



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

FOPO • NUMBER 016 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 25, 2010

—
Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Tuesday, May 25, 2010

• (0945)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

[Translation]

Good morning everyone. It is a real pleasure to be with you all today.

[English]

Ladies and gentlemen, before we begin, it's our custom at the committee when we travel to allow a few minutes for a few words of introduction from the member who represents this area and the area that we are travelling to.

Monsieur Blais.

[Translation]

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

I would like to begin by conveying my greetings to members of the Committee and wishing them a very warm welcome to Grande-Rivière.

In the next few hours, we will be hearing from several different witnesses. I also want to point out that, this afternoon, we will have an opportunity to visit the Sainte-Thérèse plant and meet with people who have been, or are still, grappling with this problem. We will begin the hearings, which will allow us to gain a better understanding of the impacts—even though, in actual fact, we are already quite aware of them—impacts which are very real.

In the communities, there are economic impacts, but there are also impacts on individuals. These people will tell us about their experience, what they are going through now and what they could be facing next year. After that, we will begin our work and present a report containing recommendations. This year, and especially next year, we are aiming to have these recommendations acted on in order to make life easier for these people and mitigate the impacts.

I want to thank you for being here today. We will turn it over to the witnesses to say what they have to say. I am sure it will be a worthwhile experience, for us and for you.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci, monsieur Blais.*

Ladies and gentlemen, throughout our proceedings this morning, you will hear an alarm signalling that time has expired, whether it's for presentations or questions from members. Members of the committee know what time constraints they are limited to. I would ask, if you hear the alarm, that you begin to bring your remarks to a conclusion.

Starting off this morning, we have Monsieur Scantland, who I believe is going to make a presentation, followed by Monsieur Cousineau, Monsieur Blais, Monsieur Lelièvre, and Monsieur Desbois.

Monsieur Scantland, if you want to proceed, you have four minutes to make your opening comments.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Scantland (General Director, Conférence régionale des élu(e)s Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine): I would like to thank the Standing Committee for coming to our region to see for itself the reality we have been facing since early spring. This situation obviously has an extremely prejudicial effect on all our maritime communities. I particularly want to stress its impact on our plant workers, dock hands and fishers.

I would like to take a few moments to introduce the Conférence régionale des élu(e)s. This is a group composed of elected representatives from the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands region. It is an organization that was created by the Government of Quebec, five years ago, to act as a special point of contact with the Quebec government regarding development in the region. The Conférence régionale des élu(e)s is regularly consulted by the Quebec government on all issues relating to development in the region. In that sense, the Quebec government has also been made aware of the current situation.

In my opening statement, I will be emphasizing one word in particular: insecurity—the insecurity created by the current management scheme and reflected in the current circumstances of fishers, fish plant workers and the industry as a whole. To me it is inconceivable, given the current situation, current knowledge of the resource and the work being done by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, that we are unable to plan better, particularly over the longer term.

Right now, we are in a situation where all the harvesting plans were announced at a very late date—and I will be dealing in general terms with harvesting plans as a whole. There is no, or almost no, consultation, particularly when the news is bad. When the news is good, they are ready to consult and share the resource but when the time comes to announce bad news, it is done on the sly with very little consultation.

I would say that the ones who are really missing in all these consultations are the communities. The communities are never consulted about what is happening in an area where they are the most directly affected. The fact is that 25% of the economy in the Gaspé region depends on the fisheries. Yet, the communities, like the *Conférence régionale des élu(e)s* and elected representatives in general, are rarely, if ever, consulted regarding the status of the industry. Furthermore, very little information is communicated to partners when changes or draconian cuts are made to quotas.

Obviously, all of that has a shock effect on the industry as a whole—as I was saying earlier—and it results in disputes between the different fleets, between traditional fishers and those with temporary allocations, between fishers and the fisher helpers, or between plant workers and fishers. It systematically destabilizes our communities. It results in tragic situations, both for the families and for the companies.

Cuts in fishing quotas also accentuate interprovincial competition. We know that Quebec has not often been the beneficiary of resource sharing when it comes to competitive quotas. In that regard, quota cuts also lead to fierce competition among buyer/processors at both the provincial and interprovincial levels.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans' power to manage the resource is definitely too heavily concentrated in Ottawa. Furthermore, it focuses more on issues in the Eastern provinces, to the detriment of Eastern Quebec. Decisions are made very slowly with respect to sectoral issues. I would just like to give you an example: a request to lower licensing costs for the shrimp fishery is still being reviewed more than eight years later—eight years to make a decision.

