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Chair

Mr. Fabian Manning

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• (0915)

[English]

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

We are the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for the Parliament of Canada, and we are in the process of conducting a study on the small craft harbours program. We have travelled to the eastern part of Canada, and we're delighted to be in the western part of Canada at the present time.

We had a great day here yesterday, visiting some harbours. As I said, we've heard from people throughout Canada. While we have many differences, there are also a lot of similarities as we travel.

We're hoping to have our report presented to the House of Commons sometime this fall.

I am certainly delighted that the two Davids have taken the time to be here today. We didn't necessarily put you up with a post between you; it just happened that way, so don't worry about that.

We have representation here from all the political parties. However, due to a situation beyond our control, the two members from the Bloc had to return to Ottawa yesterday, so they couldn't join us today. But we have representatives here from the Conservative Party, from the Liberal Party, and our sole survivor of the New Democratic Party, who we bring along just for moral support.

The process is very straightforward. We give you an opportunity to make some opening remarks and then we have a question and answer period around the table. This gives us an opportunity to dig into some of the things you may have raised and some of the information that our members may be looking for.

I'd like you to introduce yourselves first and the organizations you represent, and then I think Mr. Tomasson is going to begin with his opening remarks. But if both of you could introduce yourselves first for the record, we'd be delighted.

Mr. David Tomasson (Director, Freshwater Harbour Authority Advisory Council): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen.

My name is David Tomasson. I am presently a commercial fish harvester on Lake Winnipeg, and I'm here representing the Freshwater Harbour Authority Advisory Council. That is what we call our Freshwater HAAC, and I'm representing the central and Arctic region for our small craft harbours. You're all familiar with that region; it's a very big region.

Bruce Benson, who's the chair of our council, was going to be here. He cannot make it today. He sends his apologies.

I have a formal presentation I'd like to make, but I'll wait until you're ready, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tomasson.

Mr. David Olson (Director and Member, Gimli Harbour Authority): Good morning, Mr. Chairman, fellow colleagues, and ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for coming to Gimli. My name is David Olson. I'm a member of the Gimli Harbour Authority, and I just want to take a little bit of time to speak to you all about the national presence in Gimli and the feeling we have towards it, which has always been very good and we want to continue with that. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Olson.

Committee members, we added Mr. Olson to the itinerary due to a conversation we had yesterday.

Welcome.

Mr. Tomasson, would you like to begin? The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. David Tomasson: I have a formal presentation and I'd like to read it out, and then maybe we will have time for questions and answers.

Good morning, committee members. Thank you for allowing us to appear before you to make this presentation on behalf of the Freshwater Harbour Authority Advisory Council, what we call the FHAAC.

As I indicated earlier, Bruce Benson was going to be here with me today, but he sends his regrets. Hopefully I can do an adequate job for our association. We are both commercial fish harvesters on Lake Winnipeg.

As you may be aware, the FHAAC represents all the harbour authorities in the central and Arctic region, which encompasses Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and, soon, Nunavut. In fact, if the central and Arctic region was a country on its own, it would be the fifth largest country in the world.

If we may present a little bit of history, the harbour authority program is run almost entirely by volunteers. This came about because the small craft harbours branch of Fisheries and Oceans decided to get out of the harbour management business and turn harbour management over to fish harvesters. Basically, we were told that if we wanted to keep our harbour, we must form and incorporate a harbour authority to manage day-to-day activities, or they would divest of said harbour. In most cases, fish harvesters, such as my colleague and I, did just that, and the program has been, in our opinion, very successful.

We discussed this presentation at the Central and Arctic Region Harbour Authority Annual Conference in Winnipeg in April 2008. It was made abundantly clear to us that all harbour authority members there wanted us to convey to this committee an appreciation for the work the small craft harbours branch has provided to our region and for the guidance of this committee.

We know that the facilities we have at many harbours are a vast improvement over what was there a generation ago. However, that does not mean we do not have many challenges and concerns, which we wish to make you cognizant of today.

The small craft harbours program divides Canada into five regions: Pacific, central and Arctic, Quebec, maritime gulf, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Each region has its own issues specific to that region, and the central and Arctic region certainly has its own share.

First, only 30% to 40% of fish harvesters in our region have access to small craft harbour facilities, whereas the other regions have a figure closer to 90%. This disparity is due, in our opinion, to historic underfunding of our region. This problem is also perpetuated by the current funding formula, which bases 50% of funding on the replacement of existing assets.

The small craft harbours branch was somewhat unaware of the fisheries in the prairies, and I'm willing to bet most of the committee members would be surprised to discover that there are over 1,000 commercial fish harvesters making a living from the body of water just outside this room. As the small craft harbours branch was unaware of these fisheries, they built few harbours as a result. Because that resulted in few assets in our region, the formula was skewed in favour of other regions. Basically, because they gave us little, we had little to replace, so we received little.

Small craft harbours headquarters in Ottawa has acknowledged this historical underfunding problem, and at one time was looking at changing the formula. However, quite naturally, the other regions did not want to see a reduction in their funding in favour of an increase in ours. We certainly understand their position. It was then decided that any increase to the central and Arctic region would have to come from new funds, thereby avoiding disputes between the regions.

Therefore, we are here asking for new funding for the central and Arctic region. This request, we believe, is easily justified by the low number of fish harvesters utilizing small craft harbours facilities in our region compared to others. There are many areas in our region where fish harvesters are forced to use unsafe facilities because they are all that exist in their fishing grounds. It all goes back to the historical underfunding to our region.

Currently, the small craft harbours branch is proposing to build seven new harbours in Nunavut, at a cost of some \$50 million. We applaud this new initiative. This would, of course, come from new funding because the budget for the central and Arctic region would never facilitate anything close to that magnitude. However, the small craft harbours branch has also identified approximately 16 places in the region where new harbours could be built or old harbours refurbished to safe operating conditions for approximately \$3.2 million. This works out to approximately \$200,000 per harbour.

• (0920)

In addition, moneys for overcrowding, aquaculture, and rust-out can easily contribute to funding some of these harbours. These are harbours with more than 25 fish harvesters per harbour. This is a very economical way to provide facilities for so many fish harvesters.

If we take Lake Winnipeg, for example, the eleventh-largest lake in the world, it's really a freshwater ocean. It's 400 kilometres long and 80 kilometres wide at the widest portion. It is known as a treacherous body of water. The lake can go from dead calm to deadly in 20 minutes, and the only hope for survival is to get to a safe harbour. In fact, we have lost on average two fish harvesters a year for the last 100 years. This is our main concern: the lives of men and women who work the waters in our region.

One of the problems in getting the small craft harbours branch to spend money on some of these harbours to make them safe is the policy that the small craft harbours branch will not do anything unless the crown owns the harbour. For instance, one harbour, Goodman's Landing, is used primarily by first nations fish harvesters, and the argument is that Indian Affairs should look after that harbour, a sort of passing of the buck. However, here in the central and Arctic region we do not differentiate between a first nations fish harvester and another harvester. A fish harvester is a fish harvester, and he or she needs, and we contend deserves, a safe harbour to work from.

The gist of our presentation to you today, honourable members of the committee, is that we are here to request fair and equitable treatment under the small craft harbours program. The small craft harbours program should have a policy flexible enough to deal with the issue of new harbours. New harbours should be built where there are adequate fish harvesters with no harbour and a viable business plan. We believe this can be attained by working to provide facilities in traditional and non-traditional ways for more of the fish harvesters in our region. We would like to see the number of fish harvesters using small craft harbour facilities to be raised to, or at least close to, the levels of the four other regions in Canada. We believe this will save lives and improve the quality of life for the hardworking men and women in the central and Arctic region.

We would like to thank the committee members for allowing us the opportunity to make this presentation to you today. We trust you will take our concerns into consideration when making your final report to Parliament.

We had our annual meeting for our region, right from the Northwest Territories down to Ontario, this spring in Winnipeg. At that meeting, there was no date set, but we knew the potential for the standing committee to come here was sure, so we drafted up a presentation that we gave to all our members, and they approved this presentation. So I want you to know that this presentation is on behalf of the entire region and not just us here at Lake Winnipeg. But Lake Winnipeg is the area that I'm most familiar with.

Again, we want to thank the committee for allowing us to do this, and hopefully we can answer any questions, or I can. David is here, and there are other people in the room who I know are making presentations, and I think we all have the same interests at heart.

Thank you very much.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tomasson.

Mr. Olson.

Mr. David Olson: Thank you.

The purpose of my visit here this morning is just to restate the intention in Gimli to continue with the federal harbour. We've had a very nice program here for well over a century. There are lots of fishermen here. It's probably the premier fishing port in western Canada.

The concept of "divestiture" to us is foreign because of the long-term friendship, I guess you could say, we've had with our federal government. We don't really want to see anything change. The basics here in Gimli haven't changed. We're still fishermen, we still have a port, we still bring with us our European flavour of the Scandinavian culture of Iceland. Any changes, to us, would be really devastating, in the sense that we need good facilities at a reasonable price to conduct business, to bring the income tax to the table to help fund the programs we have. I think we have a significant fishery here in Gimli.

That's really the message here this morning, gentlemen. And I know I squeaked onto the agenda ahead of time here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Olson.

We will go to our questions.

Mr. MacAulay is going to be first off the mark this morning.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you very much. Thank you for coming and making this presentation. We arrived here yesterday evening in Gimli. The port here is beautiful indeed. It's a wonderful facility.

How old did you say it was, Mr. Olson?

Mr. David Olson: The first dock, the harbour? I think the first harbour in front of the hotel here was built in 1900, five years in advance of the railway coming to Gimli.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: It would have helped develop this community over time.

Mr. David Olson: I would say it's been a significant presence. I would think it makes Gimli completely different from most western Canadian opportunities you might visit.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I would agree with you, and Mr. Tomasson too, that people don't realize in fact what a major impact you have on the economy and what a major fishery you do have.

Mr. Tomasson, you mentioned that 30% to 40% of your people have access to small craft harbours. I'd like you to expand on that. There is an indication by the federal government that they're going to establish more harbours. Would you like to expand on that issue? I know it's an important issue to you.

● (0930)

Mr. David Tomasson: As I mentioned, in our entire region.... I'm not familiar with all of the locations of the 16, but I know on Lake Winnipeg here there's a number of areas where there are communities that work out of their community, but there's no real, formal, existing harbour facilities under a harbour program. They will dock in rivers.

