Simms.

[Translation]

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

Pardon my French. I represent Newfoundland and Labrador, where there are not a lot of fishers. The situation in my province is very difficult for our young people. A great number of our fishers are 50 years or older.

Ms. Collin and Ms. Mathurin, can you explain to us to what extent the situation is difficult for young people involved with the harbour authority or the industry? Can you tell us how old most of the people living in the region are?

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin: Mr. Dufresne is probably in a better position to answer that question.

My father is 70 years old, and still fishes. This will probably be his last year.

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes, but according to what you said, once your father stops fishing, it will be over.

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin: In my small village, there are not a lot of young people. There's practically no incoming generation to speak of and there are not a lot of boats coming to our wharf to fish. People are going to the Rivière-au-Renard dock, since it is close by.

In the beginning, there were five, six or seven members, but now we are only two. Of course, we cannot think of some sort of development, because we are working full-time elsewhere. This is all volunteer work. We try to do our outmost.

Mr. Scott Simms: Therefore, the future is going to be difficult?

• (1510)

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin: Of course.

Mr. Scott Simms: And for you, madam?

Ms. Anita Collin: In our area, most of the lobster fishermen are between 30 and 50 years of age. Some of them fish with their sons. The sons will take over the business. I know that the fishers would like to see the young people return to their homes and take over, but the young people are seeing what is going on and ask themselves what the future hold for them in Gaspésie if the government does not do anything.

In our area, the people who work in both of our factories are not old. The workers are young. However, our dock is in ruin. Lobster fishermen and other fishermen are fishing off the coast line of neighbouring towns. They are unloading elsewhere. At the rate things are going, both of our factories will shutdown. What will remain then of these two small towns? The factories are providing the people jobs. It is all that we have in our small town. One of our factories is among the oldest in Eastern Canada. We would like to preserve it.

I can understand young people. For now, there are newcomers, but were they remain? We work hard to bring our young people back. I, myself, I am a mother of two children who live outside of town. They see that there is no future here now. But what little we do have, we want to keep.

Mr. Scott Simms: How old are your children?

Ms. Anita Collin: They are 30 and 28 years of age.

Mr. Scott Simms: Please continue.

Ms. Anita Collin: Many fishers have children who fish with them now, and those children are between 25 and 35 years of age. Some fishers who are 50 years old are planning to retire in a few years and they think that they will be replaced. This has been going for generations. I can tell you that some permits have been transferred down three or four generations. The permits are handed down from father to son. However, all this is going to come to an end as some point?

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you. I now would like to talk about aquaculture.

[English]

You said that aquaculture will eclipse traditional fishing.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: Those are the predictions of the Food and Agriculture Organization, the FAO. On the global scale, aquaculture, to a certain extent, is compensating for the depletion of fish stocks. This is not a matter of competition, but simply that there is a market for seafood, but almost everywhere the fisheries are in decline. Aquaculture therefore is a solution.

We believe that aquaculture is going to develop and Quebec must be part and parcel of its growth. In Quebec, marine aquaculture has been developing only in the last fifteen years. Of course, this industry can only develop in small craft harbours. In fact, aquaculture could develop in and around dock areas. Without harbour infrastructure, this will be very difficult.

The Chair: Thank, Mr. Simms.

Mr. Blais.

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

Bravo Scott, your effort is much appreciated and you did quite well, really.

[English]

I will try my turn at *un moment donné, moi aussi*.

[Translation]

Anita, for the benefit of the committee members, I would like you to tell us about what you and your community experienced a few months ago? Can you explain to me how things unfolded?

Ms. Anita Collin: I work as a counsellor with the people in these small towns. One Sunday, I received a call to attend an assembly of fishermen at the Saint-Georges community centre to be held the next day. I arrived, and it was during this meeting that officials from Fisheries and Oceans advised us that the dock would be closed and that access would be completely prohibited. This was a few days before the start of the fishing season.

Therefore, what do you think we did to address the situation? We stated that informing us of the closure with only a few days advance notice made no sense. Our fishermen began to panic. I thought to myself that this made no sense. I then called Mr. Blais, whom I wish to thank for his assistance. I then called Mr. Huet, in Gaspé. He said that he could do nothing. I told him that there were 19 fishermen and 50 jobs at stake, and that it was Friday. He said that there was no solution for us. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans told him that there was no solution. I asked him if he wanted to make a laughing stock of us.

Mr. Mamelonet, the Mayor of the town of Percé, told me not to panic. He told me that he would find a solution, and that he would help me. We went to see the harbour authorities of Percé and of L'Anse-à-Beaufils, who lent us floating docks—let's just say that they were somewhat still afloat—to get us out of a jam.

How do you think our fishers released their cages in the water? There were 19 of them on the dock and each one had approximately 200 cages. Who would be the first? Who would be the last? It is a very difficult situation to be in.

My husband suggested that I open an office at home rather than at the shop. People from everywhere were calling me asking what I was doing for them, which solution I had found and when everything would be set up. At one point, the fishermen were saying that they were going to open the dock. One of them used his loader to remove the cement pillars. He said that if no solution was put forward, he would find one. I told him that he did not have the right to do that. He said that he was assuming the right, because he had to earn a living, and that no one would prevent him from doing that. To my mind, this year, the situation is going to be worse because the dock, with one single motor, will tilt on the bias.

I've brought pictures that I would like you to look at. You will see that this winter, the protective wall of the dock is used as a barrier against snow storms. Mr. Blais knows that I have circulated a petition that has been tabled in the House of Commons. We intend to introduce other petitions, if the government does not help. But this time, it will be serious.

• (1515)

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you very much.

What we have to remember is that when the whole community is not only concerned, but involved, results can be produced. Nonetheless, we find ourselves in situations where we are just patching things up. It should not be that way, because as we are doing so, development projects are not moving forward. If we invest all of our energy into that patching up, it becomes exhausting, difficult and frustrating. In addition, some even give up. There are other development projects that we could work on. Right now, we're spending too much time on projects such as those. On the other hand, we can't do anything else. Ms. Collin's message is that in spite of the announcement of a tragedy with only a few days notice, she did not give up.

Ms. Anita Collin: Nor do I intend to.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Hear! Hear!

Ms. Anita Collin: I would just like to add something. We had divers go down to look at the wharf from below. I can tell you that they came out of there as fast as they went in. The metal beams are eaten away and broken. There is nothing left. The only thing still in place is the cement slab on the surface. If you are a lobster fisher, you should go and fish there, there are lobster under the wharf.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Stéphane, you have a few seconds to explain how people manage in spite of everything. We manage to get around things, particularly in Gaspé and in Carleton. How do we manage to have a landing place?

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: At a meeting held recently in Gaspé, the Transport Canada representatives told us clearly that they tolerated us on their wharves. So we are making our presence felt. We have no choice. There is an emerging industry at stake.

The aquaculture industry in Quebec is still in its initial stages, and all of these companies are still quite fragile. And they are paying these costs directly. The business environment that should be in place to promote development is simply not there. The harbour infrastructure is also useful for community development. For example, our boats are equipped with a crane so that they can unload their catches. The equipment on our boats must include this, because there is no crane on the wharf. That is just one example. These costs must be covered by the companies. In my opinion, this is really inadequate.

• (1520)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stoffer.

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

Stéphane, a lot of the aquaculture industry, as you know, is provincially regulated as well. Is the province offering you any assistance in this regard, in terms of accessing wharves and stuff like that? Or have you made an application to the province at all?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: This is a political issue. We are talking about federal infrastructure. So there is no provincial investment. The province provides its assistance for many other things, but the harbour infrastructure comes under the responsibility of the federal government. So there is no support from the province for wharves.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: We also heard before—and I don't mean any offence by this—that a fair number of the people to whom we speak in other regions of Atlantic Canada are getting a little older now. It doesn't appear that many young people are coming in behind them.

If you, because of frustration, just said “That's it, we're leaving, we don't want to deal with this any more, you look after it”, what do you think would happen to the costs of that if the federal government had to do all the work that you're doing now?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: Well—

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: That's for anybody.

[Translation]

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin: What would happen if everyone were to resign tomorrow morning? Is that what you mean? What would happen if the volunteers who look after the fishing harbours were to resign?

This would certainly be far from ideal. The entire community would feel the impact. Even if the wharf in a small town is not necessarily adequate for the fishers, it is part of the town. It is part of the people's heritage.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I'll give you the purpose of my question. The transferring of management responsibilities over to community groups and harbour authorities such as yours was to allow you to

charge berthing fees, unloading fees, transit fees, or whatever fees so that you could do the minor maintenance—electrical, water, that kind of stuff. Anything on a bigger scale—structural change—was to be handled and paid for by the federal government. That's sort of the deal that we had understood took place. But we're now understanding, or at least we're hearing, that DFO is not holding up their end of the bargain.