● (0950)

There is also the groundfish issue. After three moratoriums and scientific confirmation of the impact of grey seals, we are still awaiting a management plan to reduce or eliminate grey seals in the Gulf. This is just to illustrate the fact that things evolve extremely slowly and that solutions are never brought forward.

I know that time is flying by, but I am not sure how much I have left.

In general, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans manages the resource in a vacuum, resulting in repeated objections every spring, which forces governments, at the local and regional levels, to get involved and provincial governments to manage the situation, since the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the federal government generally just offload the problem. This is a very poor example for the fishing industry in the Maritime regions. It presents the image of a totally disorganized industry. When the time comes to work with—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Scantland.

Monsieur Cousineau.

[Translation]

Mr. Gaétan Cousineau (Coordinator, Mouvement Action-Chômage Pabok Inc.): Thank you for inviting me to discuss the direct repercussions on individuals of all the problems we are encountering in the fishery and other sectors. For 20 years now, the

Mouvement Action-Chômage Pabok Inc. has been defending people who encounter problems with the Employment Insurance Act. In fact, people often turn to our organization to try and understand what is happening to them when they are unable to find employment, and to receive advice as well.

In the last 20 years, we have experienced the closure of the Murdochville plant, the cod moratorium, and the closure of the Gaspésia plant on two occasions, before and after reconstruction. We also suffered the setbacks associated with the Smurfit-Stone plant in New Richmond. Every closure has had an appalling impact on individuals, families and children. First of all, the greatest impact is on jobs. Job sources are limited to three, although now it is more like two, since work opportunities are very limited in the forest industry. As a result, people have to upgrade their skills in order to move into other areas of employment.

When you have been a fisher for 20 years, it is pretty hard to move into the tourism industry and remain in the region. So, we see a lot of former workers leaving the region to go and work in Western Canada, on the North Shore, in Montreal—all over the place. They work in order to qualify for employment insurance, so that they can return to their region. Most of the people I have spoken to tell me that they end up with less money when they have to leave the region to work somewhere else. The main reasons for that are, first of all, travel costs, because they go back home to visit their families regularly, and also the fact that they have to pay rent both at home and outside their region. I regularly have occasion to see the disastrous family environment that this creates. There are suicides, separations, kids who have to be taken out of high school and university, because there is not enough money to meet their needs. We have seen families broken up and their homes repossessed by banking institutions. All of that creates an absolutely miserable environment.

The people who are left here, who do not have an opportunity to go and work somewhere else, are reduced to working at short-term jobs provided by *Emploi-Québec* every season, where they earn \$10, \$11 or \$12 an hour, or an annual income of \$20,000 or \$22,000, placing them just slightly above the poverty line.

So, you can imagine the kind of gloomy atmosphere that settles over a region such as ours. Often we ask ourselves why we are unable to recover from this. When the climate turns gloomy after consecutive closures, people feel as though they have hit rock bottom. As a result, it is very difficult, and it takes a very long time to regain a positive spirit and possibly start a new business or invest money—of course, someone who is not earning any money is not able to invest any.

For us, this has been the situation since the cod moratorium, which resulted in the layoff of almost 1,000 people. At the Murdochville plant, it was 700 or 800; at Gaspésia, 600 or 700; and at Smurfit-Stone, 300 or 400. Those are direct jobs that do not include all the indirect jobs.

The population of the Gaspé area is aging. The region is emptying out and, very often, the ones who are leaving are replaced by retirees—former residents of the region who spent 30 years working somewhere else and have come back home. The economy is obviously a little less dynamic when it is supported by retirees.

●(0955)

Those are the comments I wanted to make this morning.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cousineau.

Mr. Blais, please.

Mr. Gérard-Raymond Blais (Representative, Municipalité régionale de comté de Bonaventure): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. I represent the Bonaventure RCM and will be speaking to you today about the situation in the region since fishing quotas were cut, something which is causing great concern among residents.

I am the mayor of a municipality by the name of Saint-Godefroi in the Baie des Chaleurs. For many years now, we have had the sense that we are always on the receiving end of news announced suddenly and bluntly—bad news like cuts to the crab fishing quotas. The two gentlemen that came before me pretty well summarized the situation residents are facing.

