



House of Commons  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans**

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FOPO • NUMBER 039 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, June 3, 2008**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Fabian Manning**

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## Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Tuesday, June 3, 2008

• (0905)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.)):** Good morning, everyone. We'll now call the meeting to order.

We're meeting this morning for a briefing on a possible cod quota reduction in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

I would like to welcome our special guests with us this morning and our committee members. Our guests this morning are from an association of boat owner-operators from the Gaspésie. We have Mr. Couillard, and Mr. Cotton.

Gentlemen, you have ten minutes to make an opening statement to the committee. I don't know who's going to present the case.

Mr. Cotton, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Réginald Cotton (Fishermen's Representative, Association des capitaines-propriétaires de la Gaspésie):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Réginald Cotton, et I am from Rivière-au-Renard in the Gaspé. I am one of the groundfishers who have been forced to fish small, temporary shrimp quotas since the moratorium.

We have provided you with the document on which we have been working for almost a year now. I am the spokesperson for the Association des capitaines-propriétaires de la Gaspésie. I represent nine mid-shore fishermen's associations from the southern gulf. I am the spokesperson for the Association des pêcheurs de la MRC Pabok, for the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels des Îles-de-la-Madeleine, for the Association québécoise de l'industrie de la pêche, for the Association des pêcheurs de poisson de fonds acadiens, for the Association des pêcheurs spécialistes indépendants du poisson de fond, for the Association des morutiers professionnels de la Gaspésie, for the Northern Cape Breton Fishing Vessels Association, and for the Prince Edward Island Groundfish Association. Moreover, two governments are working in partnership with us, the Government of Quebec and the Government of Nova Scotia. I represent all those groups.

I am here today because there is an important problem regarding cod in the southern gulf. There is a huge gap between what the science is saying, and what fishers are seeing and catching out at sea. The same thing happen in the northern gulf. The gulf is divided into two parts. The northern gulf is managed separately by Newfound-

land and the Institut Maurice-Lamontagne. The southern gulf is managed out of Moncton.

Several years ago, things in the northern gulf changed. Newfoundland fishermen would go fishing, catch cod, and see cod. They said so to the scientists managing the northern gulf, and things improved for them.

Last week, the fishing plan for the northern gulf was announced. Fishermen will be allowed to catch 7,000 tonnes of cod. The biomass is much greater in the southern gulf, and there is talk of instituting a third moratorium. As I said earlier, the fishers and the associations that represent them are seeing a huge gap between what they see and what science perceives. We would like to close that gap and remedy the problem to some extent. We would like to harmonize the fishery in the north and south, which would mean changing certain things.

For example, let me tell you about the tool people in the southern gulf are using to inventory stock — the trawler. They use it to catch cod and inventory cod stocks. That trawler dates back to Noah's time. Even fishermen stopped using it in the 1950s because they could not get it to work. At the same time, there are other things that I will not go into since all those details are in the document we distributed.

The northern gulf stopped using that trawler several years ago. And scientists in the northern gulf say that catches in that sector have gone up fivefold. That does not mean the cod suddenly appeared — it was already there. However, because the inventorying tool works much better, it provides a better picture of what is there. I am not going to go on too long about this, since you have the document.

We are asking the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to do something to improve the data on the southern gulf. For economic reasons, DFO dropped one of the inventorying trips several years ago, so there is no longer a spring inventory. This is the gulf, and in the Gaspé the cod come in during the spring and leave during the fall. I am fairly convinced — as are all fishers and associations that I represent, even the governments I represent — that the best way of measuring cod stocks coming into the Gulf of St. Lawrence is to measure and count the fish that come in in spring.

One major criticism we have is that DFO people — the scientists in Moncton — are measuring stock in the southern gulf in August. That is when they do the inventory. I am probably the only fisher here today, and with good reason, but if you ask all Atlantic fishers, even professionals will agree with me in saying that no one has ever been able to fish for cod in August. I am 57 now, and I have been fishing since I was 16 or 17. It has always been that way. We do not know why.

We, the fishermen, think that it is probably because the cod is living the gulf in the fall in preparation for its migration. I don't know whether this cod is in another water column or in areas where we can't find it, but scientists take advantage of this time of year to take inventory of the stocks. That is one of the main reasons why these people don't have any data. Every time they go out, there are no cod.

I can draw a parallel with the salmon fishery. In our region in the Gaspé Peninsula, there are highly ranked major spawning rivers. At the end of the 1800s, when the Canadian and Quebec governments realized that the Americans were very interested in salmon from the Gaspé, they first tried to inventory the fish stocks. They started to do that inventory when the salmon fishery opened. They realized that they could not find almost any salmon because during the salmon run, the salmon are going back into the river. So when they tried to count the fry in the salmon pools, they could not find very many. It's not that they didn't find any, it's that they didn't see them.

When the light is poor, it is impossible to see the salmon on the bottom. Most of the time, salmon hide behind large rocks. They hide under large tree trunks lying on the bottom of the riverbed. They are impossible to count. Scientists realized over the years, given the great interest in salmon sports fishing, that they could count them during the salmon run. That is why this method is still used today. In most major salmon rivers in Quebec and elsewhere, the salmon are counted during the salmon run, and that is the method that is still used today.

So, an easy way to understand what is happening in the southern part of the Gulf of St. Lawrence is to measure, as we've done in the past, the number of fish running upstream, but using modern methods.

The debate centres around this issue. Since the north has changed because of the trawler, various other things needed to be changed. Whether you are in the northern or southern part of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, even if there is an imaginary line drawn by humans, the cod don't necessarily recognize that line. We're talking about the same species, cod, in both the northern and southern part of the gulf. You can think of the Gulf of St. Lawrence as a lake. Even if it is separated into two, there is no reason to adopt such different methods in the northern and southern gulf.

That is why fishers have had a lot of questions for the past 15 years. The gap is growing exponentially year after year with scientists in the southern gulf, from Moncton. That is why we are here today. We are asking the Canadian government to closely examine this issue. Thanks to the work of scientists, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has quantitative data. But we know full well that thanks to our knowledge and our experience, we can provide it with

qualitative data that is as valuable as the quantitative data provided by scientists.

Last summer, I took part in a science exchange in my region, Anse-à-Beaufils, in an old plant that had been renovated into an arts centre. Scientists and academics from all over took part in this exchange. To my great surprise, I was invited to this event as a fisherman by the Government of Quebec and the Canadian government. There were some 100 people in the room, and I was the only fisherman. I wondered what I was doing there, alongside academics with titles as long as your arm. I was a bit surprised. The exchange was on climate change.

I was the first to get questions. I was asked, first, what I thought about climate change and what I had observed at sea. I shared my observations. They all told me that I was completely right. The groundfish are the most sensitive organisms to changes or climate change.

I have been saying that since the end of the 1980s. Even at the end of the 1980s, when we were catching a lot of cod, I was telling scientists that something was happening, because we could no longer catch the cod where we used to. For years, I, my colleagues and representatives of associations have been saying that the migration pattern had changed. But, not much has changed in the southern gulf, scientifically speaking.

Mr. Chair, we are asking our government to give us a chance. In our brief, we are asking for a three-year project, with a TAC of 4,000 tonnes. You might think that 4,000 tonnes is a lot, but for the fishermen in the entire Gulf of St. Lawrence, this is not a lot. I can tell you that, with a TAC of 1,500 to 2,000 tonnes for the southern gulf, the picture will look pretty bleak.

● (0910)

Four thousand tonnes would be appropriate if all the fishermen went out to sea. It is easy today, every fisherman knows what he can catch, be he from the Maritimes, Quebec, the Magdalen Islands or anywhere else. If it were set at 4,000 tonnes, every fisherman would go out. We are asking the government to record and analyze each trip by each fisherman. We strongly believe that the situation would be better than with a moratorium of 2,000 or 500 tonnes.

Mr. Chair, like all those whom I represent, I believe that the worst harm done to the biomass in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence was the result of the fishery being closed.

Here's an example that I often use when I'm asked to talk about the fisheries. If someone in my family had cancer, I would isolate them in a corner and leave them there. Because they had cancer they would be left to die in peace, even if it took two or three years. Why not take a chance and try to see other doctors or get other medication? It's the same thing with regard to the fishery. We, the fishermen, are here because of our experience, just like the fishermen from Newfoundland. If fishermen from Newfoundland have convinced scientists to change some things we should do the same in the southern gulf.

•(0915)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Excuse me, but we allocate ten minutes for your opening statement, so could you try to wrap it up now, because we're going to a period of questions and answers after this. I'm sure some of the things you want to say you'll be able to say in answer to some of the questions. So could you please just finish your opening remarks, and then we'll go to the questions and answers, because we have another set of witnesses coming after you.