A number of communities have aboriginal status; they are first nations communities on the lake. They're good fishers, good fishermen, and they really don't have access under the policy to harbours. For example, whether it's Berens River, or Bloodvein, or Hollow Water, those are three big communities right off the hop. Jackhead will be talked about today.

Those communities are fishing out of rivers and makeshift harbour facilities on their own. Yet they do produce, and they will transport their fish to a local central gathering point. That's how their production goes and moves down the lake, either by boat or right to where the road ends, where they can get the fish to reefers and brought in to the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.

I want to expand on what you mentioned. A lot of people don't realize—and I said it in the presentation—it's about the eleventh-largest freshwater lake in the world. There are over 1,000 fishermen directly employed. I would say you could multiply that economically, most likely by about three. There are most likely about 3,000 people who in one way or another depend and rely on the commercial fishery and their harbours to make a living.

In Lake Winnipeg alone we're running record productions now of over 10 million pounds, generally, a year off that lake. Fishermen are getting a good price for pickerel; Americans call them walleye. It's a species that's in demand. This lake here is a goldmine, if it's run properly and we manage it properly and have harbours.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You mentioned, too, that you lose on average—did I understand correctly?—two per year.

Mr. David Tomasson: Yes, that's based on statistics for the last 100 years.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: So in the last 100 years you lost about 200 fishermen?

Mr. David Tomasson: That's right, one way or the other.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: That is substantial.

Now, on the harbour here, what do you charge for tie-up fees?

Mr. David Tomasson: David can most likely speak to Gimli, but I can tell you that in our harbour back home, we basically charge.... You can either charge by the foot or by the season. We do it by the season for our fisheries.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: What I'm getting at is, with what you charge, do you have any trouble collecting your fees? Do you feel you have the proper authority? Do you think that things need to change in the system so that you do have authority?

We've heard a lot of different things across this country as we've been travelling. Some harbour authorities had vessels left, tied up, fees not paid—just a lot of different problems. I'm just giving you the opportunity to expand on that area.

Mr. David Tomasson: Well, I'll let David speak for Gimli, but I can tell you I've been a member of our harbour authority, and in our region, the central and Arctic region, I have not really heard about a major problem with fees collected and/or fee structures.

Now, I'm not saying that no harbour will have a little bit of a problem here or there, but generally, I would say it has not been an issue brought forward in the central and Arctic region.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: The thing is, you have a.... We're used to dealing with lack of funding and difficulties, but when you take a walk across the wharf out here and have a look at it, you can see it's not lacking very much. It's quite an experience to come into this town and see what you would expect was developed from that harbour and what has developed here. But of course this is not your harbour.

Is there anything else you'd like to add to the committee?

Bill, did you want to ask a question?

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to our guests.

Mr. Olson, I'd like you to tell the committee how you got this wonderful harbour, the history of the funding, because it's quite a sight.

• (0935)

Mr. David Olson: I guess we have friends in high places.

It's been a long-term program in Gimli, and a lot of hard work has been done. I think the situation of Gimli, in western Canada on the lake, makes us very different, and that fishing is a powerful draw to people. We have people coming from around the world, and the human rights museum that's coming to Winnipeg is going to bring new people to Gimli on a regular basis.

But the big picture is that it's a really hardworking place. It's an aggressive spot. The quota entitlement program in Gimli is the most significant on Lake Winnipeg, which speaks to the individuals we have in the community. This is a hardworking group. I'm not going to call them all Vikings, but there are a few of them.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you for that.

Mr. Tomasson, in your presentation you talked about the need for safe harbours, and you referenced a point about aboriginal fishers, the first nations, that there should be no differentiation—I think that was the word you used. Could you just expand on that for the committee?

I think what you said was that the small craft harbours branch more or less says that improvements to your harbour or the construction of a harbour for you should be an Indian Affairs issue. Are you saying both departments sort of push back at each other, and that consequently we don't have the facilities we should have for those people?

Mr. David Tomasson: Yes, that's a major issue. The small craft harbours program today will not build a new harbour on Indian reserve land. These are status first nations people, and they basically don't have harbours on their land. They have their own.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Would they not even cost-share?

Mr. David Tomasson: With Indian Affairs?

Mr. Bill Matthews: I'm just asking you—

Mr. David Tomasson: Ask the small craft harbours people that.

Mr. Bill Matthews: No, no, I'm not sure. I don't know. I'm just trying to get information.

Mr. David Tomasson: Having some background with governments, I believe that it was and is a formal position that it would be the responsibility of Indian Affairs to have a harbour on Indian reserves. But I think this committee should look at that very closely.

For example, on Lake Winnipeg alone we have a tremendous number of first nations reserve people who rely on the fishery. It's most likely the only employment they have in their big communities. Some of the communities are easily 1,000 people, and they don't have access to a good harbour through the funding.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you.

I'm finished, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

Just to clarify, if I could, Mr. Tomasson, could you provide us with a list of the 16 harbours that you mentioned in your brief could be built?

Mr. David Tomasson: Yes. I don't have it with me today, but we can do that.

The Chair: If you could forward that to the analyst, it would serve better if we had it.

I want to get back, if I could, to Mr. Olson, for a second.

Regarding the facility that's out here, yesterday we talked to some people and they said it came about during the Pan-Am games, or something of that nature. Could you elaborate a bit for us on this? Was the small craft harbours program involved with the construction of this facility in any way, or was it totally from other funding? I'm trying to determine where the funding for this facility came from.

Mr. David Olson: I think you're speaking to the south side of the harbour, the south basin, and I think there was three-level government participation—the RM of Gimli, the provincial government, and the federal government—to build the facility on that side. But everything else here is federal and has been for a long time.

The Chair: Okay. That's over on the other—

Mr. David Olson: That's on the far side, and we'd like to see that brought into our harbour authority.

The Chair: So you would like to see this section right off here brought into the harbour authority. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. David Olson: This section that you see in front is in the harbour authority.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. David Olson: The ownership on the south side is...I suppose it's three widths. I suppose the federal government owns the water lot and perhaps the land. But those are the things that I think are in consideration or in negotiation as far as the land issues are concerned.

The Chair: Who oversees the property now? The small craft harbours branch oversees your end of it.

Mr. David Olson: Yes.

The Chair: Who oversees this end, here?

Mr. David Olson: The town owns it, but we're managing it.

The Chair: Okay. You manage it for the town.

Mr. David Olson: We're managing it for them, yes.

The Chair: All right. That was for clarification.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, gentlemen, for appearing before us today.

Sir, were any of the harbours under the jurisdiction of Transport Canada at the time of divestiture? I know in western Canada and eastern Canada we ran into some harbours that were actually owned by Transport Canada. I'm wondering, out of ignorance, prior to this program, was Transport Canada responsible for any of the harbours?

• (0940)

Mr. David Tomasson: You know, I'd have to say I really don't know of any.

But I would like to comment on the question that I think Bill raised. I'm not sure who raised it, but it was about who owns or who started this facility, for example.

These harbours, and this one here, as David said, was built about 1900, but the federal government basically was responsible initially for these wharves and docks. This goes back 100 years. Most of them, up until now, were under the jurisdiction of the federal government until the Department of Fisheries and Oceans developed their small craft harbours program.

For example, my harbour at Hecla Island, which is another 60 miles north of here...up until 10 years ago, the land and the wharf belonged, and still does, to the federal government. We lease it back from them through Fisheries and Oceans.

I'm not so sure about the fine line between Transport Canada and whether they were involved at one time. I don't know. But I do know most of them are owned by Fisheries and Oceans. We've signed a long-term, 20-year lease. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans did make some improvements, which was a godsend, because if you have a facility like this and you have any kind of major issue, you

have a \$1 million or \$2 million problem. There is no way, in our fishery, that we can afford that.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: In most of the harbours we have seen so far, we have heard there's a really good working relationship between the front-line DFO staff of the small craft harbours program and the harbour authorities throughout the country. I understand that same type of relationship exists here. Is that correct? It's very positive?

Mr. David Tomasson: Yes, and we're very, very appreciative. In fact, at our annual meeting—and I tried to say it in the presentation—basically, the representatives from over 35 to 38 harbours were very, very positive in wanting us to convey to the committee members that we have a very good working relationship with the small craft harbours people. It's very good.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Great.

Mr. Olson, regarding the divestiture program, in most cases we found out that the federal government either didn't sell or completely turn over the harbour to either a private or a municipal identity. They actually still own the structure. It's only being managed by a harbour authority. In Ladner, we found out that the Delta town council manages the harbour, but it is still a federal government asset.

In your presentation this morning, are there discussions or any concern at all that the ownership of the property at the harbour in Gimli may be completely turned over and either sold or transferred to either a private or a municipal identity or another group? Is that a concern you have?

Mr. David Olson: Well, I hope it doesn't happen. I think that's the whole purpose of seeing you people today, trying to get on the agenda to make that presentation to you to say that we appreciate the federal involvement in our community. It's fantastic, and we thank you for that.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Very good.

Sir, with the issue of the reserve lands—again, I plead ignorance—I didn't know that reserve lands extended to aquatic concerns like Lake Winnipeg, for example. Usually I've thought of reserves as being terrestrial and not necessarily aquatic, unless there is a lake within the total jurisdiction.

In Lake Winnipeg, does the reserve extend out into some of the water as well?

Mr. David Tomasson: No. Now you're getting into a fine line. In most jurisdictions, I believe the government legally owns 99 feet to a high-water mark. Therefore, I believe the reserve lands do not extend beyond that. But when you put a structure on the aquatic part, you have to have access. To get access, you have to go on the reserve land, unless you come by boat. Any facilities to service it there, whether it's a fish shed, hydro, whatever, all have to come off the reserve. That becomes a bit of an issue, I believe, for ownership, access, those kinds of things. I think that's the issue.

• (0945)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Calkins, please.

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

I certainly appreciate hearing from you again, Mr. Tomasson. If I remember correctly, you were actually present at.... Of course, it looks like there needs to be some work done.