Mr. Scantland talked about insecurity; I would like to talk about uncertainty. People are leaving the Gaspé region in droves—particularly young people—to find work. In the past, people talked about going to work in the large urban centres, like Montréal and Quebec City. Now people are leaving the province to go and work in Alberta and Manitoba.

That worries residents, because it results in a significant loss of income for crabbers. Furthermore, dock hands and plant workers who only worked four or five weeks before now find themselves reduced to only two weeks of work. There has been a return to what I experienced when I was 16 years old, what were called at the time “odd jobs”. Nothing has changed in all those years, not to mention the economic losses in Gaspésie and throughout the region that you will be visiting in the coming days.

Furthermore, this has had a considerable impact on the health of residents of the Gaspé region. The reason I know is that, for several years, I was the manager of a centre that treats drug addicts. The job losses, the uncertainty and the insecurity all affect people's health.

Friends, drug addiction in Gaspésie is more and more common as a result of these job losses and sudden drops in income from one day to the next. I do not understand why the experts in government cannot predict what is going to befall us today, tomorrow or in future years. I beg you, members of Parliament and ministers alike, to do all you can to ensure that people have some inkling of what could occur in the next few years.

In terms of problems in the fishery—Mr. Cousineau talked about some of them—we have experienced the same difficulties in the groundfish fishery. At the time, I was with the CSN and we discussed the issue at length. We tried to find solutions. After the cod fishery, now it is the crab fishery's turn.

So, I think it is plausible that your experts are well positioned and well enough paid to be able to predict what is going to hit us in the coming years. It is not only the Bonaventure RCM; the entire population is raising the alarm, asking that you answer its call.

●(1000)

The people behind us who are listening to the discussion have lost income. Sometimes they find themselves living below the poverty line. That is not the case for the majority, but it is for a pretty large segment of the population.

I can imagine what it is like to be in the position of the people who represent us. I do not want to be mean, but it seems to me that they live in a completely different world. When they are seated comfortably at their desks, they cannot possibly imagine what people who earn only \$12,000 a year are going through.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will conclude my presentation by once again urging you to plan, and to think about the people living in poverty, who are encountering these problems on a daily basis, and who get up every morning wondering whether they will still be working tomorrow, and whether they will be able to allow themselves a little luxury and regain their physical and psychological health.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blais.

Mr. Lelièvre, please.

Mr. Léo Lelièvre (Acting Reeve, Municipalité régionale de comté du Rocher Percé): Good morning to all the members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, as well as all the captains at the back of the room.

It seems to me that, prior to this year, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans should have cut crab quotas gradually. This year, the quota cut has put a great deal of pressure on the economy in our RCM. The municipality, the RCM in general and business have been hit hard. For the fishing captains who are behind me, this year has brought a deficit. Since the crab fishery closed in 1989, captains have made the necessary effort to conserve the species. They have paid for observers at sea, like the BIOREX company, and dockside observers from Resmar Inc., who are responsible for weighing the crab that is fished. During those years, there were about 130 traditional crabbers. Now there are more than 350. That is what is known as overfishing. There are too many people out there, and that is why the resource is declining.

As regards the dock hands, it is impossible for them to qualify for employment insurance when they only work four weeks. They are worried about their future. The federal government should provide financial assistance and training at the École des pêches.

As for plant employees, once again, I come back to employment insurance, because people work in order to qualify. Some work in plants for four weeks, which does not really pay much. One thing is for sure: they are not eligible for employment insurance.

Because we live in a remote, even devitalized region, the government should reduce the number of hours needed to qualify for employment insurance and restore isolation premiums for people living in areas such as ours, which are remote. That would really help people.

In terms of the local economy—convenience stores, grocery stores and businesses—the situation is not promising. Sales are down. Plants where US money is coming in are not financially viable. The exchange rate is too high. The government should also consider granting a tax exemption to processing plants. It would be possible to have employees work at other sites and grant them tax exemptions.

In the Gaspé region, wood is disappearing. There is no more wood and there has been no more cod since the moratorium, as my colleagues were saying a little earlier. Now a moratorium is being imposed on the crab fishery. What will become of that fishery, of the fishing captains, dock hands and plants in years to come? I do not know whether the government can answer that, but I would really like an answer.

Thank you, and have a nice day.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Desbois.