[Translation]

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have said what I came to say. The people who are around the table have all received our brief. I won't say any more. Perhaps my colleague, Mr. Couillard, has something to add.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Couillard (Technical Advisor, Association des capitaines-propriétaires de la Gaspésie):** To summarize the problem of assessing the health of cod stocks and the gap between scientists and the industry, I would add that the bond of trust is broken. The only way to bring things back into balance and bring the two parties to talk to one another is to try for a genuinely cooperative approach through a partnership program between industry and the scientists. When I say industry, I mean fishers. When scientists assess cod stocks, they often forget about the socio-economic and socio-cultural environment, and do not take into account the impact of their findings on the fishers. In our document, we are also asking for a partnership program when the assessment structure is implemented. We want to be involved in deciding how data is gathered and what criteria are established to assess the health of cod stocks, particularly in the sector under discussion.

Lastly, DFO always takes the precautionary approach, which is extremely difficult for the industry and fishers. The precautionary approach is an extremely significant factor, just like sustainable development and the sustainable envelope and budget put forward by DFO. Scientists who apply the precautionary approach at DFO have given it a definition as "Erring on the side of caution." However, they are erring so far on the side of caution that it is unnecessarily making life very difficult for fishers. What we do not want is erring too far on the side of caution.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you very much, Mr. Couillard.

We'll now go to our round of questioning, beginning with Mr. Regan, please.

[Translation]

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, Mr. Cotton and Mr. Couillard, I would like to thank you for coming here today. This is quite an important day for the fishers of your region. I am very concerned about your situation, as are most likely all members here today.

We have received a table entitled "Captures and total allowable catch of cod in NAFO Division 4T in 2004-2007". Do you have the table? You will be given a copy.

The table shows the total allowable catch (TAC) in each year from 2004 to 2007. The captures account for some three quarters of the TAC. That worries me somewhat. How do you explain that apparent trend?

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** Thank for your question. I am very glad that you asked this, because I said earlier that I was primarily a groundfish fisherman, though with the last two consecutive moratoria, we were allowed temporarily to catch shrimp.

When we fish for shrimp, we cannot fish for cod. For several years, the problem with the cod fishery in the southern gulf has been that it opens at the beginning of July. So we cannot fish for cod.

Secondly, most of the time, even though this is probably not in the notes, fishers with mobile gear catch almost 100 per cent of their quota, almost all the time. The remainder used fixed gear, and there is a problem with respect to fishing seasons and fixed gear in Quebec. For several years now, I believe that Quebec and other provinces have been putting forward some demands on this issue. We have to wait for the lobster fishery in the Atlantic to be over before the cod fishery can open. But fixed gear boats and other small inshore boats have to do without the cod for that reason, when the cod does not come close to shore.

When I said that we did not get some three quarters of the captures back, that is in relation to this sort of problem, not because there was no cod.

•(0920)

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I see. I understand that the scientific inventories of cod stocks prepared over the past few years were done using different boats. I do not know the difference between the types of gear used, but in your opinion, does using a different boat have an impact on DFO data?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Couillard:** What I can tell you on that is this: recently, we commissioned an assessment by a fishing equipment expert, and managed to show that when fishing gear is poorly adjusted, it does not only show the wrong readings—low readings—but might show that the catch for the assessment is zero. That is the particular reason for which fishers do not really feel that the scientific data have credibility.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** So this is not because different boats are involved. That has nothing to do with it.

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** No, because DFO scientists have a formula—I don't know what they call it, but I'm sure some people here know—that makes it possible for them to compensate for the discrepancy between the two boats.

But that is not why we are taking action. We have a great many problems that date back many years. In our brief, there is testimony that mentions Mr. Cyril Burns, of Cape Breton.

Historically, Fisheries and Oceans Canada chartered fishing boats with skilled fishing crews and captains to inventory stock. At some point, I don't know in what year, but it is stated in the document—a fisher who presented himself with his crew would trawl 24,000 pounds of fish in a single pass. The scientists told him that he was causing them some difficulty because under normal circumstances he should not have been catching cod. So that was the end of it: scientists on the boats said that they would no longer agree to have fishers with them to inventory stock. We consider that unfortunate.

What I'm going to tell you might seem amusing, but it is as if people don't want to find any fish in the southern part of the gulf. We are not here for nothing, and we have not done all this work for nothing. It has been difficult and long. It is difficult for us to leave the Gaspé and come here three or four times a year. It is expensive and difficult, but we do it anyway because we know full well that what the scientists are saying—that in 20 or 40 years there will no longer be any cod in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence—is not true. It is not true at all. We, the fishers of the southern gulf, are like the people of Newfoundland, we see cod and we catch cod. We are not saying that there are the 200,000 or 260,000 tonnes there were in the early 1980s, but there is some. I think that Canadians might be able to use it. With the knowledge we have today, we could allow Canadians to enjoy the little fish we catch, because otherwise, the seals get them.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** So in your opinion, the DFO trawler that did the inventory in the southern gulf did not do a good job.

What would you recommend for the system to be more efficient?

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** Earlier, I talked about harmonizing the north and south. After all, we are inventorying the same species and the same body of water, even though that body of water is split in two by some imaginary line put there by human beings. It is the same Gulf of St. Lawrence. If things are working so well in the north, why can't we harmonize the south with the north?

Scientists at the Institut Maurice-Lamontagne who are looking at the northern gulf changed their boat for a shrimp trawler, which is called a Campelen trawler. Why could we not use one in the southern gulf? We have been asking the advisory committee for these things for years, but to no avail. People are telling us that the data in the southern gulf are not changing. The U.S. is coming to see those data. I don't believe we have anything to learn from the U.S. We should do our own work. And if the system is working well in the north, we should be applying the same system in the south. People would just be happy about it.

We are not saying that cod is present in the same numbers as it was in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but we should allow Canadians to participate in the fishery. If we can catch some, we should have the right to do.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Mr. Byrne, do you have a question?

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

What you're telling us, if I am reading you correctly, is that the scientific evidence that's in place is completely false compared to the biomass reality of the southern gulf.

I'll give you some supporting evidence for that. You may be aware that the cod fishery in 4RS was shut down in 2003 because of the lack of the resource. Well, of course the cod fishery in 2007 in 4RS, in the northern gulf, was set at 7,000 metric tonnes. So it went from zero tonnes in 2003 to 7,000 tonnes in 2007. So could somebody explain to me that if the scientific evidence that led the closure of the cod fishery was accurate, how can the cod fishery now support a 7,000 metric tonne quota in 2007?

To me there seems to be a systemic problem with DFO's scientific credibility in collecting this information and in prescribing proper commercial approaches to the harvesting of this resource. You are doing a pre-emptive strike here to prevent that same mistake from happening in the southern gulf.

I want to put something to you. In the proposed new fisheries act, the powers of the minister are limited. You are here to implore the minister to use his existing powers to set quotas as he sees fit, and to have those decisions unchallenged by any court. Under the new fisheries act, the minister would actually have the requirement to follow scientific advice, as it exists, whether or not that scientific advice is responsible, reasonable, or meets the test of common sense. That requirement is in the proposed bill before Parliament today. If he doesn't follow that advice, various environmental organizations can challenge the decision of the minister in a federal court and create an injunction against the prosecution of the fishery.

Is the answer to the southern gulf's problem simply to pass the new fisheries act and to let ports decide what is appropriate or inappropriate, or would you rather have a minister with the ability to make judgments based not only on scientific evidence as it exists, but also on the evidence brought forward by fishermen from organizations that you represent, evidence that is not necessarily scientific-based, but based on generations of experience of being on the water?

Yes or no?

• (0925)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Excuse me, Mr. Cotton. Before you answer, I just want to say that we're going way over time because of the length of the question. I don't want to take time away from Mr. Blais, who I am sure we want to hear, so could you give as brief a response as possible, please?

[Translation]

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** The law hasn't changed. I can give you an example. Earlier, I said that one of my colleagues, a fisher from Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, went to sea with scientists and caught 24,000 pounds of cod. Normally, the scientists should have said that, if the cod was present in such large quantities, the cod fishery could be reopened. I said that there is no cod at all in August, just because there isn't any. There isn't any cod anywhere.

I know that the new legislation could limit the powers of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. We believe that making such changes to the legislation or to the powers of the minister is not the issue. We want things to change. We are talking about shared stewardship. I have worked under a system of that kind. Shared stewardship and co-management are the same thing. Fishers will have to have a real voice in decision-making rather than have decisions imposed on them as they have been for years. Scientists give the orders, and we have to comply.

On the ground, like the fishers of Newfoundland, that is why we want things to change. If we find cod, we should be able to calculate how much there is, so that we can determine whether we can allow fishers to take some of it. Otherwise, the grey seal get them.

I would like to tell you that at present, in the southern gulf, there are worms—not just in cod, but also in capelin, turbot and halibut. Turbot is a lucrative fishery, in fact, it is the second-largest fishery in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in dollar terms. It brings in \$1 a pound to fishers. However, when you take out one, two or three worms from fish in the net, once the fish is frozen it leaves a yellow mark that makes it unsuitable for marketing. Then what do we do? Do we let the seals catch the cod rather than have the fishers catch them? Wherever I go, I ask whether taxes get paid by seals or fishers. I think that at some point we will have to make a choice and remedy this.

• (0930)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you very much, Mr. Cotton.

We'll now move to Mr. Blais.