You talked about it, Mr. Tomasson. When I looked at it, the first thing that struck my mind, being from one of the prairie provinces—as a matter of fact, I'm the only member of the committee from the prairie provinces. When you take a look at the history of the small craft harbours program, the divestiture program, I don't think there is any region, other than the central and the Arctic, that was hit with as much divestiture. So right away the central and Arctic region had more divestitures than did the Atlantic regions or the Pacific region. Given that, and I've seen the slides and the numbers, on a per capita or a per harbour basis, the central and Arctic region—and you alluded to this—is significantly underfunded in relation to some of the other regions in the country.

Has the Freshwater Harbour Authority Advisory Council looked at exactly what kind of a number we're looking at? I know you said it works out to about \$200,000 for the 16, but if we were to take a look at all of the core fishing harbours that are still identified by the small craft harbours program as core fishing harbours, what are we looking at insofar as bringing it up to par with the kind of funding that, say, other regions would get?

Mr. David Tomasson: Now you're getting into an area where I wouldn't want to really mention a figure. I indicated here the 16 facilities that I think we need or that have been identified. I think I mentioned about \$3.2 million. I think that's underfunded right there because that figure has been bandied around now for about three to four years. That figure today may be up closer to \$5 million, just with the inflation.

I do want to compliment Fisheries and Oceans. When we talked about underfunding to our region, Fisheries and Oceans listened, to a degree. They know we're underfunded, and it's a traditional thing; it's because that's where it began. In order to get us up to par, they'd either have to take funding from one of the regions—which we don't support, because the other regions obviously would get uptight and we don't want that—or it has to come from new funding. Fisheries and Oceans have had new funding. Fisheries and Oceans brought in some fatigue money about two or three years ago, and as a result, the small craft harbours program got one-fifth of an equal share. They never based it on the formula, the old formula, where we would have been underfunded. They did give us an equal share, which was a positive, and I compliment Fisheries and Oceans for that.

Now your question is, how much is the shortfall? I don't want to throw that figure out, but that can be easily gotten to. In fact, I'm sure the small craft harbours here locally have it.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Interesting.

Are you a fisherman at all, Mr. Tomasson?

• (0950)

Mr. David Tomasson: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: And you, Mr. Olson?

Mr. David Olson: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: We talk about this, and obviously the focus of our study is small craft harbours, but the harbour is here to support the fishermen.

If you take a look at the mission statement that the small craft harbours program has, the primary goal is to support the commercial fishery. Depending on where you go, there's commercial sport fishing, plus there's recreational use of the various harbours. We've certainly seen indications of that at the three harbours we've seen on Lake Winnipeg. We've seen some interesting arrangements, where there are some private and government wharves or docks in the same facilities.

But when it comes right down to it, it shouldn't be harbour management or the small craft harbours driving fisheries policy; it should be there to support fisheries policy. From a fisheries policy perspective, it would be important to justify increased funding for the small craft harbours.

With the high cost of the dollar right now, I know there is some question as to whether the current marketing system for the freshwater fishery is making all the fisheries viable. The walleye, pickerel, and sauger fisheries are still very viable. But when it comes to things like whitefish or the mullet, we've heard testimony about bushing the fish and so on because it's no longer profitable. When you have more profitable fisheries, it makes it easier for governments to justify spending money on wharves.

Are there any comments you would like to bring forward that would help this committee in its deliberations? Are there any policy changes that need to be made to make it easier to justify increased spending on small craft harbours?

It's an open-ended question, and I'll just leave that out there.

Mr. David Tomasson: My quick comment is that we certainly support the fish harvesters as being a top priority for the harbour. And that is a policy under the small craft harbours program. Obviously the more viable a fishery is the better the conditions should be in the harbour, with more allocation of moneys to it.

It also gets a bit complicated, and I'm sure it's the same in Alberta. The federal government, under Fisheries, has passed the management on to the provincial authorities. The province determines the quota aspect, and the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation is the marketing agent to set the prices on that. It's maybe a little different for your other colleagues from the coastal fisheries.

I know I'm very confident in saying we feel that the fishers should have the priority that the small craft harbours program gives them in managing.... They take a priority over the recreation fishery and such, and so they should.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Right.

Mr. Olson, do you want to comment?

Mr. David Olson: I would ask you to maintain the status quo and make sure that the federal inventory of harbours in western Canada is looked after. I think if you want fish production to grow, then you have to put money into new harbours. There are lots of opportunities. I'm sure we can produce 75 million pounds of fish in western Canada; we might be halfway there now.

If it's an open-ended question, bring the money, put the harbours in, and we'll catch the fish.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blaine Calkins: From a fishing policy perspective, in Alberta I'm not aware of any quotas as far as.... We have a lake quota. It's usually whitefish. We have an allowance on other species. Whatever number you hit first, the lake shuts down. Now we don't have any lakes the size of Lake Winnipeg in Alberta.

My understanding, through Manitoba Conservation, is that you have a licence to fish a certain quota, much like you would have on a coastal community. But some of the other lakes have a lake allowance. Do I have that right?

Mr. David Tomasson: In Manitoba we normally have had, and we do have, lake quotas. But back in the seventies, when there was a mercury pollution scare on Lake Winnipeg, the lake shut down for a few years and they basically turned the lake quota into individual quotas for fishers. In fact, they have remained very constant in that regard for a number of years.

It's my understanding that this is being reviewed again, to update whether those quotas should be increased, decreased, or whatever. It's not likely that it will be increased, because we're seeing record productions out of Lake Winnipeg that have never been seen before.

The point I'm trying to make to you is that the individual quotas basically make up the lake quota.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Understood. The collection of quotas would be a lake quota, indirectly.

The last question I have then is dealing with the productivity of the fishery. You talked about pollution, and I know there are some concerns when it comes to Devils Lake and so on, insofar as.... This is getting a little bit away from small craft harbours, but again the whole viability industry will drive the policy of the harbour, if the industry remains viable. Are there any concerns that you as fishermen would like to bring forward or make the committee aware of insofar as any of those kinds of issues: pollution, water quality, and the viability of the fishery?

● (0955)

Mr. David Tomasson: Well, we're very concerned about any foreign biota coming from down south. Some gentlemen back here have been very active with Garrison. I mean, what is that, 20 years ago, when Garrison was a big issue? Some gentlemen back here fought hard to get Garrison off the table. Right now it seems to be coming back with Devils Lake. And, yes, we need lots of support federally on Devils Lake.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

Thank you, Mr. Tomasson and Mr. Olson. Certainly it's a different perspective you've raised with us this morning on some of the issues here. We certainly welcome your comments, and thank you for your presence here today.

We're going to break now for five minutes to get ready for our next group. Thank you.

● (0955)

(Pause)

● (1010)

The Chair: I'd like to welcome our witnesses for our second session this morning.

I believe all our committee members are back.

As usual, our plan is to allow you to introduce yourselves and make a presentation, and then we'll open up the floor to our committee members for any questions they may have of you.

To begin this session, I would first of all ask you to introduce yourselves and the organizations you represent.

Mr. Robert Kristjanson (Lake Winnipeg Fishers): I'm Robert T. Kristjanson. I'm speaking for the fishermen on Lake Winnipeg and for small crafts and harbours.

Before I start anything, I'll let him introduce himself too.

The Chair: We appreciate that.

Mr. Allan Gaudry (Vice-Chair, Manitoba Commercial Inland Fishers Federation): I'm Allan Gaudry. I'm the co-chair of the Manitoba Commercial Inland Fishers Federation. I'm here in place of Sam Murdock. He's our chairman and he sends his regrets, but he had another commitment today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gaudry.

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: First of all, I would like to welcome you to the greatest place there is in the world. It's called Gimli, Manitoba.

What you see out here is the "Republic of Gimli". We want our land back. And if any of you looked at it—I don't know if you all have seen it—it is there about the republic, the 12-year republic where we are.

I was going to give you a long song and dance about the harbour systems we have out here in front of Gimli, but first of all, let's do some history. I love history. I dole out history, because we formed here through history to do the same thing over again, and we haven't learned. It's funny how it is. It is in front of you, but you have to make the same mistake again—sometimes when you go out at night, you forget how sick you got the night before.

Going back to this, federal responsibility for Lake Winnipeg has been monstrous, and I mean monstrous. The first federal dock was built in Hnausa, 20 miles north of here. The reason it was built was because you had a representative of the government at the time. That's a good old story there. But it was the first wharf built.

When the Icelanders settled here, they built a small wharf out on the south side that they used. But the first federal dock was Hnausa. Then came...I'm not sure whether Gimli and Hecla were involved in the same thing. The federal people have run the harbours here since day one, and of course that's exactly what we want to see. Nothing changed, because there's no small fishing that can change that and make it into.... There isn't money around to do that.

The first harbour authority—it started in 1972 or 1973, when the small craft harbours program was started—was started in Gimli. The minister came from Ottawa, and the plans were laid down for what you see out here right now. At that time, for 11 years, I was the head of the harbour. For 11 years I ran the harbour, until it was turned over to the town.

In that time, what we had with the small craft harbours program was an excellent.... I can't put it into words. We got along with them 100%. Yes, we grumbled about one thing or about another thing. That's only a good marriage somewhere down the line. If you didn't have that, what would you have?

When the first harbour authority was started here, it worked very, very well, and it is still working as of today. You can go out the door and have a look at it. Even though I'm not involved, it's still working very well today.

What happened was that down the line, there was an awful lot of money spent east of here. The amount for western Canada was very, very small. The allotment at one time—I can look it up—I think was a million dollars, and for what we were deeded, of course, that was quite a bit of money at the time, when it was started in 1973. They tried to get some money.

I don't think you understand the makeup of a harbour. Our fishing family has been involved in the fishing industry, and so have a lot of other families here. We have been in it for 117 years. There isn't a fishing family in Gimli that didn't go north and build their own docks and build their own wharfs. They did that for 80 years, and some of them are still doing it as of today. At the time I grew up, as a young man, I was carrying logs out of the bush and building a dock. I'm not the only one. There were countless fishing families here that did the same thing, from one end of the lake to the other.

•(1015)

What you have that is greatly needed is more funding to look after small craft harbours. It is a marriage between fishermen and government, because fishermen don't have the amount of money to put into the facility, so you must have the government help you along the line. I know everybody says government can't do this and can't do that. Well, then you put people in that run it and know where it goes.