Mr. Daniel Desbois (President, Association des crabiers gaspésiens inc.): Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, we are appealing to you today on behalf of our members, who are all traditional snow crab fishers in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

We would like to discuss the current situation—a situation which warrants that an inquiry be conducted with respect to the management practices of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Not only are those management practices contrary to the principles of sustainable development, but they raise a great many questions as to whether the resource is being managed in the public interest and in a manner that is consistent with new departmental policies and the principles laid out in the Fisheries Act and the Oceans Act.

In the crab fishery in the southern Gulf, the vast majority of fishing enterprises that we represent are the only ones whose economic activity depends exclusively on that resource. They deal with the coastal communities in Northern New Brunswick, the Gaspé, the Cape Breton Islands and Prince Edward Island, and employ approximately 800 professional fishers.

Furthermore, the primary processing activity of 15 or more plants in New Brunswick and Quebec depends on supplies of crab from that fleet. These plants represent between 3,000 and 4,000 additional seasonal jobs.

Traditional fishers fish in zone 12, which has been the main crab stock fishing zone in the southern Gulf since the mid-1960s. Those stocks also supply three other sub-zones—12E, 12F and 19—and now zone 18 as well, since fishers from zone 18 were rolled into zone 12 in 2003.

This year, Fisheries and Oceans Canada suddenly reduced the total allowable catch of crab in zone 12 by 63%, from 20,900 tons to 7,700 tons in 2010, on the grounds that the commercial crab biomass in the southern Gulf was overfished during the first declining cycle of the resource. This decision shocked the entire industry, which will be facing income losses estimated at more than \$125 million this year. The overall 2010 quota reflects the lowest TAC since the fishery began.

As far as we are concerned, DFO decisions in recent years with respect to management of the snow crab fishery in the southern Gulf triggered the overfishing, something which was roundly criticized by the Department's scientists. Like what has happened to too many fish species in Canada and around the world, this dramatic situation is the predictable result of an ill-considered increase in the fishing capacity for short-term political gain.

Indeed, since 2003, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has permanently tripled the snow crab fishing capacity in the southern Gulf. The Department chose this course of action at the time on the grounds that it wanted to use the snow crab fishery to reduce the fishing effort of lobster and groundfish fishers in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence. Fisheries and Oceans Canada then added some 700 new entrants to the 150 additional crabbers in the main snow crab fishing zone—zone 12. Those new entrants secured 34.8% of the overall quota for that zone. The Department also authorized an excessive increase in the number of boats, from 160 to 400, as well as the number of traps, which went from 18,500 to 38,000.

By taking that course of action, Fisheries and Oceans Canada acted in direct contravention of the principles of sustainable development, completely ignoring its obligation to consider fully the environmental and economic impacts of its decisions, as well as the interests of future generations. The Department chose to undermine these principles, rather than encouraging their adoption. Finally, Fisheries and Oceans Canada chose to imperil both the survival of the resource and the economic survival of the people who depend on it now, as well as those who will want to make a living from it in future.

In actual fact, Fisheries and Oceans Canada adopted practices that are irreconcilable with its own sustainable stock management policies, which very clearly argue in favour of maintaining a healthy balance between the fishing capacity and available resources in all Canadian fisheries. The official data show that 40,000 additional tons of snow crab have been harvested in the southern Gulf since 2003, compared to previous cycles. All of the additional harvest is attributable to the sub-zones and new entrants.

In fact, the catch of traditional zone 12 fishers, who have depended exclusively on that resource since the 1960s, remained about the same over the last two cycles—110,000 tons between 1995 and 2002, and 109,000 tons between 2003 and 2009.

•(1010)

In the previous cycle, from 1995 to 2002, Fisheries and Oceans Canada seems to have been aware of the impact on the resource associated with these new entrants. That consideration seems to have disappeared since 2003, however. The fact is that the Minister has proportionately increased the share of the catch allocated to the new entrants, even as the resource was declining more and more. Managers at Fisheries and Oceans Canada continue to go against the grain in maintaining that approach, without considering the potential impact on this species' natural cycle of decline. Yet all of this has been very well documented by the Department's own scientists. Fishers who depend on these resources, as well as several other stakeholders who support the representations they are making to you, are asking that a proper inquiry be carried out into our allegations that Fisheries and Oceans Canada's management practices in the southern Gulf are not consistent with government commitments to sustainable development or even its own management policies.