[Translation]

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

Hello, Réginald and Jean-Pierre. You spoke a little bit about the impacts of a possible moratorium. For the benefit of my colleagues, I would like you to elaborate somewhat. There is some hint that there could indeed be a moratorium.

A moratorium would have repercussions on the fleet, the fishers, communities and businesses, but also on the history and gathering of data. Boats and fishing operations would no longer be in the southern gulf to tell us what is really going on, as you are today in your testimony. I would like your views on those repercussions.

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** There is no doubt the repercussions would be enormous. For example, some 20 years ago, there were about 60 mid-shore fishing boats in the Gaspé. Today, in the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands, there are only 18 mid-shore boats with a groundfish licence. It's the same thing in other provinces. By contrast, 20 years ago, there were 63 mid-shore boats in Newfoundland, and there are still 63 there today. Those fishers were compensated through shrimp licences. For Gaspé fishers, the fishers that I represent, the impacts will be significant because we have no shrimp licences. We depend completely on temporary shrimp allocations. About a month ago, we had to go out on the streets to try to win back what we had lost.

Sales figures for a mid-shore boat are about \$100,000. Insurance on those boats costs between \$12,000 and \$15,000 a year. Then it's over, and we can't fish for anything else. In our region, plant workers will not even be eligible for employment insurance. You cannot do enough hours to be eligible for EI with the little shrimp we get. The impacts are huge.

In our region, people fish for crab and all kinds of other species. We get calls from everywhere, from all provinces, telling us that fishers are catching a lot of cod in their crab traps. As far as I know, a crab trap is not the right fishing gear for cod. If they are managing to catch that much cod in their crab traps, it's because there is cod. We're not saying there is a great deal of it, but there is some. All these negative repercussions make no sense. Some communities depend on the fishery, and communities will die because people can't go fishing. The small amounts of shrimp we get will not make it possible for us to make ends meet. When we want to charter our boats in the spring, we go to the bank, and people ask us what we'll be fishing for. We don't know. We can't charter our boats in the spring because it costs about \$20,000, and we can't borrow money to charter it because we don't know what we'll be fishing for.

Those are the repercussions, Mr. Blais. The repercussions bring death by inches. The repercussions bring the disappearance of fleets like ours. These needs have been created over the years, as they have in other provinces.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Earlier, you mentioned grey seal at the end of your remarks. Grey seals are much more voracious than harp seals, with which we are also familiar. They are much larger and quite ubiquitous. There are repercussions. We know full well they eat cod. We also note that the department has not made much effort with regard to the grey seal. As you noted, we are penalizing a group of fishers that honourably fish their quota of cod, or try to do so, while we let grey seals eat an important resource.

If efforts were made to keep down the grey seal population, do you think that might eventually compensate for losses and reduce the repercussions on cod stocks?

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** You are absolutely right. Twenty years ago, there were approximately 7,000 grey seals. Today, the herd has grown to between 70,000 and 100,000 seals. What is unique about the grey seal is that it lives within the gulf, along the coast. They can be found across the Gaspé.

Let me give you an example. At the tip of Forillon Park in the Gaspé, people have developed boating expeditions, seeing that there was some money to make there. They operate expeditions to do some grey seal watching. There isn't any cod left along the coast.

I would like to draw a parallel between the seals and the coyotes in the Gaspé. Deer hunting used to be a quite lucrative business in our area. At one point, scientists established a coyote population. They said that that would balance things out and that nature would do its work. The coyotes then multiplied and ate all the deer. That is a fact, you can verify it. The hunt was shut down for some 10 years. Snowmobilers and hunters made a concerted attempt to eliminate the coyotes. The hunt reopened four or five years ago. Things are going well, there are deer, and we are monitoring the coyote population.

As for the seals, they live along the coast, and there is no cod in the vicinity. A parallel can be drawn between the seals and the coyotes. As soon as a cod ventures close to the coast, it is eaten by a grey seal. Moreover, there is nothing much we can do about the grey seals. I think that we will have to rectify the situation and reduce the herd to what it was in the early 1970s. It just doesn't make sense. Once again, I insist, seals don't pay taxes, Canadians do. We should correct the situation. The grey seals are eating the cod we should normally be fishing.

•(0935)

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** I would like to touch on something else during this round of questions. I would like to hear you talk about the impact of the moratoriums and your current understanding of the situation in the region. If cod fishing were to be halted in the southern part of the gulf, that would mean that we would only get an idea of what's going on during a small part of the year. As well, you disagree on when the data is collected. The impact of a moratorium on operations at sea is therefore very obvious.

Could you expand on that idea?

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** Of course. As I said earlier, fishers think that the cod biomass in the southern gulf will be greatly harmed if we stop making regular checks of the situation, especially if we close down fishing. Fisheries and Oceans Canada scientists in the southern gulf go out in August. The situation can be verified, and that is why we are here today, as I indicated earlier. Year after year, they tell us that it is harmful, that things are not back to normal, that there is no cod, etc. Why then have all crabbers in the southern gulf been catching cod in their traps for the past few years? Because there is cod in the area. Scientists are simply not going out at the right moment.

Earlier, I gave you the example of someone who is sick, and who is left to die in a corner without being given a chance. Why couldn't a project such as what we are advocating not be created? In cooperation with the scientists, we could collect both qualitative and quantitative data. I think that is how we should work from now on. We would know exactly what is going on in the southern gulf, as was the case in the north. That is where the problem lies, Mr. Blais. Year after year, we have been putting those demands forward to the various advisory committees, because no one wants to change anything.

Another moratorium would be harmful because we think that the fishers would disappear. I am at an age when I will be retiring from fishing in the not-too-distant future. There are not many young people in the Gaspé willing to take up the trade. Because of the gloomy feeling in the fisheries and of all that has been announced, people are leaving the Gaspé, the Magdalen Islands or the Maritime provinces to work in the major centres. There are not many replacement fishers, but if we lose the expertise... As you know, cod in the Gaspé is a matter of culture. All the communities were developed around that resource.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you very much, Mr. Cotton.

We'll now go to Mr. Stoffer, please.

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

Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming today.

Sir, have you had an opportunity to share these recommendations with local DFO people, like the regional director for the area? If you have, what discussion did you have with them on these proposals you've made?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Couillard:** We wanted a political decision to be made to somewhat counter the scientific tendency. Immediately after having drafted the document, we went to meet with the scientists in Moncton, directly on the ground. It was, in a way, an enemy ground. We explained our approach to them. We told them that we were calling for a political decision, because we disagreed with them on their analysis of the health of the biomass. They listened to our demands, our point of view. Nevertheless, they disagree with us because they do not recognize fishers' qualitative assessment. They adhere strictly to a quantitative approach.

And yet, we know full well that from a scientific perspective, the quantitative approach accounts for neither socio-cultural and socio-economic components nor the impact felt by coastal communities. The impact is felt not only in the Gaspé, but also in Newfoundland. Not too long ago, we spoke about the disastrous consequences of the first moratorium in 1992 on fishing communities. In our area, we experienced the same situation as in the Maritime provinces. Villages were literally emptied of their inhabitants. In normal times, generations of young people would have decided on a career in the fishing industry because it is a culture, a world unto itself, a life that is completely foreign to that in the major centres. But all that has changed.

To some extent, that is what we are blaming scientists for, and that is why we went to Moncton to share our point of view with them. We told them that we would not do things in a clandestine manner. We tried convincing them to take part in a partnership project. Given that scientists' reading of the health of the biomass is in complete opposition to that of the fishing industry, which is really based on a qualitative assessment, we asked them to eventually assist us in conceiving a partnership project.

We have to realize that a partnership program involving the fishing industry and scientists is necessary, and that we can make a yearly assessment, and then changes. During the meeting, we told them that if they supported our approach, i.e., 4,000 tonnes over three years, the partnership program would allow us to clearly assess the health of the biomass. We also told them that if, at the end of the four-year assessment period, we also came to the conclusion that the health of the biomass was deteriorating, we would truly respect the precautionary approach and sustainable development strategy.



● (0940)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Before Mr. Stoffer asks his next question, I'm just going to ask committee members and our witnesses if we could please make our questions and answers more succinct and to the point. Mr. Stoffer's time has just about elapsed with one question, which was fairly short, and your answer. So could we try to tighten it up a bit, because I'm sure members want to ask as many questions as possible.

Mr. Stoffer.

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

I think my question was whether you had a chance to speak to the senior management levels there. But most importantly, has your organization had an opportunity to have independent scientists, outside of DFO, give an analysis of the DFO science's survey data, in terms of a peer review? Have you had an opportunity to compare in that regard?

[Translation]

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** In keeping with our discussions with the office of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, i.e., with the science director, we are now considering the matter with an independent party in order to determine our next steps. We were told that a meeting would be held in September to deal with all that.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Mr. Keddy.

**Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to our witnesses.

There's been a fair amount of information discussed here today, and I certainly appreciate that. There were a number of statements made, certainly by my colleagues.... And I realize, Mr. Chairman, that this is not a question; this is going to be a statement, and it comes out of my time.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** You'll be joining the group, then, to make a statement.