There is no doubt about it, ladies and gentlemen, without harbours you do not have fishing. Yes, you'd go back to building them and doing the things that we did before, and I'm quite sure something would be done. What you have nowadays is people who settle around the harbours, and what draws people to the harbours draws money to the harbours, draws fishing to the harbours, brings tax to the harbours, and that makes the world go around.

I don't know how far we want to delve into this. I'm sure you'd want to ask some questions, but to me, the harbours that are not being funded and need to be funded are not a great amount of money. It's a ham sandwich to you guys, but to the fishing industry, it's a monstrous amount of money. It's a monstrous amount of money to any man who lands his boat and tries to drag up his allotted quota onto the dock. A harbour with a dock to do that with is a wonderful thing. I know. I grew up with it all my life. It is the same with the dredging.

It is part of what makes Canada what it is. I stood in front of the ministers in Ottawa when I received the commercial fishing award and I said, "I just came over the biggest ocean. I just flew over it, the biggest ocean we have in Canada, and that started at Alberta and went all the way across." When you look down from an airplane—and I'm quite sure you guys have—you're looking at water in every direction. In that water there are potential fish, and if there are potential fish, there is a good old fisherman somewhere along the line.

Thank you.

•(1020)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Gaudry.

Mr. Allan Gaudry: Good morning.

Welcome to Manitoba and the community of Gimli.

I'll give you a bit of background on the Manitoba Commercial Inland Fishers Federation.

We have 12 boards of directors that represent different regions in this province. We have one chairman, so we're a board of 13. We bring the concerns and issues of the commercial fishing industry to the table and discuss the issues.

As Mr. Robert Kristjanson explained, there's no doubt the harbours are in need. There is also their maintenance. We need more. We just can't stay at the status quo. We don't have a harbour in our community, in St. Laurent. We'd sure like to have one. The recreational boaters can't launch a boat. We can't launch any deep boats in our community, even for a rescue mission. We've had some challenges just to launch a boat to do a rescue mission on our lake. We have a shallow lake. It's only 20 feet deep. So there are issues with small craft harbours. There is a need for them.

The watersheds span a large geographical area, from 500 miles south of Lake Winnipeg—so they go quite a bit south—to 1,000 to the west, to the Rocky Mountains. So this is a large watershed that drains toward Manitoba and into Lake Winnipeg and also Lake Winnipegosis. Farmers in these rural municipalities have a tremendous amount of authority to drain their farmlands for production of crops or hay land. This practice needs to be reviewed, and that was identified at one of our meetings.

The agriculture industry needs to be held accountable for damages. This type of drainage is cause for concern for water quality. All the natural filtration, the chemicals, phosphorous, pesticides, and herbicides that farmers use on the field end up in rivers and lakes, having an effect on the spawning areas. We identified that as an issue. The fish spawn during the time when the drainage is filled. We see the water dries up after a few days, and the fish are caught up in the streams and have no means of returning to the lake and are killed off, along with the future stock. There needs to be gradual drainage instead of the fast-moving drainage we have today; however, farmers get upset if they see water lying in their fields for more than five days, so there needs to be a review of the drainage system.

There is a need for it, obviously, but at what point do we drain off all the surface water? Where is the volume coming from, and at what point are the lakes going to sustain that coming volume? I think that's also a concern we have to address. The large volume of water flowing in our rivers and in our lakes damages our harbours, and that's a cause for concern. During the winter, we notice the lakes and the rivers are still flowing at high capacity, and the frazil ice builds up, blocks the mouth of the lake, the water backs up and damages our harbours, damages our boats, and floods our roads. We've had these concerns the last four or five years, and it's not going to get better; it's going to get worse.

Those are some of the issues we have dealt with at the commercial fisherman's level. And we know there are challenges we face on how to get attention to this problem. Water quality is also gaining a lot of attention on Lake Winnipeg, but Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis have the same concerns. All the attention is focused here, but again, it all comes back to the idea that if the fishery collapses, the lakes don't support a fishery; then it's easy to point a finger at the harvesters. They're the ones who are easy targets: they overharvested and that's why there's no more fish in the lake. That's why we need the research, the data collected, to make sure the water has the quality to sustain fish, so at least we have some background to say the lake is at a point where it cannot sustain fish or the spawn in those lakes. At least the research needs to be done and the data collected. That's a great concern to us.

We're seeing a crisis situation with low prices in the fishing industry. Fishers are limited to what they can contribute, if anything, during the crisis. Collecting fees to use that harbour: how do you ask a fisher to pay \$150 or \$100 for docking while you're fishing? The money is not there, and it's a very difficult time to ask them to contribute to support the harbours. Even with tourists, how do you collect from the tourists who use the facility? There's nobody there to collect it, so it's very difficult.

• (1025)

Safety concerns. Entering these harbours during some windstorms...we need the harbours for safety reasons. There are many harbours that have been silted over the years, and dredging programs are needed to improve them. Boats coming in are running aground because of this problem. With high volumes of water, a lot of the silt and sediment builds up, and where it ends up is right at the mouth of the river, and all of a sudden boats are running aground. So we need a dredging program to help those fishermen get out and access the lakes. There have been a few cases where this has happened, especially if it's a drought year and the water in the lakes is down. We're going to see a challenge there in getting access to the lakes through the river systems.

That's about it. I think that covers some of the issues and concerns. And definitely the small craft harbours are in need; we need them. That's about it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gaudry.

We'll begin our questions now.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: It's a beautiful day and a beautiful area and we're sitting here freezing.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): He would like the air conditioner reduced.

The Chair: You should have brought your gloves.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, gentlemen, for your presentations.

I appreciate the opportunity to ask a few questions. I want to say a word of thanks, and I think I speak on behalf of all committee members. We've certainly been enlightened and brought to a new perspective—many of us—when it comes to the conduct of inland fisheries, particularly here in the central and Arctic region and Lake Winnipeg and surrounding areas.

The picture that's being painted for me, not only from your testimony but also the testimony previously heard this morning, is that the dynamics of the fishery are changing. It's a high-value, higher-volume fishery; it's more professionalized, whereas it was once almost considered artisanal.

As you pointed out, Robert, families went away for periods of time and spent time in the north, but now it's become highly professionalized, where quality control is becoming a major issue and is being acted upon.

It has caused changes within the industry or the fishery. What you're looking for, if I'm reading you correctly—and you can both comment on this—is a response from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the small craft harbours program, to be able to keep up with changing times. People are looking to home port more often, as opposed to travelling great distances to other grounds. You're looking to have new infrastructure developed in response to these changes, infrastructure that currently isn't on the books. In other words, the small craft harbours program currently has a policy only to invest in facilities that are currently the real property assets of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, small craft harbours, and they don't expand that footprint any further. In other words, they don't take ownership of any additional lands or water lots. They're keeping their investment strictly in the properties they own.

The other thing you're telling us is that you're looking for some transparency and consistency in the way funding is allocated, that the region is generally underfunded, considering the increase in activity and the value of the fisheries and its impact on the local economy. So I am just repeating back to you some of the messages we've heard so that you get a feel that we've been listening and are very aware of what you're saying.

Let me ask you this: where exactly would you suggest new harbours be developed? Is there a way you can communicate to this committee the location of existing harbours and suggest to us where new harbour activity should occur, in order to keep pace with the industry? As well, could you comment about the allocation of funding? For example, I think one of the messages we've heard right across the board, and heard very clearly in B.C. and other parts of the country, is that as harbour authorities and harbour authority associations, you're looking for some sort of transparency in the way funding is presented or allocated, and you want to know that if you're going to work with small craft harbour managers locally and they actually go forward with a presentation to Ottawa to actually get funding in place, it will succeed and will indeed be allocated.

Are you aware that the minister, for example, has a \$5 million reserve budget that's not allocated to any one particular region, but is at his discretion to be able to use? Have you been able to take advantage of any of that funding, or were you even aware it existed?

• (1030)

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: I don't want to start in on you when you're halfway through this, but everything you're saying is exactly what the fishing industry and the people around the lakes.... It doesn't matter if it's Alberta, Saskatchewan—it doesn't matter where you go, they're all asking the same thing. It isn't any more clear what the mandate would have to be under the small craft harbours program.

They have a whole list of people who want some part of a harbour. You can't just all of a sudden out of the blue say, "I want a harbour down here, two miles, because I have my boat in there." To throw money at something is not going to solve anything. That's not what we're asking for. What is being asked for here is if there is a harbour needed and there are fishermen there, for God's sake, give them a harbour. It doesn't take a brilliant scientist from anywhere in the world to understand that. But if there's nobody there, then don't build a harbour. That's all we're asking.

I think Mr. Kathan here and whoever is on his staff understand that right down to the last letter—asking for a harbour that needs funding or needs help or needs something. I cannot stand here and say I don't want a harbour because you're of a different colour, or whatever you are. I am a commercial fisherman and I'm damned proud of it. I didn't come this far to be that. At one time, they looked at you and said, "You're a commercial fisherman," and their nose twisted around about three times. Well, that's gone. Now you are a harvester, and I am proud to be where I am.

What we are doing right here is talking to.... I welcome you here. Finally, we have somebody to talk to and understand what the people are going through. Little people, little shots like me, wherever you want to go, need a harbour to throw a fish box on, and if the people are there, for God's sake, build them a harbour. It doesn't take a whole billion dollars to understand that one.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Thank you.

Allan.

Mr. Allan Gaudry: To add to that, the fishers federation is going to have a meeting here shortly, in July. I'd certainly like to press that question to them. What are the needs out there? Where are the needs? Where should the harbours be? Where should a new one be

built? Where is there one that needs upgrading or maintenance? I certainly would get that information, and maybe I could get a contact person so I could say that this came out of this meeting: there is a need for whatever—one, two, or five new ones, and we need to maintain ten, or there are twenty that need upkeep. I'll get that information for you guys. I won't have the dollar figures, but I'll give you some information.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: I know you're not a spokesperson for all Lake Winnipeg fishers or area fishers, but just to sort of get a handle now on the relative magnitude of this, do you need to double the number of harbours along the lake, or is it one, two, or three?

• (1035)

Mr. Allan Gaudry: I'll find out. If there are 41, somebody can give me some information where they are, so I can determine which community they're in, and then I'll go from there and find out what the needs are. Then I'll also find out where there should be more, if there's a need for a brand-new harbour. Our community, for example, St. Laurent, is in need of one. But when I pose the question to all the directors who know their area, their region, their needs, I could probably come up with some numbers.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: I think the committee would like to receive that information.