In April of 1999, the Auditor General of Canada concluded his report on management practices in the Atlantic shellfish fisheries as follows:

4.107 We noted significant weaknesses in the Department's management practices designed to achieve its objective for the Atlantic shellfish fishery. Our audit found decisions that contradict the Department's Fishery of the Future strategy, which formed the basis of our criteria for this audit. In addition, the Department is pursuing social objectives that it has not articulated to Parliament, and economic objectives for which it has not identified expected results. There is an urgent need for the Department to clarify these objectives and to develop and implement the strategies to achieve overall sustainability of the Atlantic shellfish fisheries.

In February of 2000, in response to the Auditor General's report, the Department undertook an extensive review of its Atlantic fisheries policy. That review gave rise to the new Atlantic Fisheries Policy Framework that was adopted in March of 2004. That policy framework received unanimous approval from both industry and provincial governments. It highlights what should and should not be done in terms of the changes that are needed to ensure the sustainability of the stocks and the Atlantic fisheries. Naturally, we would have expected the Minister to quickly put into practice these important principles and the guidelines set out in the framework. However, that does not appear to be the case.

I would like to draw your attention to the following example. In March, 2005, and again in March, 2006, the Department announced that it would extend until 2009 the fishing overcapacity in zone 12 announced in 2003. The decision made this year is even more worrisome, in our view, since it was precisely in a cycle of natural decline, where the biomass is at its lowest level in the history of the fishery, that the Department announced, on March 8, that it would extend the overcapacity to 2014. It should be noted, however, that, in Chapter 5 of the Atlantic Fisheries Policy Framework, which deals with access to the resource, the Department's new management policy certainly does not encourage using the resources from one fishery to fill gaps in other fisheries experiencing difficulty.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada adopted these policies with a view to responding to the Auditor General's warning. But certain facts were completely ignored. The Department has done quite the opposite when it comes to managing the snow crab fishery in the

southern Gulf, as well as other shellfish fisheries in the Atlantic region, according to what our fisher colleagues are saying.

In 2006, and again in 2007, the traditional crabber fleet formally asked the Department to begin discussions, with a view to codifying the relationship that should exist between fishing capacity and the available resource. In keeping with that vision, the guidelines and principles set out in the Atlantic Fisheries Strategic Plan—

I am almost done, Mr. Chairman.

Our requests received neither a response nor an acknowledgement.

•(1015)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Desbois.

Madame Metallic, do you have some opening comments?

Ms. Delphine Metallic (Assistant Director, Natural Resources, Listuguj Mi'gmaq Government): Good morning to the standing committee. Welcome to the Gaspé.

My name is Delphine Metallic. I'm Mi'gmaq from the community of Listuguj in the Gesgapegiag territory. As you know, Listuguj fishes under the inherent right to fish granted or reaffirmed through the Marshall decision. We fish in zone 12. This is our tenth year in the fishery. We are still new, still learning, and we still want to be included and be part of the resource management.

In the past 10 years since Listuguj gained access to the fishery, it has brought to our community a new hope, a new economy to some degree, and a new industry. We have many fishers and captains, and the whole community has benefited. The nature of our licences is communal so the whole community benefits; not just one fisher or two fishers have benefited. Our whole community has benefited from this small craft fishery.

The recent cuts have dramatically affected our community, which is already economically depressed. I don't have to get into the realities of first nation communities, where there are no viable economic opportunities. A fishery like this brought a lot of hope.

We believed the fishery was being managed properly. We moved from a fixed quota to a percentage quota. We see now that the drastic decline from the biomass could have resulted in mismanagement of the fishery. This causes us great concern. We need immediate and sustainable measures to address this urgency that we are faced with. Solutions should be collaborative and inclusive.

I will just give you an idea of how the dramatic decline in the TAC has affected our community with the loss of jobs, as in the rest of the areas that are impacted. There is the loss of the profits that were turned back into the community to fund underfunded projects, which are chronically underfunded, as we know. We also utilized the profits gained from the fishery for employability measures in our community to help people rise above poverty levels, but they continue.... It's a very difficult situation.

Listuguj Mi'gmaq's main concern is the continued survival of the species. We are prepared to work collaboratively with stakeholders and government officials to find workable and sustainable solutions. Any objectives of a strategy should include the continued survival of the species and should also include the Mi'gmaqs on resource management, with meaningful involvement.

I speak here today only for Listuguj, just for my community, not all Mi'gmaqs. We are committed to ensure that objectives are met through consultations with the government, stakeholders, user groups, and other interested groups, and the continued involvement of all our community members at all levels.