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** I'm always disappointed when we have politicians who tend to try to drive a wedge between the scientific community and the fishermen. What we should be doing, quite frankly, is trying to get fishermen and the scientific community working more closely together, because they're your greatest ally. Rather than just taking someone's word for it, when you have more time go back and read the new Fisheries Act, and make your own judgments about it and what it does for the minister and the minister's ability to enforce the act.

We've been looking at the southern cod stocks in the gulf since I've been a member of Parliament, which has been eleven years. Everything we've seen has shown that the stock has been under pressure for that entire period of time. The cod are smaller; they're not maturing to the same size they used to.

I respect very much what they're saying, especially about the stock assessment in August. If there are no cod there in August, then we

should do the assessment at a different time. And you should do that in conjunction with the scientific community out there. The other scientists on the water are the fishermen, because you observe that animal in its environment on a daily basis. So obviously you should be part of that assessment, without question. I'm not arguing that.

What I am concerned about is an economic argument about fish stocks. Using an economic argument is exactly what happened in the early nineties to the northern cod. We fished that species—the economic argument coming from the politicians and overruling, quite frankly, DFO and overruling science—to the brink of extinction. It caused horrific problems in our coastal communities and closed many of them down and shut the fishery down. So I have a real concern that the economic argument is being used.

I agree with you that if there are no cod there in August, don't do the assessment in August. But beyond that, frankly, we run the risk of this species being placed under SARA or under COSEWIC and put on a list and protected, and you'll never be able to access it. And that's a serious risk. I know that the short-term pain is horrific, but it may be the only option. Have you considered the economic argument—vis-à-vis what happened with the collapse of the cod in the early nineties—not being part of the equation?

● (0945)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Go ahead, Mr. Couillard.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Couillard:** You can set aside the economic aspect and simply focus on the social side, but the two go hand in hand. The economic aspect is not disproportionate. Prior to the 1990s, the philosophy for managing and protecting fish stocks was determined primarily by corporate economic concerns. The Kirby report talked about large national corporations that dictated the management strategy to government. It is different today: there are teams made up of scientists and others that have been set up to represent the industry.

I fully agree that we must be concerned about the decline and the health of the resource. We discussed that at length in the document. We respect the sustainable development concept and the precautionary approach, and while we must make sure not to exaggerate, the scientific community must above all not forget the social side. That is my point of view.

[English]

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** The other issue that's been discussed, and certainly I think it's a compelling argument, is predation. We see the same thing in Nova Scotia. We see the same thing on the north shore and in Newfoundland. There are more seals than there have ever been. Certainly in my area, in southwestern Nova Scotia, the problem seal is the grey seal. I'm assuming that it's the same problem, but you would have harp as well, I would suspect. How much seal predation is there? Have you a quantitative amount? Do you have any idea how much cod the seals are taking?

• (0950)

[Translation]

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** I did read an article where a scientist stated that seals in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence ate 40,000 metric tonnes of cod.

I believe that what fishermen are looking for is a point of no return. That is why we are here today. Four thousand tonnes of cod in the south of the Gulf of the St. Lawrence is a drop in the ocean. It is not true that we will destroy the resource by taking 4,000 tonnes of cod.

I'm going to explain something to you. In the northern part of the gulf, at 7,000 tonnes, the harvesting rate versus the total biomass is about 20%. In the southern part of the gulf, at 4,000 tonnes, the harvesting rate would be about 2 or 3%. So we can't understand.

The scientists who will appear after us will probably tell you that in the southern part of the gulf there are no more large codfish. We know why they can no longer find any large codfish: it is because of the gear they are using. As I explained a little earlier, in the southern part of the gulf at present, zone 4T2 is closed, because people cannot fish flounder due to an overabundance of cod. They are using 170 square mesh size to fish flounder. But they are catching too much cod in comparison with their flounder catch. They are catching cod because there is cod. We are not asking for 50,000 tonnes, we are asking for 4,000 tonnes, to understand.

Here is our question to the department: Can we give ourselves one last chance to work together? Let's work together for three years to develop a program that takes science into account. We need these people, because we are not scientists. But I fully believe that scientists also need our contribution, our knowledge and expertise. When I have a toothache, I go to the dentist, not to a barber shop. So people who are working in the fishery should turn to the fishermen.

[English]

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** I couldn't agree more. However, we have a serious problem here. We do have a seriously diminished biomass from where it was.

The other issue you raise was to treat the southern gulf the same as the northern gulf. The science we've seen, the catch records we've seen, tell us the catch is diminishing more quickly in the southern gulf than in the northern gulf. If you treat the two areas exactly the same, then you're going to run the risk of completely decimating that stock in the southern gulf.

I'm not saying every fishing zone is correct. I'm not saying DFO has never made a mistake in the past or won't in the future or scientific assessments can't be off, but that's what we have to work with. I think you're running the risk, quite honestly, of totally destroying the southern gulf biomass.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Mr. Couillard, go ahead, please. Quickly.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Couillard:** I would like to comment on that. To my mind, one of the biggest threats to the health and assessment of the stocks is the disagreement between industry and the scientists. That is a key part of the issue. We are never able to create a working

program or reach a conclusion on the state of the fishery and on what direction to take to improve it, because we simply cannot agree. One basic aspect that must be established is communication between industry and the scientists. If we are unable to solve that problem, some will attempt to exercise political pressure, as we are doing today, and others will use scientific assessments that are not at all like ours. We must resolve that problem to obtain better results.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you very much.

We're finished our first round of questioning; our time is just about up. We have a few minutes left.

I would like some direction from my colleagues. Do you want to go with one quick question per party? I'm asking your guidance here. Or we can finish it off and let this gentleman respond and end it there.

Let Mr. Cotton respond and finish? Is everyone okay with that? Okay.

Mr. Cotton, would you finish up with some closing remarks for us, please, either in response to Mr. Keddy or with something you want to say about the issue?

• (0955)

[Translation]

**Mr. Réginald Cotton:** I will quickly respond to Mr. Keddy.

You are talking about the biomass in the southern gulf and you are saying the same thing as the scientists. I am not holding it against you; that is what is available to work with. Mr. Keddy, for a year, I have been bringing fishers from the southern gulf together. It was an extremely arduous and difficult task. We came to the conclusion that we needed to give ourselves another opportunity because the snapshot that the scientists have taken is not accurate. It was not accurate a few years ago in either the northern gulf or the southern gulf.

We are simply asking the government to work with us, to give us a chance. A 4,000 tonne TAC for three years is not much, because the seals are eating 10 times as much as that. We should be given a chance. And if ever the scientists are right, I can assure that I will be the first fisherman to stand up and say that they were right. But if it comes to light that they were not right, Canadians are the ones who will benefit.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you very much, Mr. Cotton.

Thank you very much for coming, gentlemen, and appearing before the committee.

I want to thank my colleagues for their involvement today.

I just want to say to you that we take your issue very seriously. We heard very similar comments and representations from the other part of the gulf just a few short years ago.

We will take a break for a couple of minutes to get ready for our next witnesses, please.

• (0955) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1000)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** I call the meeting back to order, please.

We're ready to entertain our next witnesses. We want to continue with our discussion on the southern gulf cod.

We have with us Mr. David Bevan, assistant deputy minister of fisheries and aquaculture management, and Mr. Sylvain Paradis, director general, ecosystem science.

Welcome, gentlemen.

I understand, Mr. Bevan, you have a statement to make. Go ahead, please.

**Mr. David Bevan (Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Aquaculture Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** I have a very brief opening statement to put this whole issue into context.

We're managing fisheries now in a very different kind of environment from what we have had in the past. We're faced with the scrutiny that exists in the marketplace, where we have to demonstrate that fisheries are sustainable. We have our obligations internationally and within our own policy framework to exercise cautious management. We need to act with the available information and we cannot just delay because of uncertainty. We have to act based on what we have in front of us.

In the southern gulf, unfortunately we have a very grim picture indeed in terms of the population trends, and my colleague will no doubt be able to respond to the questions. That grim picture is unique in the gulf in terms of comparisons to the north, and we need to consider that, in taking decisions as to how we manage it. We have to also be cognizant of all the scrutiny coming from everything from species at risk through to the market demanding proof of sustainable fisheries. Those are issues we have to consider as well.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you, Mr. Bevan.

We'll go now to our round of questioning. Mr. Byrne, go ahead, please.

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

Just to quote one of my colleagues, I hate when politicians drive a wedge between fishermen and scientists. I tell you, there's a fair bit of self-loathing going on here in this room right now, I guess, if that's the case.

I'd like to ask you a question, Mr. Bevan, based on your own previous experience. DFO has had a track record of actually listening to fishermen when they present evidence that opposes a scientific point of view. And in fact there are numerous examples in recent history, current fisheries management plans, whereby that advice received from fishermen has been well-founded.

I can think of one example, on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, where scientific evidence presented to DFO, and by DFO to the minister, did not support an opening of a commercial cod fishery, or for that matter, to put it in a different tone, a test fishery or whatever. But the current minister made a decision to open that fishery, and in

fact there does not appear to be any significant serious decline in those stocks. In fact the status quo seems to be prevailing.