Mr. Allan Gaudry: Just let me know where to forward it to.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Bill, unless you have a question, my final question is on the harbour authorities' involvement in new capital construction.

Currently the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the small craft harbours branch, has a limit of \$40,000 on what they can grant a harbour authority to do local activities or construction projects. But that's the ceiling or maximum. If it's any more than that, the project has to go through the public tendering process. But up to \$40,000 can be granted to a local harbour authority to conduct a small-scale project.

We've heard in testimony, or some points of view from various harbour authorities, that if that \$40,000 figure were to be raised to \$200,000, the harbour authority could use that money to buy materials and use local labour or volunteer labour to construct projects. In other words, the net effect or impact of that could be that the \$200,000 could be equivalent to a \$600,000 publicly tendered project, because if you're using money to buy local materials and using local labour to do these projects, you really will get better economics and better efficiency from the project.

Would that be of help to you? If that circumstance were created, from your own experience, would that be of any benefit to your organization?

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: Of course it would—anything that would add to the upgrade of any harbour. Right now when you need something, if you have money, you put a little into it and the small craft harbours program puts the rest into it.

What is happening at a lot of harbours right now is that you have to have fire equipment, you have to have pumps, you have to have all kinds of equipment in case of a spill, and all that's needed to deal with it. It's not just an ordinary harbour any more, where you put down two poles and a plank on it so you can walk on and off the dock. In the environment we're dealing with right now, it's completely night and day.

I understood when all of this started years ago, when they tried to divest themselves of these harbours, that it was the absolutely wrong thing to do. I stood up at most of these things. I am still a Canadian living in Canada, as far as I know, and I look to my federal government to help with the harbour and in bringing in fish, a product that's exported around the country. And anything that is brought to the table for that would help.

You'd have to sit down with the people from the small craft harbours program and sit there and see where we're at and what dollars this would bring. It's an excellent idea.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stoffer.

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

Mr. Kristjanson, it would be an honour to be in the "Republic of Gimli", I'll tell you that.

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: Thank you very much.

I hope you signed in on the way in, because I don't know about your passport.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: You know what it's like when you get on an airplane. We want a passport here to make sure you're in good standing.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Yes, sir, thank you.

I have a couple of questions.

Mr. Gaudry, what is the ratio of first nations and Métis fishers to non-aboriginal fishers?

• (1040)

Mr. Allan Gaudry: According to the 2006 study from FFMC, 75% are aboriginal fishers in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Would that be similar to what it is, say, in Saskatchewan?

FFMC includes the catchment area of Alberta, the Northwest Territories, a bit in Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Would that be similar to the other provinces as well?

Mr. Allan Gaudry: Yes, aboriginals are predominantly the majority in the fishing industry.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: In regard to some of the harbours that are in first nations reserves, has there been a formal request by your organization, or any organization you're aware of, to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for funding for strategic harbour infrastructure?

Mr. Allan Gaudry: From what I understand in talking to some of our members from first nations, when they go for funding initiatives,

their priority is health, housing, and education, but funding for a harbour is not a very high priority for them.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: But has a formal ask been presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for specific funding for harbour infrastructure?

Mr. Allan Gaudry: I'm not aware of it. If there is funding available, I would certainly do the research and find out. That's another branch of funding we tap into, especially for those communities.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: It seems fairly straightforward. You have a small craft harbour. You assume the small craft harbours branch should be responsible for maintaining and fixing it. However, there are jurisdictional concerns that the small craft harbours branch has, and they have a certain mandate that says they only work on whatever resources they have for small craft harbours over which they have jurisdiction.

When there's a harbour on a first nations reserve, they don't have any jurisdiction over it. It's understandable that the people here would say they'd love to help but it's not their theatre of responsibility. That's why I'm just questioning you again regarding the formal request. If the formal request has not happened, I would make a suggestion that your organization draft correspondence to the Minister of Indian Affairs and ask that person specifically for specific funding for these harbours, especially the new ones you're looking at.

You're absolutely correct. Economic opportunities for some of the more remote areas are very hard done by. As is the case in some places on the east and west coasts, and now in Nunavut, of course, fishing is an opportunity for people to be able to stay in their communities and earn their livelihood from the resources there.

Mr. Kristjanson, we heard earlier that the pickerel catches in Manitoba are increasing. Some fishermen have not seen pickerel of this nature in a long time, in terms of its abundance, which of course assists some fishermen with opportunities, and it may encourage young people to get into the fishery as well.

Sir, with your long history of fishing in this area, can you give me some examples as to why the fishing is so good right now in Lake Winnipeg, especially when it comes to the species of pickerel?

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: We took 5,000 so-called fishermen off the lake. In 1969, fishermen had a quota to fish. If you didn't have a quota before that, you didn't fish on Lake Winnipeg. I was in Newfoundland, speaking on a radio show there, and I said to them, "You have a pond. We have a pond. The only difference from your pond is that ours is a little smaller."

You have to regulate what you are fishing. They've done it all over the world. By doing it here, it might be small.... I am not here to decide about fishing quotas, but the reason for putting a quota entitlement in was to give the fishing industry what we have right now. That is why we have fish in Lake Winnipeg.

I think it's the same old story. It doesn't matter. In Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis, I can't speak for them, but they have a problem. It is not the fishermen there. That is not their problem. That's not being overfished. That has to go back to science and go into the rest of it. Lake Winnipeg was.... Now you put the fishermen back on the lake. Maybe the quotas are too small. I am not here on that, as I said before, but the abundance is there.

Isn't this fantastic, gentlemen? You came from the west coast and you came from the east coast. You flew across this great nation and you came to a place called Gimli, where they're talking about having too many fish in the lake. You came from a place in Vancouver where they have no salmon. They have nothing left. If you go to Newfoundland, they can't find cod. But here we want to raise the quotas. Is there something being done right here? Is that hard to answer? There must be something right.

Maybe we should be taking more, but managing the resource is no different from the geese. We quit shooting geese and what do we have? We have geese in our bathtub in the back of the yard because we quit shooting them. Is it that hard to figure out why? Isn't it something to go back from here and say, "We were at a lake where they have all kinds of fish. What are they doing wrong?"

• (1045)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

If I could, I just want to recognize Mr. Alan Kathan, regional director of small craft harbours. Alan was with us yesterday and is here for the hearings today. We certainly welcome his presence. I'm sure he's no stranger to the people who are making presentations here, and certainly we welcome his positive comments toward the relationship with small craft harbours.

With that, I'll hand the floor over to Mr. Kamp.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for appearing before us. We certainly appreciate seeing what you have here. I just have a couple of comments or questions, and then I'll pass it over to my colleague Mr. Calkins, who's actually from the central region. I'm from British Columbia.

Mr. Kristjanson, I'm glad you clarified a bit further. I appreciate your forthright comments in response to Mr. Byrne's questions. When you were talking at first, I thought you were kind of saying that if we build them, they will come. If we build some docks, fishermen will come and we'll expand this industry, and it'll be good for the area and good for the province. In your response to Mr. Byrne's questions, I wasn't hearing that quite so clearly. Perhaps you could comment on that again.

You did say, though, that if there are some fish harvesters, we should build them a dock. I thought I heard you saying something along that line. So how many harvesters do there need to be in a particular location before you think the Government of Canada should be investing in a harbour?

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: There are harbours around the lake that the small craft harbours branch is not involved with. And there are an awful lot of fishermen, still, who are doing that. If I give you a

name, it won't mean anything to you anyway. One of them is Frog Bay. There is one. There are a lot of fishermen in there with no funding at all from the federal government.

I am not saying to go anywhere and build docks, as I just said. I don't want a dock two miles down just because I'm fishing there. There has to be common sense put into the docks. But upgrades of harbours are needed. Dredging of harbours is needed. And there are wharfs in harbours that have to be refitted in one way. If there is, in a location where there are fishermen.... I don't mean to go and build a dock someplace around the corner because I might want to go there one day. Of course not. That's nonsense. But there is a need to refit and rebuild and help fishing harbours that are here right now.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Certainly we've heard that message across the country as well.

Mr. Gaudry, you say that where you live there isn't a harbour. How far away is the harbour you use?

Mr. Allan Gaudry: In our community, we don't have a harbour. We just have boat launches that are made by the locals. Any time there's a strong wind or high lake levels or low lake levels, they are affected. We don't have a harbour in our community, but we do have some boat launches. It doesn't do justice to the community.

Mr. Randy Kamp: But you fish out of your community from those boat launches. You don't drive to another harbour.

Mr. Allan Gaudry: No, our community fishes the winter fishery. We're in the middle of lobbying for a fall fishery. We want to change our fishery, because we face so many challenges in the winter months in commercial fishing. We're lobbying the province to make some changes and allow us the fall fishery so we can harvest fish during the fall. I think they're more active in the fall than they are in the winter. In the winter they're dormant. In the past, it was challenging for the commercial fisherman who worked seasonally to really go out there and make their primary living from this, because we only have one season.

So fishermen are coming around and saying they need to change. They can't just fish the way they have for the last 40 or 50 years. There has to be change. The challenge is to also get the management in the province to agree to these changes. Right away they're concerned with sustainability. That's what they throw at you every time.

• (1050)

Mr. Randy Kamp: Finally, could you expand a bit on your comment about harbour fees and berthage fees and that sort of issue across the country? How much could be charged or should be charged and so on? Obviously, in your case, you don't have a small craft harbour as such.

In that context, you said, with respect to the fishery, that the money is not there. At least that's the way I wrote it down. We've also heard that there are record catches in Lake Winnipeg and so on, that it's a thriving fishery and so on. So is the money there? Is the fishery doing well? If it's doing well and it's not producing the money it should.... What did you mean by that comment?

Mr. Allan Gaudry: What I mean is, the low prices we're getting for our fish nowadays and the rising costs of operating are challenges we've faced in the last four years, since the price of our highest-value fish, which is pickerel, has dropped. All the other species are not a high priority to FFMC, so our bycatch is pretty much bushed. What we need here is a market for that low-value fish and also a priority with FFMC to handle it. If not, then allow dual marketing. Let the small communities come up with their own market and their own processing and they'll handle that fish. Those are changes that we're also looking at making.