I'm just wondering, sir, if you can ascertain for me how long you think you can keep going before it reaches a critical mass.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Dufresne: I think the situation is extremely difficult for the harbour authorities of small wharves. I think that they are almost at that point.

A few moments ago you asked what the government is doing. There is a harbour master from Transport Canada who manages the harbour. Fisheries and Oceans Canada could do the same thing, it would be no more difficult. They would have to pay the person's salary, and he or she would work full-time, as used to be the case.

You are quite right. Many promises were made at the beginning regarding the program, that were not kept. Even Public Works and Government Services Canada was sidelined. Managers arrived to manage things, and we were taught how to clean oil furnaces and how to be careful not to pollute. We were given training courses.

I do not think this makes any sense, because volunteers, particularly those on a board of directors, should be providing advice, assistance and encouragement, not cleaning garbage cans.

However, as I was saying earlier, a full-time harbour master could do the job. All it would cost would be one salary. Actually, it would only cost half a salary, because the person would only work for half a season.

To support Stéphane, I would like to come back to the subject of marine aquaculture for a moment. We said that there will be more and more of this. For our part, we are quite lucky: aquaculture will become increasingly important in the Baie des Chaleurs and in the Gaspé Bay, because there are almost no groundfish left. In Quebec, these two bays are very fortunate because they are very well sheltered. There is no doubt that this activity will grow tremendously.

Our relations with Transport Canada are not that difficult. When these people come here, they explain their doctrine, and that is it. I think that politically, someone at a higher level than these people should simply have to push a button. The problem would be solved. With the exception of the spur wharf that Stéphane mentioned, the main wharves are in very good condition. As we have been told, the red flag must be there to serve everyone, not just one user, and someone with good political connections needs to tell the officials that sharing and accommodation are the right approach. In Gaspé at the moment we are being threatened with talk that some industries will certainly be coming to town. For these people, two birds in the bush are worth more than one bird in the hand.

I'm 54 years old and I can say that in Gaspé, we have been told five or six times that there would be incredible development, and that there would not be enough room left to build houses. As Stéphane said, we are suffering because of that at the moment. It would be more profitable for us, rather than having to listen to these people who come and explain their theories, to have someone try to work with us to find some solutions. I think we would find solutions, and I do not think it would be all that difficult. At the moment, the turf wars between Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Transport Canada are almost the only thing that is happening. It is as simple as that.

• (1525)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dufresne. Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Harvey, the floor is yours, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): I'd like to start by thanking you for being here today. Like Anita, I have attended these meetings on several occasions. I have been in the region frequently over the last few months, in Pointe-au-Renard and here in Gaspé.

The issue we are addressing today is similar to several others. I see that my Liberal friends and colleagues are now interested in wharves and small harbours. It is not unlike the environment. They were supposed to reduce CO2 emissions by 6%, yet there was a 33% increase. When it comes to immigration, there are now 500,000 undocumented immigrants in Canada and a waiting list which has gone from 50,000 to over 900,000 names. As a result of budget cutbacks, we now find ourselves with poorly maintained wharves. There is now a great deal of catching up to do. A 30% budget increase was recently earmarked. We are aware of the type of challenge involved here, but we must also give things time so we may see progress.

I also understand how important the work of volunteers is. We have often forgotten to say thank you. I did so last time I came to make an announcement. We made the effort, on behalf of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Minister of Transport, to thank you for your work and your involvement within your community. We told you that your work was appreciated and that it mattered to us.

Mr. Dufresne, you said that there was a lack of imagination, what would you do under the circumstances? You referred to a big red button, but what is it connected to?

Mr. Jacques Dufresne: It's quite simple, someone higher up in government, a minister or the Prime Minister, could tell the people from Fisheries and Oceans and Transport Canada to come to an agreement and give us some space. The wharves are practically not being used. It is a real joke. From time-to-time someone will come to implement a philosophy and then turn around and go home. We end up being stuck with that. Two or three years ago we were told that red flags were for everyone, but the reality is otherwise.

Mr. Luc Harvey: It is red for everyone?

Mr. Jacques Dufresne: It is red for Fisheries and Oceans Canada and for Transport Canada. As far as I'm concerned, it should be for everyone. A wharf is a red flag. I am convinced all it would take would be to force them to sit down around a table and define the needs. We're talking about senior people, but on our side, we hold

discussions with regular people. On the Pointe-au-Renard wharves, we had to use a great deal of internal creativity. We came up with plans.

Moreover, we noticed that the harbour authority, DFO officials and PWGSC officials had the tools they needed to sell the idea to politicians, and it worked very well.

If you want to work on wharf-related projects throughout Quebec, you have no other choice that is the only way to go. Indeed, we cannot ask ministers to repair our wharves; it is as though they're operating in a vacuum. Even if we were to refer everything to the wharf manager, we know that he won't do the job either. When it comes to the money for the plans and specifications, he will say that he doesn't have it because PWGSC no longer dares to pay; it's too expensive.

Now at the DFO, they refer to regional, local and provincial managers, not to engineers and technicians. In my opinion that is also one of the buttons we should be pushing. If we want to rebuild, we need to know what we're going to be rebuilding and what state the facilities are in.

It's true: I inspected the La Malbaie wharf eight years ago. A small part of the spur wharf was demolished and that wharf was expected to last four years at most.

• (1530)

Mr. Luc Harvey: That was eight years ago?

Mr. Jacques Dufresne: Yes, it was really the limit. That is what happens.

The people I was working for are no longer there, nor are the technicians who developed the projects. Who else talks about rebuilding wharves except a politician who tries to get...? He will do up a plan in a hurry. Will he carry it out?

There were promises made about a reconstruction project at La Malbaie last year or the year before, but it is still... The dynamic is not the same as before.

When the harbour authorities were set up, people thought that all the work would take place there and that the budgets would be taken back from Public Works and Government Services Canada, with whom the projects would be co-managed. That is exactly what happened.

Mr. Luc Harvey: That is not what happened.

Mr. Jacques Dufresne: It did happen that way: the budgets were returned and given to other people to do the management in-house. We did not receive the money; we are likely birds that peck at the seeds on the ground under the bird feeder.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Could the plan that you prepared for Rivière-au-Renard be copied and pasted, if I can put it that way? Could it be used in other places?

Mr. Jacques Dufresne: I met with Raynald about a month or a month and a half ago. The local harbour authority obviously needs to be aware of the resources it has and what it could do with them. That way, it would have something to propose.

Right now there is nothing, the manager does not have anything either, and there are no longer any services at the higher levels to do the work. All people expect from politicians is for them to put out fires and do crisis management. That kind of sums up what is happening.

As I said, I really think that everyone involved, not just those at the lowest levels, should do a proper assessment of the wharves, one after another, in order to figure out what to do. Then it would be a matter of developing a budget and a work schedule; it could be done for a number of wharves. That way, the needs are identified.

We were told there had to be rationalization because the fishing industry was dying. Fortunately, we didn't go along with that, since there are nearly twice as many boats at Rivière-au-Renard than there were four or five years ago. We have 145 boats in the spring, which is a huge number. We would have been in a worse situation than elsewhere.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Morissette, I know that we are here mainly to talk about wharves, but I would like to hear a little bit from you about aquaculture. If I understand correctly, an increase of 15% has been mentioned, as well as the fact that this is a particularly good location because of the bay that provides a certain amount of protection.

Are there things that the federal government could do to help you develop this more quickly?

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: On the economic side, of course, there is the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. There is a little work to be done to tie things down there.

When we compare the financial services of our neighbours in the Maritimes with what we have, we see the differences. The marine aspect, fisheries and aquaculture play a much bigger role economically there than in Quebec. Economic Development Canada, which we deal with, does not always listen to us. It is more and more difficult to get the financing we need for our businesses.

In the area of research and development, Fisheries and Oceans' Institut Maurice-Lamontagne no longer has an aquaculture mandate. There is work to be done in that area too, of course. I would say that most of the mariculture development is being undertaken at the provincial level. Federal assistance is increasingly being sought as well; people would like to see greater involvement at that level.

• (1535)

Mr. Luc Harvey: I'm referring to licences, authorizations, the role of the facilitator in the development of this industry. Are there things that limit your development currently?

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: I am currently in the process of applying for a site. I submitted an application over a year ago, and the process is still not completed.

Mr. Luc Harvey: To the federal government?

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: To the two levels of government, but it is especially at the federal level that things are bogged down. It is especially due to the fact that we are joint users of the public resource, that is, there are fishers, aquaculturists, etc. Therefore, links must be established between the different users of the public system.

One of the objectives of the Regroupement des mariculteurs du Québec was to reduce wait times to four months for obtaining a licence. That is what we are targeting for 2011. We would like it to take four months for developer to obtain a site. However, as I mentioned, I applied over a year ago. So in fact I have been waiting 16 months to obtain a licence. Obviously, that does not create a—

Mr. Luc Harvey: I understand. That's why I asked you that question. I want to be aware of the situation.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harvey.