We've had the situation in the northern gulf, where in 2002 we went from a quota of several thousand tonnes to a moratorium, and now just last year, three years later, we've gone to a situation where there is actually a very healthy fishery being prosecuted. In fact, DFO will be contemplating an increase in the resource.

Would you agree to this committee that there are problems with DFO science, that this advice is not necessarily well-founded?

In fact, in the northern gulf circumstance we know that the *Alfred Needler*, the DFO scientific vessel that was conducting those surveys, was actually out of commission for a long period of time, which actually brought us to the point where we imposed a moratorium in the northern gulf. The *Alfred Needler* was not in actual fact being... The level of test fisheries that were being conducted was marginal, and in fact they were negatively affected by breakdowns and I believe a fire and the nets were getting snagged and so on.

Is the issue here one where either a lack of resources or difficulties within the scientific process can indeed be affecting the actual result of the scientific analysis and conclusions at the other end?

• (1005)

**Mr. David Bevan:** The science isn't perfect. There's always uncertainty. That's why we have a range in the advice that we get, and there are probabilities and so on and so forth.

I would say, however, simply put, that we don't see a fundamental problem with the science. I think in the northern gulf as well as the southern gulf—let's put it in context—those fisheries were 60,000 tonnes throughout the whole first half of the 20th century. They supported a 20,000- to 40,000-tonne fishery and then peaked out at 100,000 tonnes, with 60,000 tonnes for a long period in the second half of the century.

That's the context in which we're looking at these stocks. They're well below their historic range. The northern gulf was low, and the risk of continuing to fish on that at the time was such that it would pre-empt a rapid rebuilding of the stock. Even where we are now with better productivity, the fishery that we have, in order to respond to the demands of the fishermen, is one that will impede the rate of recovery but not stop the recovery. In the southern gulf, we haven't seen that.

I know we heard from some fishermen today. There are many others in the southern gulf who don't share the view that you heard earlier, who do understand that the southern gulf cod stock is in serious trouble, that the trajectory in that stock is down, and that the productivity there is not comparable to that of a totally separate population that exists in the north.

It's not perfect. We don't have something that can give us the degree of precision that sometimes is being sought. It will happen. We will have growth at 4,000 tonnes, and—

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** That's going to lead me to my next question. The proposed new act, Bill C-32, which is very explicit, basically says that the minister must employ scientific evidence from a conservation principle in his management plans. You presented evidence to this committee stating that in your opinion, if the minister does not.... Well, every decision of the minister is challengeable in a federal court.

Do you think if the minister were to maintain this fishery on a status quo basis, given the scientific evidence out there—right or wrong—that is being presented to you and to him, and the new act were employed, that the decision of the minister to maintain the status quo could be challengeable in a federal court? Would the scientific evidence support his decision to maintain the status quo?

• (1010)

**Mr. David Bevan:** Clearly, on the latter point, the scientific evidence in the southern gulf does not support maintenance of the status quo.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** So the court could shut the fishery down whether the minister wanted to or not, under the new act.

**Mr. David Bevan:** Well, that's not quite true either. The act doesn't say that the minister must follow scientific advice; it says he must consider scientific advice. He must consider the precautionary approach. It doesn't say that he has to consider and follow it. I think that's a clear distinction. He could be challenged in a court of law if he had not demonstrated that he actually did consider the scientific advice. But it does not oblige him to follow it. There's a whole series of other events.

And from your own area, the northern gulf, we've seen a high catch per unit of effort through the northern gulf, and we've seen some signs of fish. He can consider that as well as the scientific advice. The scientific advice does not take issue with that. In other words, it does indicate that there were fish there and that there is a high catchability of that fish, but he doesn't need to follow it.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** I'll pass my time to my colleague Mr. Simms, but I'll just make one final comment, which is that usually a Federal Court judge, in Toronto or somewhere where a case might be brought, would think that "considering" means following it. That's a point of debate.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Mr. Bevan, you don't have to speak or respond to that.

Mr. Simms.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.):** I have just a couple of points here about the research.

In your opinion, would the predation by seals be considered a significant component of natural mortality?

**Mr. David Bevan:** Some scientists—not all—are saying that that is in fact the case, and it's a major component of natural mortality in the southern gulf. I think we also have to put it in a broader context. We had a population that was depleted by significant fishing. It was subject to low productivity while that fishing was going on, and we knocked the population down well below a reasonable limit. The limit in the southern gulf, as I recall, is 80,000 tonnes. That's thought to be a place you don't want to go below.

In addition, we have other environmental changes, such as lower oxygen and higher temperatures. Those are things that don't help cod either.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** I agree, because I certainly feel that the sea temperature change is one of the issues that get glossed over.

Going back to the seals issue again—and let me get this right—some scientists say that the predation of seals is a major factor, but it almost seems to me you're not really buying into that.

**Mr. David Bevan:** No, I'm not taking issue with that. What I am saying is there is ongoing debate in the scientific community. Those scientists who study the seals and their place in the ecosystem are not coming to that conclusion. Those scientists who look after fish are more inclined to see the correlation between the population of seals and the productivity and increased mortality in cod.

We also have a tack for grey seals that's not being taken. We have a working group that's being formed to try to look at how to deal with that whole issue. So we are recognizing the need to take some action on seals.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Obviously, when you reduced the seal quota from 320,000 to 270,000, you did not take predation into account, did you?

**Mr. David Bevan:** That was on harp seals, and we were looking at maintenance of a product of harp seal population. They are not resident in the gulf, and they don't cause the problems that we've heard about in terms of southern gulf cod.

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis (Director General, Ecosystem Science, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** With regard to the scientific advice on seals, we had an earlier meeting with industry a couple of months ago to actually look at what the questions were. There is going to be another meeting in the fall to look at stomach-content studies, improved consumption patterns of seals, some new design for how we can actually measure.... For example, we're planning to put cameras on the heads of some seals to be able to follow them better and see what their nutrition patterns are, because when we do stomach content you don't find that large a number. That doesn't mean they don't eat that, but you don't really see it.

We also look at other issues, like belly biting, eating the underneath of the cod. You don't really find traces in their stomachs. There is also the issue of worms, parasites being transmitted to species. We actually have a science plan to work with all of the partners.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** My colleague has one very quick question.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Mr. Regan.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** A few years ago I had occasion to be on Sable Island and to hear from DFO scientists. They have previously only had to look at the insides of the seal to see what was in the gut, so to speak, in terms of trying to figure out what kind of fish they'd been eating for the past few weeks. But these days they can use the fatty acids in the seal to determine what it's been eating for five months, which is much more accurate. They were saying, to my surprise, that the amount of cod in the grey seals around Sable Island was 3% to 5%.

What similar work has been done in the gulf, in the southern gulf particularly?

•(1015)

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** That's one of the issues that is going to be addressed in the fall meeting, because we're looking at the genetic makeup of the food consumption, exactly to discuss what you are talking about, the fatty acid content and so on. I don't think we had a clear picture for the southern gulf, and that's what is going to be addressed at the meeting in the fall.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you very much.

Mr. Blais.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, gentlemen.

First of all, when will the decision on cod in the southern gulf be announced?

**Mr. David Bevan:** It will probably be announced this week, within the next few days.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Just how accurate is the scientific assessment that you have presented?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** It is difficult to specifically assess the accuracy. Bear in mind that this opinion does not come strictly from DFO scientists. Here's how the process works. DFO scientists present scientific information to a joint panel with representation from industry, universities and the research community. Using peer review, we reach a scientific consensus which is subsequently sent to the minister, after having been posted on the Web for all Canadians.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** You realize that it is surely not in the interest of fishermen to exaggerate the abundance of cod in order to obtain a 2,000, 3,000 or 4,000 tonne quota for an additional three or four years. These are responsible people who fully realize that doing so would be to their own detriment. The people fishing cod are cod fishermen.

In this case, why not have confidence in them?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** The issue is not about not having confidence in them. I will use the words you used during the break. We have no intention of being confrontational with the fishermen. The idea is to move closer together and to have a stronger consensus. The challenge is bigger than that. We want to work with the fishermen, but we are also facing pressure from other parties. For example, Cosewic, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife, has decided to submit a notice for a new review of cod in light of scientific opinions that were submitted. So we are facing a situation where there are a number of stakeholders. We want to take the views of scientists very seriously. In fact, as Mr. Cotton mentioned, the minister has decided to put in place a process to bring the groups closer together. We are planning to hold a symposium early in the fall. We are currently working with the fishermen. We have provided them with some resource to prepare a comprehensive brief so that we have the bases of their approach. The idea is not to have a confrontational attitude. We have a picture that we have been following for the past few years, and it is showing a decline. We can compare the southern gulf with the northern gulf, where we have a picture that is indicating the contrary. We can see a recovery there because the natural mortality rate seems to be decreasing. But we are not seeing that picture in the southern gulf where we know that the

two stocks are very different. We are not talking about the same stock at all. Although we could say that the gulf is a large lake, it would be a large lake with two very distinct fish populations. If we had the same signal in the southern gulf, a signal showing a recovery, that the fish are larger, that mortality is decreasing—which we are not seeing at all as mortality is decreasing quickly and we think that the grey seal has an impact at that level—we could start saying yes, we can go there.