In the past, we have engaged in other resource management efforts involving the community at large to develop, to manage, and to monitor. This has proven to be successful. We are committed to ensuring sustainability and are concerned, as I mentioned, with the survival of the species.

We need to develop a Mi'gmaq governance working group that would ensure a sustainable snow crab harvesting plant with Mi'gmaq involvement. As somebody mentioned earlier, decisions are made too far away, without the awareness of what goes on at a local level.

We should create a constitutionally protected rights-based fishery under section 35. We understand that this will take time and financial resources.

Listuguj is committed and ready to move solidly towards the development of a fishery that is sustainable and that will continue for generations to come. It's important that we preserve the stock so that our children and grandchildren will benefit.

We are only at the beginning of fully exercising our Mi'gmaq inherent right to fish. With access through Marshall, we now have an opportunity to fully implement treaty negotiations. Full implementation and full participation in the Gulf small craft fishery require capacity building and progress.

•(1020)

Listuguj has demonstrated that it can manage. For example, our salmon management plan has been utilized for over 25 years. We are looking to create sustainable solutions to help address the situation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to be here today to look at the snow crab industry in Atlantic Canada. Since the downturn on the cod moratorium, we've relied so much on other species, and crab in particular has become so important.

I have a few questions I'd like to ask. My first questions are to Gilbert and Daniel.

The FRCC made a recommendation that there be an independent, third party, apolitical structure established to hold public hearings and make public recommendations on access and allocation issues. Do you believe that is a good recommendation and would that help with allocation and access criteria?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: Unfortunately, I am not aware of who sits on that independent commission, but if the communities are not involved and cannot influence the commission, it will be difficult to arrive at something that respects the individual circumstances of each.

The Conférence régionale des élu(e)s conducted a study on the cost of the insecurity brought about by current management practices, and the cost is incredibly high. Businesses are unable, year after year, to evaluate the stocks that are delivered to them. Fishers are unable to estimate the stocks they will be harvesting. As a result, there is no development occurring in the industry. We are not moving forward, because we have not ensured the basic minimum. In that regard, it is obvious that someone is going to have to look at this and establish a basic minimum that people in all the communities can rely on and, from there, build up the industry. Right now, we are not building the industry, we are tearing it apart.

Mr. Daniel Desbois: As we see it, if there is any way of reducing the political impact of quota allocation, that would certainly be a very good thing. At the same time, there need to be real consultations to determine who will sit on these committees. So far, the consultations have taken place out of politeness more than anything else. They consult us, but it is more out of politeness than out of interest. It is a little like what is happening this morning: we are given four minutes to make a presentation, on 10 days notice. That is almost an insult to us.

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Gilbert, you mentioned that you'd like to see DFO decentralized. What recommendations would you make on decentralizing DFO from Ottawa?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: I think that, where fisheries management is concerned, there are other ways of working than simply having someone make decisions from a central point and filter them down to the communities that depend on these fisheries. It seems to me we could show some imagination and find governance models that involve the communities. Let us be adult enough to think that our communities are capable of making the necessary choices when it comes to properly managing the fish stocks they depend on.

In terms of decentralization, my view is that Fisheries and Oceans Canada should be the custodian in charge of conserving the resource, not managing it. The Department should be providing advice on how to harvest the resource, but the sharing and management of the resource should be left to the communities. When I say the communities, I am talking about fishers and processors—the people who earn a living from the fishery.

•(1025)

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Andrews.

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

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

To begin with, I would like to let the witnesses know, as well as everyone who will be making presentations later this morning, that Committee members are very interested in receiving any documentation that you have and would like to forward to us. If the material is translated, that would be even better; if it is not, we will have it translated. I am thinking in particular of the briefs of Mr. Desbois or Mr. Scantland, or any other material you may wish to present. Please do not hesitate to do that. We will be very pleased to receive it and to look through it, in order to better understand your testimony.

I am a guy from radio, like Gérard-Raymond Blais, whom I had the chance to work with for several years. In radio, we are used to saying whatever we have to say very quickly. At the same time, I fully understand that dealing with an issue like the impact on the snow crab industry in just a few minutes is pretty well impossible. That is the reason why we are holding several hearings, something that will give us a chance to reflect on all the issues.

I would be interested in hearing more from you, particularly, Mr. Desbois, on the inquiry you are calling for with respect to the Department's management practices, which do not jibe with the principles of sustainable development, and so on. Perhaps you could say a little more about that.