We have allocated enough time to do a second round. Each member would get four minutes. Is that fine with everybody? We need to stick to our times.

Mr. Matthews.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for coming. It's a real pleasure to be here in Gaspé, in the riding of Mr. Blais, with my colleagues who started this trip in Newfoundland and Labrador on Monday. This is our fifth province.

Our committee is a non-partisan committee. We work very well together. We have been a constructive committee for the eleven years that I've been a member of it. It's not about Liberals and Conservatives, about who cut the budget and who made promises. It's about you people, about your needs and desires. We want to do a report that hopefully will have some impact to help resolve your situations.

I say that very sincerely, because this committee has worked very well together. It's the first time in my time on the committee that I've heard this kind of talk, especially by someone who just showed up this afternoon.

Having said that, I want to talk to you, Mr. Morissette, and ask you a question about your situation with aquaculture. I have a region in my riding that's somewhat like yours. We have a growing industry with tremendous potential, and with infrastructure needs like yours.

Just so I understand this, are the Transport Canada and Department of Fisheries and Oceans wharves closely located? You say you use the Transport Canada wharf now. They are reluctant to let you use it but they accommodate you. Is it close by the other fishing activities or is it off somewhere far away?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: In both cases, in Carleton and in Gaspé, the wharves are side by side. The Fisheries and Oceans Canada wharf in Carleton is right beside the Transport Canada wharf. Here, in Gaspé, they were also side by side. With the streamlining of small craft harbours done by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, these wharves were deemed non-essential because there was not a great deal of fishing activity. Aquaculture is a new activity. It should be pointed out that the two main centres on the Gaspé Peninsula are Gaspé and Carleton, both places where fishing activities have been abandoned.

What we are saying is that we are legitimate users, just like the fishers. The development of aquaculture is important for DFO, and so Gaspé and Carleton must be identified as being important centres for the development of aquaculture. We need infrastructure just like other major fishing centres do.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Bill Matthews: The department is on record as saying that aquaculture is becoming more and more important. I think they are sincere about trying to find solutions. I guess my question was that since the Transport Canada wharf and the fisheries department wharf are both federal, then why can't two federal government departments somehow work out a solution?

Are there other activities on the Transport Canada wharf—I know I'm going to run out of time here—that would conflict with your activities? And is it in good shape, the wharf? Why couldn't they, as two federal government departments, work out a solution? I just wonder why they can't work something out.

That happened in my riding. DFO took over a Transport Canada wharf that was in good shape. If that hadn't happened, I would have had to go to DFO to try to find sufficient money to construct a comparable wharf for the fisheries department. So it makes all the sense to work together.

The Chair: Mr. Morissette, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: In Carleton, I don't understand why there is no agreement, because there is no other activity on that wharf. Transport Canada wanted to transfer the wharf to the municipality, but it did not do so. In Gaspé, there will be other activities, but as Jacques mentioned earlier, we don't really know what they are. Currently, we do have a place, but there is no reason why there should not be an agreement. I cannot understand it.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morissette.

Would you like to make a comment, Mr. Dufresne?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Dufresne: I would like to add something to what Stéphane just said. About three months ago, in Gaspé, we asked Transport Canada if we could use a small section about 30 feet wide by 300 feet long, which will never be used by large vessels because there is not enough water; there is only between 8 and 12 feet. This proposal was not analyzed; it was not even considered. All they did

was to tell us what Transport Canada's policy is. I could send you the proposal, which was extremely simple and logical. Despite everything, it would appear that there won't be any place for us in future. It's rather dramatic.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dufresne.

Mr. Lévesque.

[Translation]

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

We have just seen the photos of the wharf in La Malbaie. This wharf is unusable. It must be demolished and a new one built because nothing fits under the cement slab. In order to be able to install other structures, everything must be demolished and a new wharf built.

Ms. Anita Collin: They drew up blueprints and specifications that were approved by the fishers. These blueprints proposed rockfill and other work. We were told that all fishers and Fisheries and Oceans had approved the project. I took these photos of the wharf from the side, because I did not want to take the risk of walking on it. If you go out in a boat, you can see that the tide comes right up under the wharf. There is nothing left. It is clear that this wharf must be demolished, because it is a hazard.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: If the wharf is not repaired, La Malbaie, L'Anse-à-Valleau and maybe also Rivière-au-Renard, I don't know how... Mr. Dufresne said that the wharf in Rivière-au-Renard appears to be in relatively good condition for the time being. If the wharf is not repaired or replaced, can your communities wait longer?

Ms. Anita Collin: Time is running out. They need to act urgently.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Your plant becomes obsolete without a wharf.

Ms. Anita Collin: Two plants would become obsolete, and that would be a shame. One of them is the oldest plant in eastern Canada, whereas the other one opened six or seven years ago. It would be a shame, because the employees who work there are young people. They are the next generation. There are several other businesses. I myself am a business owner, so I know what the situation is. The fishing season brings in more money, and that makes several businesses happy. The government takes but it does not give back.

• (1545)

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Thank you very much. That gives us excellent arguments to submit to the government as part of our recommendations, whether it be the Department of transports or Fisheries and Oceans Canada. We will know what to expect. In fact, these people are scheduled to testify before us shortly, I believe. We will certainly be asking them questions. We would like to have a copy of your applications and the way in which you submitted them when we meet with the representative of the Department of Transport. Thank you.

Ms. Anita Collin: Thank you for having come to listen to us.

Mr. Luc Harvey said to me earlier that he did not know what he would do in Gaspésie this evening.

Luc, why don't you visit La Malbaie. If it wasn't too cold, you could rent a diving suit and see for yourself under water the condition the wharf is in.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sure that's an invitation that Mr. Harvey will take under consideration.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lévesque.

Mr. Stoffer, four minutes.

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

We have heard in previous provinces that the relationship between harbour authorities and fishermen and local DFO people—those are the people on the ground—is actually pretty good. There's a good relationship. But what DFO is telling these fine folks is “Look, we hear you; we just don't have any money.” Is that the same sort of argument you're hearing here, in Quebec?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: For aquaculture activities, I wish we had a harbour authority, but I don't have a wharf.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I meant the other folks.

[Translation]

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin: In my region there is a fine fishing harbour and an iron wharf, but there are no boats. My father fishes crab, but he cannot land his catches in our wharf because there are now designated wharves. His boat is docked at l'Anse-à-Valleau, but he must land his catches in Cloridorme. We have a winch, and this wharf could be accessible, but there are no boats. The water is not deep enough. The owners of large vessels, for example, those measuring 65 feet, do not want to venture there, because they are the ones who must assume the risk in the case of damage. But we do have a fine fishing harbour.

You were discussing harbour authorities earlier. When there are not very many boats, individuals are the only ones who go fishing. For several years, they were only allowed to fish five cod per day, I believe. They were not even allowed to take their daily quota. When even small recreational boats can no longer tie up at the wharf, the income is negligible. With \$2,000 in income per year, if we have to paint the wharf as well, that does not leave much money for the rest. We do what we can with what we have, but we can't do more.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Dufresne.

Mr. Jacques Dufresne: In 2001, we tabled an activity plan for the wharf in Rivière-au-Renard with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. We proposed a structure for the harbour authority with a view to continuity and economic development. That would have allowed us to go ahead with development and generate funds.

At the time, we were told to do whatever we wanted, but there was no funding. I do not think the problem was that there was no funding, but rather that it went against their doctrine to award any. They asked us to increase the amount of the fishers' contributions. In Rivière-au-Renard, there have been crises in the fishing industry for the past 10 years. The price of fish is going down and the price of

gas is going up. The cost of licences is considerable. We do not want to take it upon ourselves to go cap in hand to the fishers to manage a wharf that does not belong to us.

Three months ago, we tabled the same proposal. We thought that these people would be ready to receive it. At first, we were told the same thing, that is to ask our fishers for money, but we refused to do so. So everyone went away to reflect.

If you want to obtain this document, Guy Descôteaux has it. Fisheries and Oceans in Gaspé may have it as well. It is a structural proposal. Of course, the wharf in Rivière-au-Renard is large and there are many opportunities. But when we table something like that, we are told that it is out of our hands because boats use the wharf. But that wharf is enormous. It could be used to generate two or three times the current income, provided we are given the opportunity to do so. But there does not seem to be much openness in that regard.

We asked if we could recover part of the money that they are saving, in order to have continuity and a structure that will be capable of managing a large operation, or an operation that shows promise.

As for the lack of funding, I imagine that budget envelopes have been cut, but over the past seven or eight years, there has been a conversion of funds which is somewhat difficult to understand. At first, the public servant was paid by Fisheries and Oceans. Shortly thereafter, we were allocated budget amounts, but the public servant's salary of \$100,000 per year came out of those amounts. We cannot follow those things. And when they come to talk to us, it is from them to us. There is something to be done, because everyone is working in good faith, but...