So hopefully in the next few years we're going to have some changes that will bring back the youth. We have an aging workforce out there. If we don't have the youth, five to seven years from now who's going to be out there harvesting? That's a big challenge. That's the next big issue we're going to be dealing with: who's going to be left to harvest fish in the next five to seven years? There are no youth out there coming into the industry.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thanks very much.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Mr. Kamp. In the short time I've been here we stopped at Winnipeg Beach, we went out to Arnes Harbour, and now we're back here in Gimli. Roughly how far apart is that? I would imagine those are the three small craft harbours and there are no small craft harbours in between. Those are the three that are here.

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: Winnipeg Beach is nine miles and Arnes is fifteen or sixteen miles.

If my wife heard you say "Arness", she might come over and give you a little tap on the back of your head.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Arnes?

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: It's not "Arness"; it's "Arnes". We've got some good Icelandic stuff—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I've had many taps on the back of my head already.

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: We brought you in from Alberta to a great country.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Be that as it may, from a safety perspective, is nine miles, fifteen miles...? That's a long way to go in a boat. I guess what I'm asking, from a fisherman's perspective, is how far do you venture out? How far do you need to go to get to the places where you're fishing? I know a bit about walleye, and they're a school—

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: They fish fifteen miles offshore. The distance is not... They say another eight or ten miles down. Hecla is around the corner. So you have the harbours; all you want are the facilities—not to go with the harbours.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: So there's no need, from a safety perspective, to really have more of them. Just make sure the ones that are there are kept up, and that's all you would need to do.

Mr. Robert Kristjanson: Just kept up, yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That's good.

Mr. Gaudry, I believe you testified in Ottawa already.

Mr. Allan Gaudry: Yes, I did.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You mentioned again the bushing of the fish. I will not get too far off topic again, because we are talking about small craft harbours. I asked this question of the previous guests who were here, whether or not small craft harbour policy should be there to supplement the overall fishing policy, and of course the fisheries policy here is through the federal corporation. I know there's an exemption to that. Is it Island Lake?

A voice: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'm just wondering if either of you want to have any comments on that, or if you know how that's working as far as that exemption is concerned. What would you be looking for insofar as maybe a dual marketing system is concerned?

• (1055)

Mr. Allan Gaudry: At Island Lake, we're very familiar with the concern there. We have a director out of there. It's the cost of freight. They're the most remote corner of the province, without any roads, so everything has to be flown out. With the cost of freight to move a fish out of that corner, it's almost—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: So it's not a very representative sample of the fishery in Manitoba as far as the pilot project is concerned.

Mr. Allan Gaudry: No. They have many challenges in the cost of freight. I suggested to them that they start processing and freezing fish so that they'll have the storage capacity. Why send a plane down there to pick up round fish or dressed fish? Pick up the fillet, because then you have more volume in the freight. Also, if you store it in the frozen form, at least when you go there you have a full load; you're not just going there for a partial load. Then it does make sense to go up there and pick up the fish.

Those are some of the suggestions and ideas that are coming out of the support for Island Lake. Freshwater fish was very easy for them to drop. Why would you want to go and get that fish when it's the most costliest fish to retrieve? So it was easy to drop freshwater fish in that area. So they said, "Well, we'll find our own", but that's still a challenge today, to freight that fish out of that corner.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for their presentations here this morning. We are certainly gaining a different perspective of the fishery in this area from what most of us are used to. It's been a worthwhile exercise. Thank you.

We'll adjourn this part of the meeting now and get ready for our next set of presenters.

Thank you.

• (1055)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1100)

The Chair: I call this session to order and welcome our witnesses here this morning.

Our process is for you to make a presentation, and then members of our committee may have some questions for you on your presentation or otherwise.

I'm not sure if you were here at the beginning of our session, but we are the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. We're in the process of preparing a report that hopefully will enhance the small craft harbours program under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

We represent all the parties of the House of Commons. Our two representatives from the Bloc are not with us today, due to circumstances beyond their control. They had to return to Ottawa last night, but we have representation here from the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the NDP.

We thank you for taking the time to be with us today to make a presentation. We toured some harbours here yesterday and we heard from some presenters earlier this morning. Certainly, it has been an eye-opener for all of us to learn about the different types of fishery you have here, though the needs and wants here are similar to many other areas. Therefore, we look forward to your presentation.

First, we'd like you to introduce yourselves and let us know what organization you represent. We will ask Mr. Traverse to begin the presentations, but first I'd like you to introduce yourselves.

• (1105)

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson (Manager, Goodman's Landing): I'm Kevin Sigurdson, and I'm representing Goodman's Landing Fisheries. I work for Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation.

Mr. Henry Traverse (Spokesman, Jackhead Fisheries): I'm Henry Traverse, from Jackhead Reserve. We gave it back its original name of Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation. In English, it's Jackhead Reserve.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Traverse.

Opening remarks from Mr. Traverse. The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Henry Traverse: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

When I came here this morning, I didn't know if the committee wanted me to bring something on paper to present my case.

My reservation, Jackhead Reserve, is a fishing community. The reason I came here is for identification purposes. We've been living on this lake we're sitting beside this morning for centuries. We've been getting our livelihood from this lake. I didn't come here to speak on behalf of the FFMC, the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation. I'm here to represent my community, my family, my ancestral...the connections we have to the fishing industry.

I wanted to say that much, but I guess I have to provide you with all the necessary information: who I am and who we are as Nishnawbe people. I want to read something to you. I don't know if the committee got a copy of some of my recommendations we are facing back in our community, but I want to read this document. Also, I guess the committee knows we're a federal responsibility. This came about the day the treaties were signed. This is why we're in this situation today. The way I express myself, I have to identify who I am and where I come from wherever I go.

I want to read this to you. It's a declaration of our first nations that we have to bring forward. Wherever we go, whatever we do, we're going to talk about water rights and everything like that.

This declaration went to England in 1985, and the House of Lords had a standing ovation in support of it. I want to read it to you here this morning. I don't want to be too long. I don't know how many minutes I have; I understand it's five minutes. It says:

We the Original Peoples of this Land know the Creator put us here.

The Creator gave us Laws that govern all our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind.

The Laws of the Creator defined our rights and responsibilities.

The Creator gave us spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture, and a place on Mother Earth which provides us with all our needs.

We have maintained our freedom, our Languages, and our traditions from time immemorial.

We continue to exercise the rights and fulfill the responsibilities and obligations given to us by the Creator for the land upon which we were placed.

The Creator gave us the right to self-determination.

The rights and responsibilities given to us by the Creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other Nation.

We have to try to maintain and balance our communities, our lives, with some of the things in this document, which carries the duties and responsibilities of every first nation. At the same time, I have these five points that are very critical and crucial for our situation where I come from.

As I said, I don't want to put the blame on anything here today.

• (1110)

Also, I want to give respect to everybody sitting at the table here. At the same time, as I said, I'm not here to defend the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, because it's a crown corporation.

In our small communities, we have lots of despair, lots of suicides. Young people are killing each other because they don't have anything to do. What we need and want in our communities is to be able to get on with life and to try to create something for our young people today. Those are the purposes we strive for today as community leaders and community fishermen.

The reason why I talk this way is that this is the way I live and this is the way I walk. I try to follow my culture every day, and I have to state what I have to say about my identity. But I want to thank you all for listening to me. I don't want to go overboard here.

Our community needs something like a good harbour where I come from, the Jackhead Reserve. That's the reason why I've been leading talks with our MLA and with our MP, in order to try to get this harbour that we need in our community, the Jackhead Reserve. In some of the places where they construct these government wharves, there's a lot of drug activity and lots of alcohol going through—places that I've seen around Lake Winnipeg. In some communities, when they have a government wharf there, they do not try to involve it with their FFMC fish plant. I know of a couple of places that don't have a concern about it, but where I come from, we definitely need a good, safe wharf that we can use for our future.

I recently got into a bigger quota, and as I speak, I don't have a place to have protection for my boat.

I want to say that much at this time. I don't want to offend anybody. If I do, I ask for your forgiveness.

I don't know if I should read these other five pages. They point out the problem we're having in developing the Jackhead harbour authority, number one. We're in the process of doing that because it will be a benefit for the future economic development of our community.

We live at the end of the road here, so we're all that's left at the bottom of the bag, I'll say. Where we live, we're not a very big community. We have about a hundred homes where I come from, but fishing is our main resource. We've always relied on the river for protection for our boats, but as you say, everything is getting to be environmentally watched today. It's very hard to be able to have a clean environment if you're going to be parking boats in the river.

As I said, our fishery goes back a hundred years, ever since the first contact began in documents and papers. We've always been involved in the fishery. My ancestors, my grandfathers, my forefathers were the ones who were involved in these negotiations when this fishery was being established. At the same time, that was their livelihood. I'm always very grateful for that today, so that I can be here today. In terms of the way they lived their lives, everything has changed and has come to be the way it is today.

• (1115)

Anyway, I wanted to say that much for now. I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Traverse. Certainly you don't have to come here and apologize in any way. We're not offended by hearing from people like yourself. That's the purpose of our committee, that's the purpose of our travels, and that's the purpose of our study. We welcome your input into what we are doing. Certainly the concerns you have raised are unique in some ways, and that's even more of a reason to be here in Gimli today, to hear from people like yourself.

With that, we'll pass on to Mr. Sigurdson.

Before we hear from our next witness, he has provided us with a document that is in the English language only. I just wanted to have consensus of the committee to pass this around. We will have it converted to French afterwards for our colleagues from the Bloc.

Any objection to passing this around as it is presented?

Hon. Gerry Byrne: No problem.

The Chair: No problem?

Merci beaucoup.

The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: My name is Kevin Sigurdson. I'm here on behalf of the chief and council of Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation, representing their business of Goodman's Landing Fisheries Limited.

Some of those pictures that you see are basically just pictures. We don't have any fancy presentation or anything. I just wanted to give you guys an idea of the worst-case scenarios. Of course, the worst-case scenarios are when the water is too high or the water is too low. The biggest thing is that the fishermen do not have protection for their boats.

Just to give a little bit of background, in 2002, the chief and council hired me as a manager to operate their facility at Goodman's

Landing. Since that time, we've gone from about \$600,000 in revenue to about \$1.8 million. It's growing all the time.