I don't doubt the fishermen's ability to find the fish. They are professionals, they know their work. But we also have scientists who are professionals, who must follow very strict protocols, and it is at that level that we want to reach an agreement. If there is an issue with the time when the surveys are done, we could consider other periods and try to conduct the surveys at other times to determine if the current models are false.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** So it is true that the data is collected in August. Is it also true to say that that is not the right time of the year to find cod?

•(1020)

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** It is hard to say that that is not the right time. The issue must be debated. I am not a cod scientist myself. As I was saying, there is a very specific protocol for the time, the number of tows, the duration of the tows, and the type of equipment.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** But it is true that it is done in August.

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** Yes, it is done in August and September.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Okay. It is also true to say that fishermen are challenging the time when the data are collected.

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** Yes, that is what Mr. Cotton is saying.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** I said "the fishermen".

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** Some are not challenging that period.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Who?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** There are other fishermen, the midshore fishermen for example. So we will see where we are at in September, when the debate on the issue will take place.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Is it also true to say that just three years ago, when we were in Newfoundland, where the same committee was discussing cod, we were talking about coastal cod and deep-sea cod, which presented differences, the view of the scientists at the time was that quota should be decreased and that there should eventually be a moratorium in that area? However, the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans was to consider increasing quotas. Quotas were increased in that area, and as far as I know, for the past three years, there has not been a disaster.

Are there any links that can be made to that? I also understand that, first of all, it is not in the interest of fishermen to make things up; secondly, it is not in the interest of the scientists to do that either. But these elements—we are talking about the fishermen's qualitative analysis—cannot be ruled out either, as part of a collaborative and non-confrontational working framework.

Why not say you will study the situation and work more, possibly, on the grey seal, which is a predator? Why not do more work in that area?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** At present I believe that there is a strategy, comprised of a scientific component and a management component, that deals with the entire issue of grey seals. Therefore, I do not believe that there has been a refusal to look into the issue of grey seals.

On the other hand, when fishermen provide us with information, we usually sit down and look at how we are going to deal with the issues. You are right: in northern Newfoundland, there were recommendations and once again we worked very closely with fishermen. There were sentinel surveys, and the Stewardship Program. Conditions appear to have changed and we can adopt a positive attitude.

On the other hand, what is worrisome is when people say that current stocks are healthy and at good levels. Scientifically speaking, we would recommend the biomass to weigh in at approximately 85,000 tonnes and not approximately 36,000 tonnes, or 26,000 tonnes, as is currently the case. This is a bit dangerous.

During the first moratorium, we saw that researchers were heavily criticized for their scientific opinions. They are understandably determined to provide accurate opinions.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you very much. Your time has expired.

We'll now go to Mr. Stoffer.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming today.

Mr. Cotton was kind enough to send us this information. He put five bullet points of recommendations to make. To me it looks like he and his organization are offering a tremendous olive branch to DFO in a collaborative effort, and it's really nice to know the fishermen are not yet doing what some fishermen do, like lock up the harbours and protest, as just recently when we had a little problem with crab in Nova Scotia.

Here are his points:

Conduct a joint industry-DFO review of the scientific criteria and methods used by DFO to assess Gulf of St. Lawrence cod stocks.

Standardize the criteria and methods used to assess cod stocks in the southern and northern Gulf of St. Lawrence divisions.

Improve collaboration between scientists and the industry by establishing new memorandums of understanding on marine environment protection and responsible fishing.

Draw up a bipartisan program to establish collaboration between DFO scientists and the industry to make sure the recommendations identified above are properly addressed.

And I assume that if those four could be met, then:

Permit a sustainable commercial-type fishery by means of a three-year pilot project, with a 4,000 tonne annual TAC in NAFO Division 4T.

They're offering this as an olive branch to DFO to work cooperatively with you. I would assume that DFO would want to jump at that and say, "Okay, let's work together. Let's have openness and transparency and make whatever scientific finding peer-reviewed, open, and unquestionable at the end of the day." I would assume that's what DFO would want to do.

If these what I would think of as very cooperative recommendations are being put forward, is this something the minister and DFO would seriously look at to move ahead for the future?

• (1025)

**Mr. David Bevan:** I think there are elements there, yes.

The real issue is the 4,000 tonnes over three years. It's not based on any kind of science. And we're making a conclusion about what the outcome of that study will be by having that fishery before we get the answer. So I think that's an element that's a bit of an issue.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Right, and I can appreciate that. That was their first recommendation, and that's why I said it last. The next four, I think, are really what they're looking for. Whatever information comes out of that, from a cooperative effort, would obviously be the decision everybody could live with, right?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** That's the reason we're having this meeting in the fall. We're actually working together to get prepared for this important meeting.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Couldn't you do it beforehand?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** To give the fishermen a chance to get a very good document on the table.... We have a survey season, so a lot of our scientists are busy during the summer months. People tend to be on the water during the summer, so we're thinking that September would be a better time to do it.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Mr. Kamp.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming to help us understand this issue a little better.

Fundamentally, I guess, the witnesses before you disagree on the size of the biomass. And the reason is that they don't trust the methods that were used to arrive at the department's estimate of the biomass. In their testimony they talked about things like the methodology that was used, that there's a new boat for the northern gulf test fishery, while in the southern gulf we're still using 1970s technology.

I don't want to spend too much time on this, but I wonder if you could comment on the methodology, what you have done to arrive at your estimate of the biomass.

**Mr. David Bevan:** We've been using three science vessels, the *Needler*, the *Templeman*, and the *Teleost*. And whatever vessel we use, we have to calibrate the fishing tools to actually figure out how they compare. We used to use the *Needler* in the southern gulf; now we're using the *Teleost*. And there was a period of calibration.

We're expecting a new vessel in a couple of years. At that point in time, in order to ensure the time series, we will have to calibrate the tools as well. Even if we were to change the fishing gear, we would have to calibrate the old one with the new one, because you want to ensure that you're not managing noise; rather, you're managing a real fishing effort.

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** Are you telling us, through all of that, that you're confident in the conclusions you've reached in terms of the 36,000 tonnes of biomass?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** The southern gulf scientific surveys we have in the models we apply are known to be the best models in Canada, so it's hard for me to believe we're not providing a good picture. There may be other factors, and that's why we're now using an ecosystem approach that has an influence on the scientific surveys.

That's one of the issues we will be discussing with Mr. Cotton and the other fishermen when we meet in the fall. If there is a need to actually do extra science to realign the scientific programs, then we'll have to do so.

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** That's good.

The witnesses before you provided some anecdotal evidence. In particular, there was an account by Mr. Cyril Burns. I don't know whether you had a chance to read that. I think he was under contract to be involved in a test fishery. It's a bit disturbing, if you read it at face value. It seems to indicate that DFO is looking for places not to catch fish so they can justify their position on this. If they do catch fish, that kind of bothers them.

I wonder if you can comment on that.

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** From what I understand, and I wasn't part of any of those discussions with Mr. Burns, he was contracted to catch fish for another research program we had; it wasn't part of the overall survey program. From what I can see, it happened that he caught a lot of fish. I cannot comment on whether he was told he would never be hired again because he had caught fish.

I don't think there's a deliberate effort from our scientists to pick people who don't want to catch fish, especially when they know there are benefits for the fishery.

• (1030)

**Mr. David Bevan:** Some of that behaviour was before the Larocque case, as I recall, and there were some opportunities to make use of that fish by the person involved.

There's an old adage in fisheries management about fishing being like dipping your cup into a barrel of water: you can always fill that cup, right up to the point where you've emptied the barrel. That's been the case in the cod fisheries. We've seen that in northern cod, when the offshore catch renewed effort was very high and kept going up, right to the last set, when the moratoria had to come in.

People can always go out and catch fish. These guys are professionals. They know how to set on the concentrations. There's not a problem to do that, but it doesn't mean that the whole ocean is full of fish.

I think that's something we have to be knowledgeable about. The reason we use time series data is to create an opportunity to see a trend. And we're seeing a trend in the southern gulf that is very disturbing. It's downward, and it's substantially lower than anything we've seen in the past. We have to take that into consideration.

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** Mr. Bevan, I think in your comments you said that although there were some fishermen here who had a different view, that many, and perhaps most fishermen in the southern gulf,

agree with the department's position that it's in decline and in serious trouble.

I think you sometimes do telephone surveys and so on. Can you tell us how you reached that conclusion?

**Mr. David Bevan:** We reached that conclusion through the advisory process and through feedback we get from fishermen's organizations and groups.

There were questions last year about why we had a fishery of 2,000 tonnes. I'd remind the committee that even at 2,000 tonnes the TAC wasn't taken—only about 75% of it was taken. That's an indication of significant problems as well.