• (1550)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dufresne.

Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Chair.

It's certainly an honour for me to be here in Gaspé today, in Mr. Blais's riding. It's a privilege for me to hear from you at this committee meeting.

I have a general question, but first I want to ask a couple of questions about aquaculture. They are fairly specific, so I'd like quick answers, if you can.

Has anybody in the aquaculture business, near the harbour authorities that would service the aquaculture industry and the various bays that aquaculture is working in right now, ever tried to get on the boards of the local harbour authorities? How often do those elections happen? And is there any representation from aquaculture fishers or whoever on harbour authorities?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: In Carleton, we tried to create a harbour authority for the small spur wharf that houses two boats, but since it was too small, we did not. The problem is that we have no services, and thus there is no harbour authority.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Dufresne.

Mr. Jacques Dufresne: I think that with a bit of good will on the part of Fisheries and Oceans, the Rivière-au-Renard Harbour Authority could probably look after the Gaspé wharf, because it is considered commercial transport for the time being. However, something could be done there, provided we can get started.

The quickest thing to do would be to consult with the minister or the prime minister. That is my dream. I am convinced that you are capable of finding a solution to the issue of the Gaspé and Carleton wharves within one month. It is such a small thing.

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: The next question I have, then, is for anybody to answer.

Generally speaking, I think we've seen that the trend in the 1980s and 1990s to form harbour authorities was based on goodwill. There obviously has not been enough funding from successive governments, whoever those happened to be, to address some of the challenges.

If the challenges were to be addressed, how best would we go forward from here? It's an open-ended question. What kind of model would you like to see? Would you like to see the status quo with more funding—i.e., little harbour authorities looking after one or two wharves? Would you like to see a different model from DFO insofar as doing more regional oversight—i.e., a DFO regional manager or business manager could help with some of the business planning and some of the administrative tasks, thereby freeing up volunteers to do other things? Or would you like to see a model whereby money was given directly to harbour authorities, in some type of a funding formula based on the size or the landing size or whatever—I'm just thinking hypothetically—whereby those harbour authorities had more direct access to ongoing money to make their own decisions and to be able to maybe leverage that money, whether through loans or whatever the case might be, to keep their wharves in good shape?

Is there any model there that seems to be a good idea for moving forward from what seems to be a fairly poor starting point?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Dufresne: I think that you are on the right track. I will give you an example that, in my opinion, could work very well. Given what we had seen, L'Anse-à-Valleau, Rivière-au-Renard, L'Anse-au-Griffon and even Gaspé, which is very close, could perhaps, among the four of them, obtain funding for a skeleton staff, because that is something that is important. Doing this work on a volunteer basis is simply asking too much. We need a staff that would be active in all four harbours and a board of directors that would work with them. Then, the volunteers would enjoy working, be more creative and we could submit projects. I know very well, as concerns the harbours, that there is not only streamlining to be done, there are other things as well. However, the way we are organized now, all we can do is damage control rather than sitting down and planning for the future. So I think that would be a good idea.

• (1555)

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin: I agree that this way of doing things... In my region, there are only two of us. Obviously, if we sat on a committee with several other people, it would be easier to work

together and to develop projects or plan things, because we know that we would be looking after a given initiative. However, when there are only two of us, we are responsible for collecting money from the small fishers who come to the wharf. If they do not pay, we must send a registered letter to collect the \$100 fee, and then a second letter, and so on.

The harbour authorities told us that we had to go to the Small Claims Court. But I am a volunteer, I am not going to go to court for \$50 or \$60.

Definitely, if a number of authorities got together, that would be possible. And then, perhaps our wharf would be used more, because we do have a very nice wharf.

Ms. Anita Collin: I know that the wharves in Saint-Georges and in L'Anse-à-Brillant come under the same harbour authority. At a certain point, the fishers who sit on the board of directors see that the wharves are falling into disrepair. That is what happened with the fishers in Saint-Georges, who no longer want to work with the people in L'Anse-à-Brillant, so they simply give up.

Currently, I am the spokesperson for that wharf, and I am a volunteer. No matter how much time I devote... I am the one the fishers come to see. They do not even want to meet with the chair of the association. That is the way things are. They say that it's no good. That's what they tell me.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

I have a couple of quick questions. As chair, I don't often get to involve myself in the questions, but every now and again I do.

Mr. Morissette, did I understand you correctly that you paid \$200 a month to tie up to the Transport Canada wharf, and Transport Canada tried to divest of this facility earlier on and didn't get to do that? Did I follow you correctly?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Morissette: Yes, our rates are the same as for any boat that ties up to a Transport Canada wharf: so many cents per metre. I have boats that are 45 feet long, which equals \$200 per month, and I am there eight or nine months per year.

Transport Canada wants to divest of the Carleton wharf because there is no more activity there. There was a project, but the municipality has not yet taken it over. Fisheries and Oceans is very interested in acquiring a portion of the wharf that is used mainly by fishers, whereas the other portion of the wharf was once used for the docking of a ferry, unloading wood, etc. But Transport Canada's policy is to divest of all the wharf or of nothing at all.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Madame Mathurin, did I follow you correctly that the wharf in your community is owned by small craft harbours directorate, by DFO?

[Translation]

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin: Yes, by the harbour authority.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, but it's small craft harbours property, correct?

[Translation]

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin: Yes, Fisheries and Oceans.

[English]

The Chair: Did you say that you have no boats, or that boats don't land there? I'm not—

[Translation]

Ms. Carmelle Mathurin: There are boats, but not many. There are some lobster fishers, but they sell their product elsewhere. There are no landings on our wharf because it is not a designated wharf, but it is in good condition.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you very much for your testimony here today. We certainly thank you for your time.

We have to clear the table now to get ready for our next set of witnesses. Once again, thank you.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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•(1610)

The Chair: Welcome back, committee members, and welcome to our guests.

For translation, English is on channel one and French is on channel two. I'm from Newfoundland and Labrador, so we may need another translation for me. I'll try my best.

We are the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans of the Parliament of Canada. We are in the process of conducting a report on the small craft harbours program of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. We began this process last fall. We heard in Ottawa from people involved with the department, the national harbour advisory board, and some others. This week we have travelled to Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, and today we're in Quebec.

Part of our process is to hear from people in the communities. We heard from some harbour authorities earlier today, and we're delighted to have representatives of municipalities with us here now. Our process is basically an effort to try to enhance the small craft harbours program. Most of the committee members, including me, represent rural areas of Canada. We have many harbour authorities in our ridings.

As an example, in my riding of Avalon in Newfoundland and Labrador, I have 68 harbour authorities that I deal with. It's the busiest file in my office.

So it's very close to all our hearts that we try to find ways to improve and enhance this program. I certainly want to thank you for taking the time on a beautiful Friday evening to come and state your case before us and give us the opportunity to ask some questions.

The process is very straightforward. We open the floor to the witnesses and give them an opportunity to make their presentations. We then open the floor to questions from committee members.

The committee is made up of the four parties in the House of Commons—the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Bloc, and the NDP. We have a very good committee. As a matter of fact, it's maybe one of the better committees in the House of Commons. I'm not saying that as chair, but we do have a great working relationship. Many interests are common among all the members here, and we try to proceed in that manner.

We have an excellent presentation that was made to us from one of your groups. It is in the French language only. I'll ask, if I could, for the cooperation of the committee members to pass this around to everybody. Julia, our clerk, will have it translated at a later date; it's just to give you an idea.

Is that okay with all committee members?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Julia will have it translated later and we'll present it to you again when we return to Ottawa. It's just to give you an idea. For those who cannot read the second language, we'll have to wait, but it's an excellent presentation.

I think I've covered everything I need to cover at the present time.

Pardon me if I pronounce your name differently from what you've normally called yourself for the past number of years, but I will try my best.

We'll have an opening presentation from Mr. Scantland.

How's that for Newfoundland language?

•(1615)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Scantland (Conférence régionale des élu(e)s Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am the Director General of the Conférence régionale des élu(e)s de la Gaspésie et des Îles-de-la-Madeleine. I would like to introduce the colleagues who are accompanying me here this afternoon. Representatives from the regional conference are here. They are all concerned, as is our umbrella group, by the difficulties that our small craft harbours are experiencing throughout our territory. I was happy to learn that you have 67 harbour authorities in your region. I believe that we have approximately the same number here, a region that also includes the Magdalen Islands. Therefore, we will understand each other.