Society is changing. The lake stations in the past were all about the fishermen going out to an island, and there would be 40 of them staying there. They built their own docks and went out to this station. Well, society now, today, as we know, is changing, because now the fishermen want to be closer to their families. They want to be home with their children. If it's blowing for a week, they want to be able to go home. So they need road access.

Goodman's Landing provides, on the west side of the lake, road access to the middle of Lake Winnipeg. It's the furthest road access in that area. Of course, in Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation, we have a high rate of unemployment. But we have a very viable fishery. We have fluctuating numbers of between 93 and 108 fishermen. There were 103 T4Fs filed for last year. In 2007 we generated about \$1.8 million for about 315,000 kilos of fish.

Since 2002—you'll see one of the pictures, the older pictures with older camps and stuff like that, as they go around—the chief and council of Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation invested over \$300,000 in capital to rebuild the camps for the fishermen to live in and to upgrade their ice facilities and stations.

The existing harbour, as you see it, was originally built by the band in 1974 or 1975, I believe—Henry might be able to answer this one—with help from Manitoba Northern Affairs, because they were having trouble getting the boats into the Jackhead River. Since that time, several fish stations have closed down on Lake Winnipeg, because it wasn't viable for them to be hauling fish by boat. So we've been getting an increase in fishermen, and we can only see that the increases are going to be going on a lot longer. I believe we should be getting up to about 500,000 kilos of fish within about three years.

Why are we here today? I'm here today because Goodman's Landing is not part of the small craft harbours plan. We're an individual fish station located on crown lands, six kilometres north of the Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation. Since 2002, we've been after Alan to try to get us some money to build a harbour. The same old thing goes on. We're not a harbour authority, and as you said before, you're not taking on any new harbours.

Everything is changing, so you have to start looking at new ideas for the future. Kinonjeoshtegon is rebuilding the fishery. They want tourism. The north end of Lake Winnipeg is not as developed as the south end. You mentioned before that there is this one 9 miles away and that one 10 miles away. Well, in the north they're 40, 50, and 60 miles away.

• (1120)

Because of the changes and the harbour we have now, we fear for the fishermen's safety and for their equipment. They're using the boats and motors and stuff that are not being protected. You'll see the high waters. There's no breakwater at all, and we've got no boat ramps. We make do. We're not complaining.

You said you had \$40,000 to hand out to harbour authorities and stuff like that. Wow, could we use 40,000 bucks! The number the small craft harbours program had come up with was going to be around \$600,000 or \$700,000.

Another issue that always comes up to the first nations communities is “Sorry, you’re a part of Indian and Northern Affairs and we can’t help you.” These are all fishermen. It’s fishermen, and you’ve got tourism in the future.

The question was asked before. I believe that if there were some real direction from the small craft harbours program, Indian and Northern Affairs would step up to the table in a joint venture, because without the organization of the small craft harbours program to initiate the harbour authorities for a separate place..... I don’t know this for sure, but something could be worked out.

Why is Goodman’s Landing a key site? It’s a key site because it will allow 75 fishers from about 25 miles north, from McBeth Point, which has a small craft harbour, to come and unload their stuff. They’re in a remote station where they’ve only got access by boat, so they kind of use that as the stopping-over point where they come back for supplies and stuff like that. So there’s 75 there.

The Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation has a barge that is running, and if there were a new harbour at Goodman’s Landing, that boat could save about eight hours on a round trip to provide them with fresher, faster access—road access. As I said before, it looks as if there’s going to be no road to the east side, so we feel we could help the communities with a shorter distance if we had a protected harbour. In the past they have been helpful in our region because they gave us some old docks. Anything we can use we look after as long as we can, and even old docks are better than none.

All—I shouldn’t say all; the other fishing communities have safe harbours for their fishermen. All we’re asking now is for you to recognize that changes are happening, and the old way of doing things, where all the fishermen were going out to the camps and this and that.... They want to be closer to their families.

I believe Goodman’s Landing is the number one site for you to be looking at for a new harbour. I know there’s a lot of red tape, because we’re not a harbour, but we really feel strongly for that.

In 2005, as you can see by the pictures, we were flooded out. The following year we had too little water. We’ve got to dredge it. The community spends about \$5,000 to \$7,500 a year dredging it out. As you know, we’re not supposed to be dredging them out, but what do you do if the boats can’t come into the harbour? You’ve got to do what you’ve got to do in the fishing industry, as everybody knows.

In asking for a new harbour, we don’t want to see any facilities decommissioned on the lake. We should keep those other facilities running because we don’t know what’s going to happen in the future. Keep them running on the lake because we don’t know what’s going to happen in 20 years. There’s very little maintenance to a facility that’s not being used every day. So I wouldn’t want to see any changes to any existing harbours.

•(1125)

Somebody mentioned a little earlier the idea of “build it and they will come”. The Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation started revitalizing their station, and do you know what? They did come. Now we need your help in ensuring that those people who are coming can have a safe harbour.

Just for your information, because you guys were asking about this before—and this is only my opinion—our family has also been on the lake for a hundred years. We had traders on the boat. I’ve personally seen a lot of these small craft harbours coming into Warren Landing, rebuilding Black River, rebuilding Catfish Creek and Berens River. We’ve used those facilities over the years. I grew up with them.

Where was I going with that? I don’t know where I was going with that one, but it was a good one.

The Chair: Somebody may bring up some of that in the questions.

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: Yes. There you go.

The Chair: Yes, I’m sure, but we need to get our questions going.

Thank you very much for your presentation. Again, I realize you’re trying to cover a lot of ground here, but I’m sure some of this further information may come forward as we begin our questions.

Mr. MacAulay, the floor is yours.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much for coming, gentlemen.

We’ve been touring the country and listening to different sets of problems. We’ve heard overall a great report for small craft harbours as far as the front-line people are concerned.

Mr. Sigurdson, you indicated that it’s Goodman’s Landing. Am I correct?

•(1130)

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: Yes, Goodman’s Landing.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: That wharf was built solely by the community. Is it fully a first nations community?

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: The community itself?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Yes. Is everybody who fishes there a member of that first nations people?

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: Some 98% are Métis and aboriginal.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You want this committee to put in a report to the Minister of Fisheries and the government. What I would expect you want in that report is that you’d like to expand a little bit on the idea that your fishermen have a long piece to go in order to get to a safe harbour. You have to dredge it yourselves. In fact, it’s close to impossible for you to provide what you’re providing, so what you want this committee to have in its reports is the necessity of that for safety reasons and economic reasons. Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: That is correct, yes. We need a safe harbour because the fishery is growing so much, and it is an outlet for many different communities and fishing stations on the lake. We’d like that, yes.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Time is short. Mr. Traverse, the Jackhead Reserve....

First of all, thank you for coming, and there is absolutely no need to apologize. We’ve heard a lot rougher language than that over time. It was not rough at all, and we’re very pleased you’re here.

Is your wharf totally first nation? Is that fish from the Jackhead Reserve totally first nation?

Mr. Henry Traverse: Yes, we reside in Jackhead Reserve.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: How far do you have to go in order to get to a safe harbour?

Mr. Henry Traverse: As far as we're talking about here, there is no safe harbour where we come from. We're in a very critical stage here.

Also, in 2005, there were high waters here in Lake Winnipeg that totally took our wharves away and took our harbours away.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: That you built yourselves?

Mr. Henry Traverse: That we built ourselves, yes.

The other thing I wanted to mention is that this is my second time coming to give a presentation to the standing committee. The first one I went to was in Grand Rapids. I think that was in 1995 or 1996, and now I'm at this one here today. In Grand Rapids, it had to do with the FFMC again, of course, but nothing came of that.

On your question, about a year ago I was successful in trying to upgrade my harbour through what they call the EMO, the Emergency Measures Organization. They listened to my case and what my situation was. I had a 60-foot boat, but I had no harbour and no dock. What they did for me was give me some funding to a total amount of \$55,000 to upgrade my harbour, but no funding for a dock. Today I still don't have a dock.

At the same time, I want to—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: So you have the boat, but no dock.

I'll pass it to one of my other colleagues, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Whether they be aboriginal or non-aboriginal, we seem to be hearing a consistent point of view from fishermen that nobody is interested in competition with each other. What they're interested in is making sure every fisherman has reasonable access to harbour infrastructure in order to be able to prosecute a fishery while feeling safe in the process.

One of the things that probably tempers your point of view is the realization that there is a fixed pot of money within the small craft harbours budget, and if local managers were to use that fixed amount of money to do what's needed, in essence it would be taken from somebody else. Is it consistent that you are looking for more money to be put into the central and Arctic region pot to be able to deal with this?

Realistically, one of the things we're challenged by is trying to come up with a figure of how much is needed in the small craft harbours program nationally to solve this problem. We came to the conclusion in an interim report, which we tabled in the House of Commons in December 2007, that as much as a billion dollars would be required. We did so not really fully understanding exactly.... We knew we had a reasonable estimate of how much was required to fix up existing harbours, but one of the things we did not know—and

still do not know to this day—is how many harbours are out there that need to be built but are not currently within the small craft harbours program, yet still are required for the good, safe conduct of the fisheries.

Would you or organizations in which you are members be able to assist this committee by supplying that information as to what additional harbours would be required, where they are, and potentially how much they may cost?

• (1135)

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: That's where I was going with my story, but I forgot. Just being around a lake and dealing in the province all over the place, I would say that the three main harbours—and this is just my opinion—are Goodman's Landing, number one; Frog Bay, because it's changing and they're getting more fishers there; and Lake Winnipegosis, where they're using an old barge right now.

But off Lake Winnipeg, there are tons of places that nobody remembers. You're talking about places like Pukatawagan, but there's nothing in Pukatawagan. Everybody in the north is trying to develop a fishery, as there's such high unemployment, and the fishery is the main thing. If they can get the freight cost down, which a lot of communities up north are doing, you're going to start having requests from up north. It's not like the south, where they have the big cities, the politicians, and this and that. They're not sure how to go about it.

You guys should be asking yourselves, hey, on that committee, we should not just have the people who have always been going to meetings, but have some more real people, some new input into what's happening in small craft harbours—and not for the big lakes. There are other lakes, like Lake Manitoba, Lake Winnipegosis, etc., that have all been ignored over the years. I'm not sure about the amount of dollars you're spending, but there are all the small lakes you could consider.