So we had a fishery last year where we were not seeing an abundance of available fish and people were wondering why one would want to continue to target a species that seems to be in decline. It's not unanimous. Obviously there are people who really need this fish, and that need is reflected in their desire to continue to have a fishery.

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** Okay.

By the department's estimates, there's a spawning biomass of 36,000 tonnes in 2008. If you followed the desires of the fishermen and had a TAC of 4,000 tonnes for the next three years, what would that do, in your estimation? Do you know what that would do to the spawning stock biomass in terms of tonnage?

**Mr. David Bevan:** One thing I note from the RAP is that the science advice is that the spawning stock will go down no matter what we do. It will be extirpated if the trends continue over the next few decades. If we fish, we can accelerate that. If we fish 2,000 tonnes, it's expected to be extirpated within the next 20 years; if we fish 4,000 tonnes, that will accelerate it further.

We are looking at the need for time to evaluate what we can do with respect to grey seals and what the other factors are that are causing this high mortality. I think if we go for 12,000 tonnes over the next three years, we'll see some significant impacts.

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** I don't have a firmer number, but the SAR recommend that if there's no fishing, the extinction would be in 40 years. If we fish at 2,000 tonnes, it would be in 20 years. So at 4,000 tonnes, it will be even faster.

I'd like to raise the issue of the precautionary approach that Mr. Couillard brought forward.

In an environment where the stock is in a very unstable, very low status, I think it's our responsibility to take our time to make decisions that will not jeopardize the stock. If we hold back and we do a good assessment and we look at it again with the fishermen and we find there are a lot of fish, the fish are going to be there next year and it's going to be good news for everybody. If we find the situation as bad as we claim, we will not have dug the hole even deeper, and that's where the precautionary approach comes about. If the fisheries are in very good shape, no one is challenging the science. The science is there; the stocks are increasing; the TAC is increasing and everyone is happy. In this case, the trend is downward.

No one is challenging the northern cod this year because we had a TAC and everyone is excited, and we see an upward trend, and we'll continue to work together and make a good assessment. But I think that's where the precautionary approach comes about: if it's risky, let's take a bit of time and do a good job before taking on a risky business. That's part of what we call sustainable development, sustaining a long-term fishery with a good environmental condition.

• (1035)

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** In this case, the data seems to show that it's heading towards extirpation, regardless of whether we fish or not. It's just a matter of time, given the current conditions. So is the approach then that we should fish it as little as we can in the hope that perhaps the conditions will change? In other words, maybe with natural mortality, non-fishing mortality, conditions will change and perhaps we'll have the possibility of recovery in the future.

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** That's the picture we've seen in the northern gulf, and that's why we have to be cautious. Two years ago the trend in the northern gulf was going down. It's going up slightly this year. I think we may have a similar issue in the south.

We're seeing another trend. People are claiming and they go to information that the cod are recovering, the northern cod out of Newfoundland, and we'll be looking at it.

So it's very important to be cautious in the way we move forward together.

**Mr. David Bevan:** Productivity goes up and down in the ecosystem. In the past we didn't look at that and we created horrible problems when we kept fishing at one level and assumed a stable state in the ocean. We all saw the horrible costs this caused us. I think we need two things in the southern gulf. We need to make sure we don't do something irreversible. Second, we need a bit of time to look at the causes of low productivity and high mortality. If it turns out to be seals, we need to do something about them.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Good luck with doing something about the seals.

Before we go to our second round, how many gulf cod stocks are there, for my information?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** There's the northern gulf, the southern gulf, and the 3Ps, which is a mix in southern Newfoundland, which is like a bit of the northern gulf sliding in, and a bit of the northern cod coming in, so that's at least three in the gulf area.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Yes, I've been in situations where I've heard the northern gulf people argue that they and 3Ps were the same, so I wondered how many there really are.

There's another thing for my information, again, before we go to my colleagues. The gentlemen who were before you want to standardize the criteria and methods in the south and the north. Can you tell me what the difference is right now in the assessing and so on? What's the difference in the—

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** The approaches are fairly similar, but because of environmental conditions sometimes you don't do the job the same way. In those two stocks, the methods are fairly similar. We're not using the same years, but they have been calibrated. We have fairly consistent ways to do business. The model includes the same kinds of factors: mortality, size of fish, maturation, year class, and so on.

We're looking forward in September to getting real, clear guidance from the fishermen about what they would like us to do in a different way.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you very much.

Mr. Simms. We're going for a second round.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Can you give us an update on the latest stock assessment reports for the gulf area and for northern cod? Have they been released?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** Yes. I have copies here for both the northern and southern gulf cod, and they're on the website of the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat.

Are you looking at the spawning biomass? For 2008 the spawning biomass is at 36,000 tonnes for the southern gulf, driven down from 43,000 tonnes last year. Last year the minister approved 2,000 tonnes, and we're waiting for the decision this year.

In the northern stock, in 2007 we were at 29,000 tonnes. This year we're at 26,000 tonnes. The minister last year approved 7,000 tonnes for the fishery, and has given 7,000 tonnes again this year.

The spawning biomass is a bit lower because we see some natural upturn and the mortality has shrunk.

• (1040)

**Mr. Scott Simms:** That was my next question: what has the announcement been for a directed fishery in northern cod? You said it's the same as last year.

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** Yes, it's 7,000 tonnes.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** What I find odd is that just a short time ago you cut the red fishery in 3N and 3NO, and the reason given was cod bycatch. That's interesting.

Do you have a comment on that? We're certainly not talking about the inshore stocks. Assessments for the past three or four years for northern cod have been that the inshore stocks are at a fairly healthy level, but they're at a dangerous level in the offshore.



**Mr. David Bevan:** The 3NO stock is in serious trouble. It is unable to sustain the bycatch. We've been making tremendous efforts internationally and nationally to drop that bycatch. We have made real progress in doing so, but that stock can't take directed fishing. It can only take bycatch, and we have to keep that to the lowest possible level.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** I'll pass it to my colleague Gerry.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Mr. Byrne.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Mr. Paradis, it seems to me you've articulated something that sometimes inflames the situation among fishermen. You've both testified that more than once DFO has been wrong. But the precautionary principle should remain wholly that it's better to be wrong and that there are more fish than wrong and there are no fish.

The consequence of imposing a moratorium on the southern gulf would probably result in about \$10 million lost to the economy. Yet there seems to be the approach that if you're wrong, that's great, because it means there were more fish there than what you anticipated, and we'll have better fisheries in years to come. But there would still be \$10 million in lost revenue, of economic activity.

When is DFO going to come to the point, when articulating the precautionary principle, where you also say you are going to impose upon yourselves a discipline to put in place the scientific scrutiny to make sure you get it right? Right now you're simply shrugging your shoulders and saying, "If we get it right, we get it right. If we get it wrong, we get it wrong. But we'll always err on the side of caution." When is science going to be factored into this more?

**Mr. David Bevan:** That's an interesting question, given that we're talking about not factoring science into it.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** With all due respect, I just presented cases where science was not factored into this, where scientific evidence came forward to you and the minister that incomplete scientific analysis was done. For example, the *Alfred Needler* did not conduct proper scientific activities in the north, which led to a shutdown in the fishery. That shutdown was inappropriate.

So with all due respect, don't come here and say there is a schism here in the testimony. Science is not doing its job. It hasn't been doing its job for quite some time, and it continues to not do its job. You simply sit there, shrug your shoulders, and say the cost should be borne by the fishermen. When are you going to give it up?

**Mr. David Bevan:** Absolutely not. Absolutely not.

I believe science is doing its job and provides us with the best information possible under the circumstances, within the limits. You cannot expect.... There is nobody in the business of fish management around the world who has perfect advice, perfect information. It simply doesn't exist.

We have to take decisions in the face of uncertainty and we need to deal with risk management. In the north, there is less risk now than there was in the past. Therefore, we can have a fishery.

I'm not sure, in retrospect, that the decisions in the past were right or wrong. I can't make that kind of conclusion. I think people come to those decisions based on their own experience. But we're way, way below the potential on both these stocks. We have a fishery that in the north is a shadow of its former self. We have decided, as a

group—that's the fishermen and managers, etc.—to cap it off, to take advantage of the potential growth now, and not to take a less risky approach and let it grow bigger so that we can have a bigger income in the future. We have decided that. That is a joint decision. The fishermen have decided that's what they want to do.

In the south, we have high, high risk. If we take the wrong decisions in the south, we are not going to come back. We are going to be like 4VW, where there's not any growth possible and where we're looking at a situation in which we can't see a future fishery because the stock keeps continuing to decline. So the question we have before us is which path do we want to take?

It's easy to say spend a few more million bucks and find more fish. That's not a realistic approach. No amount of money will remove uncertainty. All of us have to make decisions in the face of uncertainty and we have to make decisions based on the risk that we're facing.

In some fisheries, we can take decisions that don't follow the advice exactly, because the risks are low and the consequences of them being wrong are minimal. In other fisheries—and I'd argue that the southern gulf is one of them—if we make an error, it won't be losing a few million dollars today, it will be wiping out the potential to ever rebuild a stock that used to support a multi-million-dollar fishery. That's simply not responsible. We need to take those kinds of considerations into our decision-making process.