I would like to introduce Mr. François Roussy, mayor of the city of Gaspé; Mr. Majella Emond, Reeve of the MRC de la Haute-Gaspésie, on the north shore of the Gaspé Peninsula; Mr. Claude Cyr, who is both Reeve of the MRC du Rocher-Percé and mayor of Chandler and finally, Mr. Georges Mamelonet, who is mayor of the municipality of Percé. I will also take this opportunity to introduce two other colleagues: the mayor of Grande-Vallée, Mr. Gabriel Minville, and Ms. Jocelyne Huet, of Grande-Vallée.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for being here today to meet with us. The Conférence régionale des élu(e)s de la Gaspésie et des Îles-de-la-Madeleine is very concerned about the state of its harbour infrastructure throughout its region. These harbour facilities are very important not only for our fishing industry, but also in social and cultural terms for our entire region. Like other maritime communities—it is probably the same thing for you—we developed around our harbours. The harbours have cultural and heritage significance for all of our territory.

• (1620)

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Chairman, could we ask Mr. Scantland to come to the front, as he is the spokesperson for this umbrella group? I cannot see him for the moment. If you could take Mr. Lalièvre's place, particularly as he is not here, I would greatly appreciate it.

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: Now that you know who I am, I will not take my name card with me.

[English]

The Chair: I'm more interested in hearing you than seeing you, but....

We had expected some other guests.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: I was saying that the importance of harbours in our area is not only economic, but also has cultural and heritage value. Currently, the underfunding of this program for our region has had significant consequences in all three of these areas. There have been repercussions for our fishing industry. Despite what Fisheries and Oceans says, access to certain wharves is neither adequate nor safe for our fishermen. We had emergency situations last year at the Saint-Georges-de-Malbaie wharf, which is very bad for our industry. Mr. Georges Mamelonet will in fact address that issue later on.

The wharves that have currently fallen into a state of disrepair represent risks for our tourists, who quite rightly want to have access to the sea. They used these wharves in order to see the water. Often, part of the wharf is closed because of a lack of maintenance and the fact that it is not safe. Some wharves are temporarily closed. This creates a particular atmosphere of desolation and does not project a good image of the federal infrastructures in our area, nor of the community that is welcoming these tourists to our region.

The lack of funding for this program also means that some of the fishermen's wharves are not only poorly maintained, but they do not allow for multiple uses. Our region is experiencing significant economic difficulties in relation to the collapse of the fish stocks and the lumber market. We are attempting to diversify our economy through various means. The two themes we have chosen to diversify our economy are tourism and fish farming, or farming products in a marine environment, aquaculture.

In this regard, the wharves are important for the development of this industry. Very often, the lack of maintenance and Fisheries and Oceans Canada's inability to act in these areas deprive us of the possibility of developing this industry. For these reasons, we are in a position to say that currently, the federal government, through Fisheries and Oceans Canada, is not fully playing its role on our territory, which has a negative impact on our entire economy,

whether it be tourism or the fishery, fish farming or the development of recreational boating as well. The Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands are welcoming more and more recreational boaters who quite rightly come to explore the surrounding waters. Very often, because of the lack of maintenance or the closing of certain sections of a wharf, the boaters find that they have no access to moor their boat.

There are of course marinas that exist in our region, but people do not always plan for enough time, and they are sometimes obliged to berth at a wharf in a different area. I myself had that experience in the Magdalen Islands last year. I was travelling through the Magdalen Islands on a sailboat and we ran into a serious storm. We had to take shelter in a harbour where the infrastructure was inadequate not only to protect our sailboat, but even the fishing boats that were there. We had to protect ourselves as best we could with the buoys that the fishermen lent us. This whole aspect creates an atmosphere of decrepitude of the infrastructure that, in my opinion, projects a very bad image of our region in this regard.

Moreover, I would like to emphasize that our organization works with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in order to try and find solutions for non-core harbours in our area. Core harbours come under the jurisdiction of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. They want to maintain them in light of their responsibility with harbour associations, but others are categorized as non-core harbours, and the divestiture program is not adequate to allow for the renovations of these wharves and for them to be handed over to local authorities. We are working in collaboration with Fisheries and Oceans Canada and we want to put forward a regional divestiture program which would involve changes in use in certain cases. We would like to have their support in this effort, but it is extremely difficult to get information. We have great difficulty getting information on costs, on projects that are already implemented, etc. We would appreciate the cooperation of Fisheries and Oceans Canada in this respect.

Olivier Demers, who is with me here today, is my advisor and my associate. He is the professional in this area that I refer to and at times, in fact quite often, he indicates to me how difficult it is to obtain information from Fisheries and Oceans Canada in order to properly document the files that we are working on.

I have given you a brief overview of the situation. I believe that through the question period, we will be in a better position to respond more specifically to the aspects that concern you and that concern us as well. In conclusion, I must say that wharves are critical in the Gaspé area. They are essential to our economy, and also to our culture and heritage. They are a part of our landscape. In that sense, we must give them all the attention that is required, not only so that they will be functional, but also so that they can contribute to the development of our economy overall, not only to the fishery.

I thank you for your attention. Given that I have a few more minutes, some of my colleagues may add a few words if they wish.

•(1625)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Scantland.

We will be doing a series of questions. Anybody will be free to answer any of the questions posed by my colleagues.

Mr. Minville, the floor is now yours.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Minville (Mayor, Town Council, Municipality of Grande-Vallée): Thank you for having invited us.

The Grande-Vallée fishing harbour, as we already pointed out, is a heritage and cultural property. It is a symbol of the economic activity that brought our village into existence. It is a reflection of our identity and our culture, a witness to the intense economic activity of an era.

Political authorities thus have a duty to ensure the continuation of financial programs designed to safeguard these symbolic infrastructures.

In Grande-Vallée, the first fishermen's cooperative was founded in 1930, three years after the municipality was constituted. Ours is a recreational and tourist harbour. Like a number of communities, we have witnessed a change in the purpose of our small craft harbour, which has been transformed by declining fish stocks and industry mining of the fishery. In any case, this activity remains rooted in our communities and it remains a part of customs and usages of the local population. They were born close to a waterway and their activities remain focused on it.

The harbour has been labelled non-essential, but it remains a nerve centre of tourist activity. These so-called non-essential ports must not be considered unimportant to their communities. Our small craft harbours are decrepit. They are located in the middle of the village, at the nerve centre of tourist and economic development.

We are the ones who distributed the scale drawing. I am sorry that we did not also have an English version of it. As you can see, despite our efforts, this does not project a positive image for those whose names appear on this infrastructure. In the upper left hand corner, you can see the refrigerated warehouse which we are told is the only building of its kind dating back to the 1930s from this period in the Gaspé Peninsula's history that has been developed. You can see that it has been extremely well preserved. It is an important remnant of our way of life. We are currently in the exploratory phase of the Esdras-Minville and Refrigerated Warehouse Area project. This is a \$600,000 development project of which \$100,000 has already been committed.

On the other side of the river, to the west, the tourist office has been developed at a cost of \$300,000, and it will open for the 2008 summer season. Grande-Vallée is a small, single industry municipality seen as having decayed. We are doing our best to offset out-migration of our youth and to try and guarantee some jobs for our people. We believe that this nerve centre, that we would like to develop with you, will be an incubator of socio-economic micro-businesses whose development will make it possible to create both seasonal and permanent jobs. We believe that DFO's lack of action is

a brake on Grande-Vallée's development project. However, you will find that we are persistent.

The Divestiture Program is the poor child of the small craft harbours program, which itself suffers from chronic underfunding. However, for communities like Grande-Vallée, it is not merely a matter of infrastructure or esthetics. We really need our harbour in order to develop our tourist sector. It should therefore be possible to get Canada Economic Development financially involved in the divestiture process.

We talk about regional realities, but we would like to talk about specific characteristics and identity. Grande-Vallée is the first village in Quebec to earn the Village-Relais designation from MTQ and to be required to comply with a quality charter. Its small craft harbour is located within the urbanization perimeter. We need its heritage buildings, such as the refrigerated warehouse. If the drawings were more detailed, you would see the covered bridge, which is near the harbour infrastructures. The presence of the small craft harbour ensures adequate river flow and the preservation of the more than one-kilometre sandy beach, as you can see in the drawing.

On a more serious note, apart from the national flag flying in every Canadian locality, fishing harbours are often the only place where the federal government is present in coastal communities. We think we should go on the record as saying that our address has not changed: we still proudly sign ourselves Grande-Vallée, Quebec, Canada.

In conclusion, our recommendations are the following: first of all, to recognize the small craft harbours as heritage and cultural properties; to ensure the survival of fishing small craft harbours as well as recreational small craft harbours; to recognize the small craft harbours as tourist and economic attractions; to ensure that all federal departments concerned by the survival of the small craft harbours are involved; to recognize the specific characteristics of each small craft harbour in order to preserve local identity; and finally, to recognize the importance of the federal presence in coastal communities.

•(1635)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minville. That was certainly an interesting presentation.