Fishing is the only thing that northern communities have—their major money is from fishing—and they can't develop it without help. I'm not saying that we...because everybody is building their own docks. Don't get me wrong: everybody is living with what they have. It's frustrating, because as you build, you keep putting the cost onto the fishermen for dredging, and for this and that. The community is steadily paying out, and we're asking ourselves, didn't they close down that dock over there, and didn't they decommission that one over there and the other one over there? Now you're saying that the lump sum of money is only for existing facilities, but if you decommissioned this one, shouldn't we be right there? You closed one location because nobody was using that facility. That's only right. But now, because our facility is being utilized even more, we feel we should get....

So there is a whole bunch of issues, and if there's anything I can do on a future committee or something, I would really be willing to put in an effort there.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stoffer.

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

Thank you both very much.

Sir, on the east and west coasts we hear a lot of concerns about dredging, as there is a lot of silt and that. Now, I ask this question out of ignorance, but where is the silt coming from? Is it silt coming from the rivers that builds up in your harbours and causes you to have to dredge, or what?

• (1140)

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: I'm just going to talk about Lake Winnipeg. The biggest problem now is that there are only two or three big boats. That's why you haven't been hearing a whole bunch, because there used to be 30 to 40 boats travelling on the lake, but now we're down to two or three.

The biggest problem with dredging is in the rivers. For instance, the Jackhead River was completely dry. We have 35 fishermen, because we don't have enough room at Goodman's Landing. They have to take their boats to the river, and when the wind is blowing from the north at 45 miles an hour, they have to jump out of their boats and pull their boats across the sandbar to get them into the river. Then they ask if they can dig out the river. Well, you know what happens there: you can't touch it because of the fish, and this and that. If the river is blocked, the fish can't get up there anyway—and it's after spawning season anyway.

On Lake Winnipeg right now, it's mostly about the rivers and access to the harbours within 600 to 2,000 yards off these facilities, I would say, which have to be cleaned out. Without the big dredging system—I don't want to rule out anything—there are ideas that maybe there's a smaller system that could be helping to clean these out. Sometimes backhoes and drag lines are just not enough; you need a smaller barge-type vessel. It doesn't have to be operated by the government; it could be operated by anybody.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: You also indicated that there was some sort of northern provincial funding that helped build a particular wharf. One of the concerns, of course, that I would assume any government would have is that if they're going to spend hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars building a wharf facility, they want to ensure that it has long-term future viability. Obviously that would depend on fish stocks. Without fish, you don't have fishermen, thus the wharf would become derelict in that regard. Obviously, as we've heard today, the fish stocks, especially for pickerel, are doing quite well in Lake Winnipeg. For the foreseeable future, with the sorts of restrictions in place, it looks like it can continue to do well, as long as the lake remains healthy and everything else.

So young people, especially on reserves like Jackhead, looking at this for opportunity, need to see some sort of infrastructure that allows them to continue to carry on what their uncle or father or mother did in that regard.

In your personal view, is there a long-term, viable future for the fishery in your community and in Mr. Traverse's as well? If indeed that's the case, is there any joint possibility of provincial buy-in or cross-jurisdictional buy-in with federal departments as well? Right now, DFO small craft harbours has a big enough job just looking after the ones they're responsible for. Adding new ones is not necessarily going to be a hard sell, but it will be a request. We need to make that request on the basis that it's a long-term, economical, viable solution for these particular communities.

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: Well, for Goodman's Landing, yes. I deal with Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation. They also deal with Fisher River First Nation. The fishermen there are going to be there for 20 to 30 more years. That's all I can answer. At Kinonjeoshtegon they've set up an initiative for the younger people to start getting into it. But every time they go out with their dad and they have to pull their yawl into the station, or they go park in the station and their boat flips over, it's kind of discouraging. You know, their boat flips over, and they have to do this, and they say, "Then why do we work, because we just had to spend \$1,000 fixing our boat?" The situation is kind of depressing right off the bat.

As far as the province and the feds getting together and the first nations getting together, anything is possible. I mean, we've asked for \$5,000 from the provincial government to help us out and stuff like that, and we haven't received anything. They say to go to the small craft harbours program. We're not saying it has to be owned by the small craft harbours branch. We'd prefer it, because that's the organization that decommissioned some of the stations, which led to more fishermen at our station. So we feel that under that organization it will be protected. And it will give the younger people something to look forward to because they'll be seeing some progress in that industry.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

We'll go to Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have just a couple of quick questions for both of you. How many people live in either of these reserves? Am I right in saying that they're different reserves? What's the population of Jackhead?

Mr. Henry Traverse: What I said earlier was that we have about 100 houses. The population is about 300.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I represent some reserves in my riding back in Alberta. There's a tremendous growth rate. Most of the people are young. Would it be fair to say that there are quite a few young people on the Jackhead Reserve? Is it growing?

Mr. Henry Traverse: Yes, we have lots of young people. We don't have anything going for them right now, but I know that this fishery is the backbone we have. That's all we have to defend ourselves, in many ways. You add up the cost of gasoline, hydro, and everything at the end of the day, and you don't have anything to take home.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: There are no band-owned corporations, or anything like that?

Mr. Henry Traverse: As I said, we're a very small community, and our funding is not that high. It's not that great either. We have local jobs that are available for people who have held onto them ever since the funding started in our community. Some of them are hereditary jobs. We don't have any long-term plans other than what my friend Kevin here was talking about.

Goodman's Landing...yes, we produce a lot of fish there, but our community doesn't benefit a red penny from Goodman's Landing. That's the truth about it today.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: There's subsistence fishing, there are treaty rights, but we're not talking about that kind of fishing. We're talking about commercial fishing. Now, a first nations person in Manitoba, if they were going to engage in commercial fishing, would have to go through the same commercial fishing process that any other commercial fisherman in Manitoba would have to go through. Is that right?

Mr. Henry Traverse: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: So how many commercial fishermen are there who are members of the Jackhead Band?

Mr. Henry Traverse: There are about 28, but we have these small quotas that we buy from each other, A lot of them are 10,000-pound quotas. A lot of us hold three or four for one young person and one family. But our young people can't get into the fishing industry because of the situation. Everything has gone up. On the price to buy a quota today, I think right now they're selling them for \$23,000 in my community, and there's no financial.... The banks won't look at a young person—no credibility, nothing. So it's sad.

I was brought up depending on this lake. I was not born in a hospital. I was born right on the shores of this lake that you see out there. I was brought up that way, so I'm very thankful for that today. I try to show that to my grandchildren today so they can feel good about themselves and understand who they are.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Banks have a hard time lending money to people who don't have any equity. They don't own their own home; they don't have any physical assets. There are hard messages out there and there are some positive things that can happen. If building a wharf is going to do it, if it's going to allow some economic development.... I'd just be curious about what kinds of assurances... because there have been lots of grand plans, and some of these things do get funding and some of these things don't turn out to be quite as grand as what was originally envisioned.

I'd like to give Kevin an opportunity to respond.

● (1150)

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: I'm going to clarify that I'm acting for Goodman's Landing fisheries, which is owned by Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation, and that is the Jackhead Reserve, as Henry is talking about. Henry is with Jackhead Fisheries. He has another harbour on reserve. Goodman's Landing is off reserve, on crown land.

You were asking him a question about the people. There are actually 29 fishermen from Jackhead and 14 helpers, and the balance are from the Fisher River First Nation.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: So it's the same thing, only different.

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: Yes, it's the same thing, only different.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: So rather than having the wharf on band land, then, I guess the opportunity exists to have the wharf over at Goodman's Landing.

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: At Goodman's Landing, yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That is adjacent to, but not on, band land—and the fishermen from Jackhead use Goodman's Landing right now.

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: No, they can't because there's no room there. Right now they bring their boats into the river and just park in

the river, and that's because they can't park at Goodman's Landing. They can't get in.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Is there a desire from the younger people in the community to get involved?

Mr. Henry Traverse: Historically, we have to keep the government of the day accountable for their actions and how they address first nations issues, from where I come from. One of the gentlemen here had asked a question, but since he's from another region, I can't speak for anybody else other than my own community, or for where I come from.

We just finished negotiations last week with the provincial government, trying to get recognition for what we need in our home communities. It's been going on for too many years now. Other people have benefited from our misery.

For my part, I don't have a job. All I realize is fishing. I'm comfortable with that; I'm not a fussy person, but I'd like to express myself that way this morning. I feel good. I have a breath of life; I've been given a breath of life this morning. I feel good about that, as it's the kind of person I am. I want to say that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you very much. Thank you for coming.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: Could I just add something here?

You were asking about the viability, and stuff like that, of the fishing. Basically, at McBeth Point, which is about 25 miles north of us, there are about 145 to 180 fishermen, and it's a protected area, so none of those licences or commercial quotas, representing about 600,000 kilos, can be sold out of those areas. Those licences always have to stay in that particular area of the lake, so the viability of the fishing is locked in there.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Basically, you are saying that your lake is zoned?

Mr. Kevin Sigurdson: Yes, it is zoned into 12 areas. Years ago, there was one area that was allowed to sell outside, and basically the community ended up selling everything except about five licences. That was stopped and they put zones in there, so the viability of the fishing in the Goodman's Landing area is going to be around for a long time.

There is more of an opportunity with the whitefish fishery. Normally they have gone further north and they've stayed at stations. Now the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation is looking at shutting down the station there. We could also draw about 12- to 50-foot boats to come in there to deliver their fish, because they're changing where they can fish their fish; they don't have to go as far north, because there is so much whitefish around. So even that enhances Goodman's future.

● (1155)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank you for your presentations here this morning, once again. As I said, it's a different perspective, a different issue, and we certainly welcome those comments.

As we've travelled around Canada, we've heard some different quotes on the same thing, with different words. This is a brand-new one, so we'll take this one into consideration too.

I'd like to thank our witnesses. I'd like to thank the hosts here for having us, and everybody involved in the presentations. This will clew up our cross-Canada tour today, and we'll be working on putting forward a report later on in the fall. If anything arises over the next couple of months that you think we should be made aware

of, and which you didn't have the opportunity to express here today, feel free to pass it on to the analyst or the clerk of the committee, and certainly that will also be made part and parcel of our report.

Once again, thank you very much for your time. We had a great trip here to Gimli, and we appreciate your hospitality.

The meeting is adjourned.

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