Mr. Daniel Desbois: My presentation focuses almost exclusively on this topic, with supporting graphs. Without these graphs, it is difficult to provide much detail. I had to cut back my presentation and was unable to complete it. I had asked to make a single presentation with the representatives from New Brunswick, but that was not possible. However, it might be possible to do that at another time, in order to provide more descriptive information. Unfortunately, I am not able to present those graphs and complete my presentation—

Mr. Raynald Blais: What did the graphs indicate?

Mr. Daniel Desbois: The graphs show activity in the fisheries over the last two cycles. For example, traditional crabbers harvested almost 110,000 tons from 1999 to 2002, as well as from 2003 to 2009. However, during the second cycle, an additional 40,000 tons were harvested. We are accused of overfishing, but we are not the ones who harvested those 40,000 tons; it is the Department that made that decision in order to meet its own obligations. It should be managing the lobster fishery properly. There is no reason why crabbers or the crab resource should have to pay for the mistakes made in managing the lobster or groundfish fishery, but that is exactly what is happening now. The crab resource is paying for those mistakes. We are doing exactly the same thing in the case of crab.

Crab is a highly profitable resource which was very well managed until 2000, at which time the sharing began. Nobody asked for assistance at that point. In fact, it is only since 2003 that fishers have begun to ask for help, but we have reached the same point as everyone else. No one is able to earn a living from the fishery anymore. The Department is using the resource to meet its obligations because of poor management or ad hocery.

Mr. Raynald Blais: You made reference to a study looking at costs. There again, I imagine you could provide us with those documents.

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: Yes, we will make that study available. There is a first section presenting an analysis of the governance chain, as well as a diagnosis. After that, we worked on the costs of the insecurity caused by the current management system. But it is not only the federal government that is targeted here; it is the structure as a whole. So, we will be releasing this document to the public in a few weeks, and we will forward it to you.

● (1030)

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Cousineau, regarding employment insurance, we know that there are solutions—for example, the number of hours required to qualify for EI could be lowered; the system could be enhanced.

Could you tell us more about the type of measures that are needed to deal with these kinds of situations? This is not necessarily the first time, nor will it be the last time, unfortunately, but it is clear that if the employment insurance system were geared more to specific needs, there would automatically be less of an impact.

Mr. Gaétan Cousineau: Raynald, I am sure you remember that starting in about 1990, the Employment Insurance program began to be cut back. The Employment Insurance fund began to record a surplus around 1994. The surplus went as high as \$55 billion. At that point, the money started to be rolled into the government's Consolidated Revenue Fund and was used for all kinds of other things.

At the same time, access to Employment Insurance started to become a lot more difficult. We went from weeks to hours. Penalties are now much tougher. An offence that previously resulted in a three-week penalty now leads to total disqualification. Obviously, in regions where employment sources are extremely limited and where there is no major industry generating jobs all year long, gaining access to employment insurance is nothing short of heroic, if I can put it that way. The fact is that for several years now, only about 45% of the people contributing to employment insurance can access benefits, whereas between 85% and 90% of contributors had access in the 1990s. It is becoming increasingly difficult. Our demands over time have been aimed at bringing down the number of hours required to qualify, obviously. Everything we are hearing this morning clearly indicates just how difficult it is to compensate for lost income in the industry.

The government has an obligation to balance regional economies and support people throughout the regions, rather than forcing them to leave home to earn a decent income, so they can feed their families. Stakeholders are all asking for the same thing with respect to employment insurance: a reduction in the number of hours, and extended benefit periods so that people can cover the complete cycle when there is no work in the region.

Of course, if the unemployment rate is around 8% or 10%, there is a greater possibility of finding work. But here, where the unemployment rate has always hovered between 17% and 21%, there clearly are very few opportunities to find work outside of the tourist season, which has become very short. That is the reason why we have consistently been asking that the Employment Insurance Act be adjusted.

It is not a question of money. There is plenty of money in the Employment Insurance Fund. Every year it generates a surplus of \$3 or \$4 billion. Our demands could easily be met with the money currently being paid into the fund through contributions by both employers and employees.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm very pleased to be here in this region. I would just like to add that I am from the west coast so it's especially important for me to be here to hear your concerns, to hear what you have to say. I'm also a new member of Parliament. I was elected in November last year.