I'll now open the floor to my colleague Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

I certainly appreciate everybody taking the time to come here, as you are volunteering your time.

As a member of this committee, what I want to try to do is convince government, whatever stripe—none of them have been good enough at it—to put enough money into small craft harbours to make sure that they end up in a better state. That's what we're trying to do.

Mr. Minville, I'm very interested in all the work you described. The building shown here—is this the thing you were talking about?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Minville: Yes, it is. It is the former cold-storage warehouse that was used to store ice for the fishers' frozen herring, or what we commonly call bait, or "bouette", in French. I don't know if you know that French word. It has stood the test of time. And now it's been given a new vocation. It does have memories associated with it, but I think that it is going to have as interesting a role to play as it had in times gone by.

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Yes, but also, if I understand you correctly, it's going to again play a major role in creating development. I think you indicated that you hope to create some part-time and permanent jobs there. That's so important. That would go along with having a proper wharf infrastructure and the dollars in order to put this in place.

Could you just expand a bit more on that? It's of great interest to me.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Minville: We're very comfortable because the investment has already started to pour in. The two facilities on either side of the river have already started to generate jobs. The refrigerated warehouse already has two locations: one is already operational and the other one will come on line in the upcoming weeks. This summer, there will be people there to welcome tourists. We want to refurbish both the interior and exterior parts of the site in order to attract as many tourists as possible.

We also have our tourist welcome centre which is all set to go; and it will be opening in June. There will be people working there this summer, too, and other organizations will come on board soon. It is a key sector for us, and we are going to develop it.

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Now, you mentioned that you have a special designation. I missed what you meant about that special designation. Is it this building you're talking about, or is it in your town or community? What has the special designation? I understand you have to follow certain guidelines, is that correct?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Minville: It is a major project called the Esdras-Minville project in honour of one of our builders.

• (1640)

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Sir, is it only this project or is it the village itself or the whole thing?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Minville: The small wharves are the focus of development. But the whole thing will be developed.

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Very good. Merci.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: Mr. MacAulay, there are a lot of places like Grande-Vallée in our region. For example, at the Anse-à-Beaufils fishing wharf, there's an old factory which is being turned

into an entertainment centre and exhibition hall. There's even a bar and a restaurant.

The focal point is the wharf. Since our villages are coastal villages, the wharves have taken on a key strategic role when it comes to tourism development. The example that you have there is quite common in the Gaspé. By my calculations, there are about 10 locations where the wharf is the focal point as far as tourism is concerned.

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Well, I fully agree with you, and of course you've indicated that not only here but in the Magdalen Islands the problem is safe harbour sites. I certainly agree with what you said.

Is there anybody else who would like to comment on any other development or anything else that would bring dollars in because of your wharf, other than the fishing aspect itself, which of course is of vital importance? This type of thing can work anywhere in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Minville: There was something missing from my presentation. A pedestrian crosswalk will also link the two small wharves, as you can see on the model.

As far as funding is concerned, it would help us if the federal government would set up a specific program for infrastructure divestiture. Perhaps other ways of doing things could be flagged, for example involving other federal institutions such as Economic Development Canada or Canadian Heritage, alongside Fisheries and Oceans.

We're willing to take a look at such a formula and to work with other players. As I said earlier, our project is undoubtedly going to go ahead, but we do need federal government assistance.

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I would hope and expect that Heritage Canada could be very much involved too, and hopefully they will be, because you've put a lot of work into this, and you have a project that would be of great interest to me and to other people across the country.

If anybody else wants to ask a question...

We've been at this all week, and we've visited a lot of wharves, and we've listened to a lot of groups. You people are town councillors, but what seems to be the problem is that over a lot of years the federal government has done what it could do, but it has not done what it needs to do in order to get your wharves into better shape.

Do you believe—and I'm not sure if you are the people I should be asking—these harbour authorities...? Are any of you on harbour authorities, or do you all have harbour authorities, or what? Do you feel there's a big difference now? Is it better or worse than when the harbour authority was put in place? Do you feel that possibly there's not a long-term business plan type of agenda for you that you and the federal government can deal with? Is that what you want? If you do, what type of a deal do you think should be involved in the long-term planning? Yes, you need the dollars, but is there any other aspect of the plan that needs...?

I don't believe there are enough dollars to fix every wharf next year, no matter what government. We all can play that. But what would you like to see happen in say the next five years? What can you tell us that we could try to convince government to do? Of course I think there need to be more dollars, but there have to be other things too.

Mr. Georges Mamelonet (Mayor, Ville de Percé): Yes, Mr. MacAulay, I could answer that question quite briefly.

I think the main problem we have here is continuity in the way the federal government is doing the maintenance and all the jobs around the wharves. We have all been talking about changes that have been happening in the fishery business through the years and the appearance of tourism business that is coming down. So we're trying to inspire our *fonctionnaires* in the federal government to go that way, that we could work together, and not just DFO, to take care of the wharves.

DFO is a small part of many of our wharves, and we have an example here in Grande-Vallée. We have the main example in Percé. We had six wharves before, and we now have three left. Two of them are mainly used for tourists. There is still some fishery activity around these wharves, but they are mainly for tourists.

These wharves are the property of the federal government, and I think the main thing that could be done would be to bring in Tourism Canada and Heritage Canada regarding the history of these wharves and what these wharves have created in our communities, as well as in the community of Mr. Fabian Manning. I heard that he has about 67 of these wharves in his area. So I think it could be done, and it would be a way of solving something, and perhaps bringing more concerns about the federal government and not just DFO. That's the main problem we have now.

Regarding our port administration, these people have been doing a wonderful job for years. They have been doing so many things that DFO could not have done without this administration. But again, these people are now on tight budgets that come only from DFO, with nothing else coming from anywhere else. More than that, perhaps graver than that, when DFO is investing in a wharf, if there is too much tourism activity, they can't make the investment, and it doesn't get done. So the fisheries can't get the part they need.

Do you understand what I mean? I'm trying to talk in English, but I'm not used to talking English.

• (1645)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Yes. You're doing well. I wish I could talk French as well.

Mr. Georges Mamelonet: Thank you. I think that way it could be....

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: In fact, more agencies could be involved.

Mr. Georges Mamelonet: Exactly. More ministries and agencies in the federal government could be involved.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Mr. Blais.

[Translation]

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

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Claude wanted to speak to one of the questions Lawrence asked. Perhaps we could give him an opportunity to do so.

Mr. Claude Cyr (Prefect, Regional Municipality County of Rocher-Percé): Basically, my primary concern is the survival of the harbour authorities.

The Harbour Authorities Program was implemented in Quebec 18 years ago. Its purpose is to meet specific objectives including the daily management and maintenance of commercial fishing wharves by not-for-profit local entities. This is a key objective, as is training locals. And it is true that if the locals don't look after this, it's not going to go anywhere. The harbour authority model recognizes that local communities are the best placed to make decisions and provide front-line services. In conclusion, local management is seen as an effective way of providing services to strengthen both public and private investment.

What we want—and every region undoubtedly wants the same thing—is for the department to play a greater financial role. What do you intend to do should the harbour authorities step aside? These people are exhausted, at their wits' end, and they're lacking resources. If they were to step aside, we'll have serious problems. If these people give up, what are you going to do? What is your alternative solution?

Mr. Raynald Blais: Now, I'd like to apply the proverb "Give the devil his due", by giving the floor to François, who's the mayor of Gaspé. I've had the opportunity to say these things on several occasions to my colleagues, but I think it's important for you to be able to say these things yourself. And I'm talking about what communities consider essential when it comes to their wharves.

The volunteers are completely fed up. The department needs to take this threat very seriously, because it's an ultimatum. I can tell you that people don't take such steps lightheartedly. They derive no pleasure out of it, they don't want to make threats, and they certainly don't want to have everything done overnight only to complain that nothing has been done. Without the authorities, there will be no more wharves. The department is going to be left with nothing, and be in the same situation it was in 20 years ago.

I'd like François to talk about how important the wharf infrastructure is and the development opportunities.

•(1650)

Mr. François Roussy (Mayor, Ville de Gaspé): The Gaspé is a maritime region where the wharf is both the heart and focal point safeguarding the vitality of our communities. My colleagues mentioned this earlier, and you are all cognizant of this fact after having listened to the witnesses that appeared before us. Unfortunately, as a result of the crises in the fishing sector the infrastructure has been more or less left by the wayside. And I like what the mayor of Grande-Vallée had to say about this. You could just picture how the federal government is going to suffer because of the way this infrastructure has been completely abandoned. You just have to take a look at the front page of the *Graffici* newspaper. The words "wharf closed" are superimposed on the national flag. Our wharves are the federal government's responsibility and this image is really very sad.