● (1045)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you very much, Mr. Bevan. As much as I'm enjoying this between you two gentlemen, I have to go to Mr. Blais.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Thank you. I will be sharing my time with Mr. Asselin.

The demand for a 4,000 tonne quota spread out over three years, as is being called for by Mr. Cotton's group or groups, and the idea of a moratorium, are entirely different proposals.

Can there be a compromise between the two?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** Pardon me, but is the demand for 4,000 tonnes over three years or 4,000 tonnes per year?

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Four thousand tonnes per year.

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** Therefore, the quota would be 12,000 tonnes over three years. The scientific opinion is known, and those within the industry have aired their grievances to the minister. The minister must take this into consideration.

Under the current approach, we present biological information on the current state of the resource, and the minister must also assess the socio-economic repercussions of a decision. As Mr. Byrne was saying, in the past, decisions made did not stem directly from scientific opinion, and this was all for the better because the situation ended up improving. It is incumbent upon the minister to make the decision.

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Mr. Bevan, what do you think?

**Mr. David Bevan:** I think it's difficult because fishermen are not catching the 4,000 tonnes, obviously, and the fishery represents approximately \$2 million per year. If there were a moratorium, there would be a loss of approximately \$1.5 million. If we were to fish 2,000 tonnes, there would be a net gain of \$2 million for fishermen. However, it is difficult to obtain this data. We still have not carried out a study to compare the—

**Mr. Raynald Blais:** Between zero and 4,000 tonnes, is a compromise not possible, even if it means reassessing the issue next year?

**Mr. David Bevan:** We can suppose that if we were to maintain the catch at 2,000 tonnes, fishermen would earn approximately \$1.5 million more than if a moratorium were to be imposed. However, a moratorium does not truly achieve what it sets out to do. There will still be catches even if people are not fishing for cod. There will be accidental catches and fishermen will earn a bit of money.

**Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ):** Mr. Chairman, there's something I'm wondering about when it comes to the seals. The previous witnesses said that the number of fishers in the southern gulf had gone down, and the number of seals had gone up by 7,000. There are now about 70,000 seals there.

If we have a large number of seals, should we not use the best logical indicator, which is the impact of nature? If the number of seals has gone up so much in 30 years, by 7,000 to 70,000, it is because the seals are finding food.

There are no physical boundaries for birds, who fly through the air, they can go from the north to the south and from the south back north again. The fish in the sea are in somewhat the same situation. Except when they are fed... There are a lot of birds around my cottage. What do I do to make them stop at my cottage? I installed bird feeders. Obviously we have to take regeneration into account, but if there are large numbers of the species' main predator... Sometimes, fishers find the cod they catch have no tails. That's not because some disease made it drop off, it's because they've been eaten. The problem has to be dealt with at the source, without hurting the fishermen in the process.

How can we deal with the problem at the source? Earlier, you talked about a study in which the stomach of seals would be opened and a camera inserted so that scientists could see what the seals were feeding on. Fishers have a great deal of trouble finding cod in August, and so do seals. If you did the study in September, the seals would probably no longer be there. So how could that study be carried out? In the period when there are seals, because probably that is when they have food. If they had no food, they would not be there.

• (1050)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Could I ask you for as quick a response as possible, please?

[Translation]

**Mr. David Bevan:** We are in the process of studying the issue to find ways of dealing with the seal problem. Obviously, we have to find some way of reducing their numbers. The grey seal hunt is not enough. Even with a total catch of 10,000 seals, all the hunters really took was 2,000. So we have to find another way of dealing with the problem.

We agree with both fishers and the scientists. The problem has to be dealt with, but we need time to do it. The solutions are complex. There have to be enough fish in the ocean to allow the stock to recover.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Thank you very much.

Mr. Stoffer.

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

Mr. Bevan, of the fixed gear or mobile gear, which one catches more of the cod that are there now?

**Mr. David Bevan:** Right now we have what's called a re-entry policy. The fixed gear is the active gear, and mobile gear is not active.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Which one catches most of the fish?

**Mr. David Bevan:** Well, it's fixed gear right now. The mobile gear has a share, but the rules are that until the population of a fish hits a certain level they won't be re-entering the fishery.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Of the fish that were caught last year, you indicated that 2,000 tonnes TAC was set, and they didn't get that. Are they closely monitored at the docks when they bring their fish in?

**Mr. David Bevan:** Everybody has dockside monitors.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Regarding bycatch from other species, when people are fishing shrimp or other species, are there strict controls and monitoring of that as well for any cod bycatch?

**Mr. David Bevan:** Yes.

Shrimp is a fairly clean fishery right now, with the Nordmore grates, which knock the groundfish out and then select only for the shrimp. There are some juveniles that have to be looked at, but there's work done to ensure that those fisheries do not cause much mortality of groundfish.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I would say, sir, with your years of experience, that you know the difference of opinion between fishermen and scientists is nothing new. I think it's been going on everywhere in this country for a long time.

I go back to my earlier comments to Mr. Paradis. These fishermen are obviously very frightened for their families and communities down the road. I know you can't say it, and none of us can say that if the worst happens and there's a shutdown to protect the stock, they would be looking for some form of compensation. I know none of us here can indicate that. It would be a government decision, if it were to happen.

One thing they have consistently asked for, and we've seen it today—and I'll say it again, to be on the record—is to be players and partners, in cooperation with you. I encourage you to do everything you possibly can to encourage that dialogue and cooperation. If the evidence you present is absolutely correct—and I'm not questioning it—and they have confidence that it's correct, then I think they'll see that maybe DFO is doing what's best. It may be a tough love approach, or whatever. But if they have suspicions, then they become disappointed, and everything else happens around that.

So I would encourage a much more open dialogue and continuation of cooperation with the fishermen on this particular issue.

• (1055)

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** I can certainly guarantee that we want to work much more closely and continue to do so.

One thing I'd like to stress is that since the moratorium, ways to work more closely have been increasing consistently. We have the sentinel fisheries that are done by the fishermen providing information. With the Larocque issue, most of the projects are now being brought forward by industry people jointly with DFO. Every effort to close the gap is being made. I think the fall meeting should be a very important moment to come to grips with what we want to do together.

**Mr. David Bevan:** Let me add one brief point.

These are decisions that have economic and social impacts. In the past, we've given ministers science advice. Now, when we have to make these kinds of tough calls, we make sure the minister has information regarding the impacts, how those impacts are distributed, and who is going to be affected most severely. These are not things we would ask a minister to decide without full information.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Mr. Allen.

**Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for being here.

I have one question, but it has three parts.

The briefing document says professional groundfishers cannot understand why the scientists are so adamant despite repeated contestations from the fishers. The fishers base their reason for contesting on the lack of credibility given to them in the assessment methods used by DFO, despite the various observations and analysis.

When you extend that to say your advice is being gathered through landing statistics, phone interviews with fishermen, and

your sentinel surveys, what I'd like to know is what weight is given to the fishers in finalizing your assessment? How extensive is the phone consultation that is done, and what is the type of data you're actually collecting? Third, is there any other data point, even from the fishers, that would give their estimates of biomass and would contradict DFO's?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** Clearly, all the information is tabled, and some of it comes directly from the fishermen through the log book, landings, the bycatch, and so on. All of this information is on the table.

I would invite you to participate in one of those peer review meetings, which are very extensive, sometimes lasting a full week, where people present their information and are challenged. We invite international experts to look at the information.

The phone survey is done jointly with the industry. I don't know the extent of the questions, but it's been going on for multiple years now. There's a very sophisticated approach to doing it.

I'm a bit worried about the concept of the credibility of our scientists, of their not being there; of people not trusting our scientists. We have a very strong cadre of scientists. They're working nationally, they're being challenged internationally, and their information is being peer-reviewed. I think it's easy to claim that what they do is wrong, but the issue is more how we improve what's being done, if indeed it's wrong, and how we can correct it, if there are issues. But we haven't seen proof today that what our scientists have done is wrong.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bill Matthews):** Are you finished now?

**Mr. Mike Allen:** There's just my last question. Nobody commented on other data points on biomass. You have your estimates, but have there been any other estimates counter to that by fishers?

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** Yes. The sentinel survey, which is done by the industry people, is also a biomass index.

**Mr. Mike Allen:** And there are no numbers.... You have 36,000 tonnes. Is there any—

**Mr. Sylvain Paradis:** The 36,000 tonnes is all together. It's when all the information is being taken into account.

If you take the CSAS peer review report, you should have all the information about the sentinel survey, the fixed gears, the mobile gears, all the long lines, and so on. It gives you all of the indices that are being used.

**Mr. Mike Allen:** Okay.

Thank you, Chair.

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** Thanks, Mr. Allen.

I want to thank Mr. Bevan and Mr. Paradis for sharing. We thoroughly enjoyed your presentation and your answers.

I want to thank committee members for their help as well.

The meeting is adjourned.





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

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

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