In response to Mr. Blais' question, I would agree that in our maritime coastal region, the wharves are the very heart and soul of the community. I really think it's in the federal government's best interest to revitalize this infrastructure so that communities can benefit from the economic development that will ensue. You are probably aware that despite the fact that the situation is continuing to improve in the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands, we have been through some tough times. We need this infrastructure to guarantee economic development whether it be in the fishery sector or—and this is becoming more and more apparent—in the tourism sector.

I have a seven-year-old little boy and I hope that when he is an adult, this infrastructure will once again be available. I'd like him to know where we come from and how we've successfully developed thanks to this infrastructure which was built with our grandparents' and great-grandparents' money. They have worked very hard. Some of my family members have told me how disappointed they are to see how little has come of all the effort they've gone to. They mobilized to build wharves and infrastructure for their community, but they're now noticing that no one really seems to care about their future. And this is why I think that we would benefit if we joined forces in addressing this.

I'll defer to your wisdom, since you are the ones who, over the past couple of days, have heard testimony from people whose livelihood depends on this infrastructure. So, I'd like to turn the question around, and ask you, Mr. Chairman, what first step you would like to see the government take with a view to upgrading and maintaining our infrastructure. Tell us what this message would be so that we can pass it on to the people in our community and get behind you. We submitted an initial report to the federal government, but unfortunately, we did not get a response. This is not a partisan matter, but we've asked for ongoing investment to support us, and we did not get the response we wished for. You've already done a lot of work. Is what's being presented to you today going to lead to any results? What is the top priority, so that we can get behind you, tackle these challenges together, and all be winners at the end of the day?

[English]

The Chair: I'll take a minute and then I'll give it back to you, Mr. Blais. I usually don't get involved in the questions, but I will in this case.

Our preliminary studies tell us that for the federal government to bring the wharves and marine infrastructure in Canada up to a standard where they could be used across the country, we would need about a \$400 million investment very quickly. I think we would be dreaming in technicolor if we thought that was going to happen overnight. The process we're involved in now is to try to enhance the present budget, which sits at just a little over \$100 million this year. That is not meeting the needs that are out there. I think we all agree with that on all political sides, and that's the reason the committee felt that it was important to conduct this study.

•(1655)

The Chair: You have two seconds.

Voices: Oh, oh.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I'll be somewhat lenient, since we're in your neck of the woods.

Does someone else want to make a comment?

[Translation]

Mr. Majella Émond (Prefect, Regional Municipality County of Haute-Gaspésie): I believe that the Government of Canada should also be a good citizen. The municipalities of Gaspé have been investing enormous amounts of money in quality of life and enhancement of the region for a number of years now. We are well aware that the wharves are not receiving those same levels of investment from the federal government. Everyone here is well aware that the wharves are outdated, both ecologically and visually. Their poor condition is a risk for local residents, to the point that some municipalities are thinking of declaring them hazardous.

Is that what we need to do to make the government respond and invest more money?

Mr. Manning, you said earlier that the main issue was money. However, I do not believe that the government has put in the needed effort since its finances have been on sounder footing. It has let things go. As some people said earlier, the wharves are part of us, in a way. They are important to our communities. If the government wants to preserve them and ensure that the dynamic around them continues, if it wants to preserve that aspect, that relationship we have with the river and the estuary, it will have to invest funds. The current investment is not enough for Canada as a whole, particularly in our region. I hope that the outcome of your meetings will make it possible for the government to allocate more funding, because we know what it costs to repair the wharves.

Earlier, Mr. Mamelonet touched on the issue of discussions among a number of federal government departments. We know there is a problem there, because we have experienced it and heard about it on occasion. Fisheries and Oceans Canada as well as Transport Canada are involved with the wharves, and frequently do not speak to each other. That causes problems that are extremely difficult to solve whenever we want to move significant projects forward, like the Grande-Vallée project before you today, for instance. I don't know whether both parties are involved in that wharf, but there are areas where they are both involved, and it is difficult to have them sit down together and work on a wharf development project.

Obviously, I hope that these meetings result in a greater awareness of our problems on your part. We know—it is quite simple—that the main issue is money. We are well aware of that. But I believe the federal government now has a chance of having that money. We will not go before the courts, but we know all the spending that goes on within government, and we understand that some priorities might have to be shifted in order to promote wharf development in Canada, particularly in our area.

Thank you.

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

As we've travelled—and I'm sure my colleagues who have been with me all week will agree—we have found a variety of concerns. Today we learned of some concerns here in Gaspé, and they were not concerns in other provinces we had visited. This tug-of-war between Transport Canada and DFO property we heard about here for the first time today. I'm sure there may be other instances in Atlantic Canada, but it's something that was brought to the table today.

We have concerns regarding some properties that are owned by small craft harbours directorate but on which there hasn't been a fish landed in six or seven or ten years, but still no community wants to give up their facility. Sometimes we may have to look at, as somebody mentioned earlier, the broader picture here, and driving up the highway ten minutes versus having a wharf that's falling down. We have to do that in relation to many other aspects of our society also.

There are a lot of different situations here. Hopefully through the process we're involved in now, we're hearing about them. We have not held any meeting at which we haven't learned about something new that needs to be addressed. So hopefully that will all be part of our report.

Mr. Stoffer, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, very much for your presentations.

This is now my third trip to the Gaspé. The first one was with your member of Parliament, Mr. Bernier, and the other time was when, because we liked it so much, my family drove around the Gaspé. Even though I come from Nova Scotia, and we like to think that the Cape Breton Highlands is the number one drive in Canada, the drive

around the Gaspésie is just as beautiful, I tell you. Now I'm on my third time.

In the years that I've been a member of Parliament, I've always found that government is always looking for partners to do business with, to divest certain facilities to, either provincial governments or regional governments or private interests.

I must say, Mr. Minville and Mr. Scantland, your presentations here really help us a lot. In fact, you do a lot of our work right here by doing this.

If I were in the federal government, this is something I would look at very positively. This is something our committee will take back, and we will encourage the government—not just DFO but other departments—to look at something like this, which actually, in the end, will save taxpayers money and develop the economy in this regard.

If I were a fisherman in the Gaspé area, I'd be very proud of my municipal representation here today. This is the first time I've seen this many councillors and mayors and officials here. It obviously is a very, very important issue for you, so congratulations on that, and keep up the great work.

How many fishermen and their families are we talking about when it comes to small craft harbours in this particular region? Do you have a ballpark figure?

• (1705)

Mr. Georges Mamelonet: I would say we have about 20 to 22 lobster fishermen in small craft harbours, in every harbour, but it can be something like....

Mr. Peter Stoffer: How many altogether?

Mr. Georges Mamelonet: In the whole community I would say there are about 300 lobster fishermen.

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: More than that.

Mr. Georges Mamelonet: Just lobster?

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: Yes. In all of the region we have 1,080 permits, but it's not the same thing with fishermen—*donc, 600 ou 700 pêcheurs, probablement.*

Mr. Peter Stoffer: As you know, in Atlantic Canada and parts of Quebec, because of some aspects of the economy, a lot of our young people move out to central or western Canada for employment. We heard earlier from the lady right behind you and in other presentations that if we had the facilities up to date, if they were more modern, if we showed that the federal government—and not just this one but other governments as well—could be more proactive in enhancing these facilities, then young people might see that there is a future here and might decide to stay and raise their families here.

As you know, one of the difficulties we have, if you read the *Montreal Gazette*, or *Le Soleil*, or the *Globe and Mail*, or the *National Post*, is that you rarely ever read about a small craft harbour, and that's one of our challenges. We have to get this issue, along with all the other issues facing Canadians, on the front page. I can assure you we will do the very best we can.

If you could just comment on what this means in order to keep and enhance the economic opportunities for young people so that they can stay in these rural communities...

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: We have been trying to diversify our economy for some years. We have to some extent succeeded, because of the wind energy that is being developed in our region. Among young people aged 24 to 35, migration to our region is positive—young people are coming back to settle in the region, and starting families there. Those young people are involved in their communities and work. We have seen the economy improve.

I would like to take this opportunity to point something out. The fact that there is such a regional consensus regarding the problems that small craft harbours are having shows that we have taken this to the grassroots level. This is a community problem, not just a fishery problem, a tourism problem or a cultural problem. It is a community problem, and the federal government should handle it as such.

In cooperating with recreational harbour associations to improve fishing and recreational harbour conditions, harbour authorities have made it possible for the community to act together, to demonstrate solidarity. Responsibility is not just being shifted to Fisheries and Oceans, but also to Transport Canada, Canadian Heritage, Tourism Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Food, because they are also involved in areas associated with sea farming. The government has to look at the situation from all points of view, not solely from the point of view of Fisheries and Oceans.

[*English*]

Mr. Georges Mamelonet: Regarding your question, Mr. Stoffer, about what we could do and what would be the investment to bring the wharves back to a good state, in the region, actually, there have been a lot of studies done, for example, on seaweed, sea urchins, and species that were not fished before. In the very near future, these species will need a lot of infrastructure to be able to fish them, to collect them, and to treat them.

That is part of the answer to your question.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Would anyone else like to add something to that before we move on from Mr. Stoffer?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Majella Émond: I would like to share an experience with you that I had when I was mayor of Mont-Saint-Pierre. It is a village that relied on tourism where at one point in time, the sea completely destroyed the wharf. It was a private wharf, that did not belong to the government. We had to find the means to have it removed. This happened four or five years ago, and I can tell you that we are still feeling nostalgic about it today. On top of that, we lost many of the tourists who came to us in June and early July. Wharves are therefore extremely important. In my opinion, every necessary effort must be made to preserve the ones that are still there.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Harvey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Harvey: First of all, thank you very much for being here today. It is greatly appreciated. Mr. Stoffer was mentioning earlier on that he was happy to see so many mayors at the same time. I can tell you that every time I come here to make an announcement on behalf of the government, there are always this many mayors. There is a great deal of participation. People in these parts are very proud of their region, and rightly so, because wherever you go in Canada, the Gaspé Peninsula is mentioned regularly.

Mr. Minville, I would first of all like to congratulate you on your presentation. It was very professional, and it could serve as a model not only here in the Gaspé, but anywhere in Canada. You said that harbours are part of our culture, of our heritage. It is important to showcase that heritage.

My colleagues said earlier on, as did Mr. Scantland, that many men and women are involved. Mr. Cannon has just announced \$33 billion in funding for various Building Canada projects, projects somewhat like yours. We want to showcase these things. There are \$33 billion and we are waiting to tie that to the Province of Quebec so that you will soon be able to participate in the program. There's also \$10 million for divestiture of wharves. This amount increased from \$1.5 million to \$11.5 million. We are aware of this and sensitive to it. You know that you need this. This budget is almost 11 times more than what it used to be. There was a 30% increase in funding for wharf repairs, that is to say an increase that is 10 times that of the cost of living.

We therefore have that sensitivity. I will not point to the previous government, but there has been a certain negligence. Budgets for wharf maintenance were reduced, and what we are seeing here today is somewhat the result of that.

Can we fix the situation immediately and catch up on 10 years of cutbacks? I do not think so. We increased the budgets, things have been done...

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Stoffer, on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Harvey, with great respect to you and this region, sir, we're not here to compare previous governments.

I'm with the NDP. The last thing I need to hear is what the Liberals did or what the Conservatives failed to do or what they're not doing. We're here to listen to this testimony and to work cooperatively in the very best way we can.

That's twice now I've heard you say that, and I ask you, with great respect to our witnesses.... They don't need a history lesson on what was done or what wasn't done. I'm sure my Liberal colleagues could give you a lesson on the huge deficit they faced, but we don't need to go there.

The Chair: If I could, please, there is no point of order.

We have conducted a week of hearings. I would rather that we get to the situation we're here in Gaspé to discuss today. We can have that discussion in the House of Commons. I'd appreciate that.

Mr. Harvey.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Harvey: I must inform my friends that the issue is knowing what is at their disposal in order to move things forward and to understand what the situation is. They do not have complete information, of course. As I said—I did not name anyone—there are supplementary budgets, things are coming along for them, that was my objective. I hope that you are not upset by our sensitivity with regard to what my friends here today are explaining to us and getting us to understand.

It is an issue of priorities. Fisheries and Oceans Canada is investing almost a billion dollars. Whether it is an issue of protecting the resource, or research and development on fish farming or aquaculture, of licence buy-backs, of improvements or maintenance of wharves, what is your priority? What should we make a priority?

As you know, we are not walking around with Monopoly money in our pockets. We are trying to say that we have a budget. How should we implement that budget? What is your priority? It is not up to us to decide, it is up to you. What should we truly be concentrating on?

The Chair: Mr. Émond.

Mr. Majella Émond: In my opinion, the wharves should be the priority. We can always invest in research and development, that is true. I am not against that. However, at some point in time, we need infrastructure in order to land our goods.

We know that as far as fish farming is concerned—

[*English*]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Émond. We're getting tremendous feedback. If anybody goes by with a cellphone on we get feedback.

Thank you. Please continue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Majella Émond: The wharves are the priority, because they're really outdated, and we need them to land the different fish that we harvest in the river.

Earlier on, the representatives in the harbour authorities talked about the problems specific to Carleton and to the Gaspé as far as what is new in the fishery. There is a problem as far as the wharves are concerned, for boarding the boats, etc. We have to have good infrastructure at the outset before even thinking about developing anything else. That is what I believe.

Mr. Georges Mamelonet: I was thinking of saying the same thing. The infrastructure is at the root of the problem. In our municipality in particular, we are having serious problems both in the Percé wharf as well as that in Saint-Georges-de-Malbaie—namely in Saint-Georges-de-Malbaie, where in fact there is a great deal of fishing activity. The wharves are in a very bad state of repair. We must therefore start at the root, that is to say with the infrastructure, and try in catch up in terms of their maintenance.

Obviously I hope that the budgets for research and development, for licence buy-backs and the rest of it will not be cut back. Those budgets are currently in place right now. The main idea is to ensure that the federal government will increase the budget for maintenance of infrastructures.

Majella and I mentioned this earlier on. There is a municipal by-law, a nuisance by-law, that can oblige a regular citizen who is not maintaining his house to maintain his facilities.

Nevertheless, we must not be pushed to have to undertake that kind of initiative with the federal government, even though we are practically at that point. Last year, I had to intervene personally on the Saint-Georges-de-Malbaie issue so that the fishermen could launch their season. They started the season three or four days late. For the fishermen, the first three or four days are the most important. As a result, this community had to absorb a significant loss because of Fisheries and Oceans Canada closing the wharf.

As far as the structure is concerned, we have an enormous amount of catching up to do. That is where the effort must be made.

Mr. Claude Cyr: We could talk about this all evening and all night. There are all sorts of priorities. It is certain that you are not dealing with Monopoly money. But on the other hand, you cannot put your head in the sand: the federal government has money. It is a matter of priorities.

Earlier, Mr. Stoffer said that the problem of small craft harbours is not being discussed in major media outlets, and that we had to shake things up a bit. If our harbour authorities decided to abandon everything tomorrow morning, there would be a problem.

You can utter fine words, but we know that the federal government has money. As far as we are concerned, the federal government is ignoring us on this issue. And yet, extraordinary measures must be taken. It is a matter of political will. It's great to have grand objectives and discuss into the night, but ultimately it comes down to a political decision.

It is a matter of establishing the right priorities. For us—and this is capital—the priority is to occupy the land. It is a matter of security and economic activity.

You certainly don't have Monopoly money, but the federal government does indeed have money. We need a major boost. What do you want me to say?

• (1720)

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: Allow me to add a comment.

The region had to acquire a railroad with some federal assistance, because it had been abandoned by a private company. We noted to what extent this type of infrastructure can be compared to wharves. When maintenance and repair work goes undone, the cost can become much more expensive in the long term.

I believe that we need to come to the realization that wharf infrastructure is important for our territories, for the fishing industry, for tourism. The more we abandon them, the more expensive the cost will be. If you do not want to invest \$400 million, then you have to add \$25, \$30, \$40 million each year, and this money will be completely wasted.

When I talk about government expenditures, I'm also talking about investments. For wharves, we are talking more about productive investments rather than expenditures. The priority must be placed on productive infrastructure and development, rather than investing in other programs which, to my mind, are not as productive.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scantland.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Harvey: How much time do I have remaining, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: None.

Thank you, everybody, for your presentations here today.

I thank our committee members. As this is our last session, I'd like to also thank our clerk for her patience, and our analysts. I'm not

finished yet; we have interpreters who have travelled with us this week, our proceedings monitors, our technical people, the representatives from DFO, our hosts—have I forgotten anybody?

A voice: You forgot Sharon.

The Chair: I didn't forget her. I was keeping the best for last.

I want to thank this lady down here, Sharon, who keeps us all on the straight and narrow, or at least tries to do so.

Once again, it has been a very productive week. As I mentioned earlier, as we've travelled around Atlantic Canada and Quebec we have found many different concerns. We've also found many that are the same. Many issues that you have related to us here today and that we heard from our first panel of witnesses are the same concerns we heard in my home area. Hopefully, at the end of the day we can find ways to improve and enhance this program. That's what it's all about.

Getting your voice heard is always difficult, and that's why as a committee we decided to travel to the regions, so we could hear from people who are on the ground. Having spent several years in municipal politics and provincial politics before I went to the federal side of things, I realize that the closer you are to the people, the more you hear and the more you have to listen each and every day.

I thank you for taking the time on a Friday evening to be here with us. Certainly your testimony and your comments are something we'll add to the final report that we hope to present.

Once again, thank you very much.

This meeting stands adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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