But when I first heard of the snow crab issue, I thought that it was very important that this committee come to the region, listen to the concerns, and see if we can make some recommendations. I would really encourage you to submit your recommendations and your solutions. If you feel there hasn't been enough time at this committee—unfortunately, we need to have limited presentation times, etc.—I would encourage you to submit them in writing and get that to us, as Monsieur Blais has mentioned. We can follow up.

My first question is for you, Mr. Scantland. You talked about insecurity and the current management. You talked about the need for better planning, and about late announcements, especially with bad news. You emphasized no consultation or limited consultation, especially with regard to involving the community, and I'm wondering if you could elaborate more and talk a little bit more about what kind of model or management model you envision that would address these issues.

•(1035)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: It is always difficult to comment on that sort of thing. At the same time, I do think there are a couple of starting points. There are a few basics that must be considered before we can develop a model of governance that would really reflect the realities in the different areas.

My description of the way Fisheries and Oceans Canada manages the resource here would be that the decision-making process is relatively centralized, based on data provided by biologists. It is important to have that information. What is debatable is the way that information is made available and the way in which decisions are made, on behalf of communities or groups, as to the way of managing that resource. Elsewhere in the world, and even elsewhere in Canada, there are other ways of managing the fisheries that

involve the communities in the decision-making and allow them to develop solutions based on the expected status of the resource.

As regards crab in particular, we know that there is a cycle—and Mr. Desbois made some very intelligent comments on that earlier—a cycle which is predictable. Therefore, why would it not be possible to manage the fishery based on five-year plans providing for five-year quotas? What would the impact of that be? The impact would ultimately be negligible, and adjustments could be made over time. Why this vagueness, year after year?

I would like to draw a parallel to the forest industry. When you know what the status of the resource is and how much you will be harvesting over a certain number of years, you are in a better position to make adjustments subsequently in terms of developing the plants or new products and working with fishers, so that landings can be spread over a longer period of time. There are no constraints.

So, there are all kinds of ways of adjusting to what is happening in the plants, and to the realities facing the fishers and our communities. But if we do not have the right to give our opinion on resource management, other than through fleeting consultations, then we are clearly going to end up, year after year, in the same kind of situation we are facing today. That is what happened with the groundfish and shrimp fisheries. In the spring, when February and March roll around, we start to wonder whether it will be a warm or cold spring. A warm spring means there will be demonstrations, problems with the plants, problems with the fishers and problems with the workers.

Not one year goes by without another crisis. How can organizations such as ours be expected to influence development and find long-term solutions when we are systematically put in the position we find ourselves in now?

[*English*]

Mr. Fin Donnelly: *Merci.*

Monsieur Desbois, if you—

Oh, I'm out of time.

The Chair: *Merci.*

Mr. Allen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am very pleased to be here.

I want to thank you and all the fishers for being here today. Thank you and welcome.

I have a few questions this morning.

Mr. Desbois, are there places in the region where processing is occurring? And how many are we talking about?

Mr. Daniel Desbois: There are two in the Gaspé region and two more, in the Magdalen Islands.

•(1040)

Mr. Mike Allen: I am from western New Brunswick. There are a lot of potato producers in my riding, but not many crab fishers.

[English]

I want to read something into the record here this morning. It highlights a problem.

This was a report done for the provincial government in New Brunswick, and it's *en anglais*. In it, there is a comment that was made that says a lot about the industry and one of the challenges. This comment is from GTA Fisheries Consultants. I'm not sure if anybody's aware of that, but it says:

For some species, like snow crab, the status of their biomass and the quantity that can be fished from one year to the next (without compromising it) are cyclical in nature. These cycles represent a challenge, because the total allowable catch...can vary by 50% or more, depending on whether it is the upside or the downside of the cycle. When the total allowable catch is rising, there is enormous pressure to make way for more fishers. Conversely, when the cycle is falling, there are often too many fishers and so there is pressure to reduce the number of stakeholders.

I think that's what happens every year in the spring when this is all decided.

[Translation]

I imagine the question is whether there is a better way of setting the TAC year over year, compared to the current system.

Mr. Daniel Desbois: The issue is not only the TAC. We went through this in 1989-1990. The resource was jeopardized in 1989-1990 with 130 fishers. In cooperation with the Department's scientists, fishers reinvested in research. Thus we were able to rapidly increase the resource. It was far more abundant than it had ever been before, but the fishers did not reap the benefits. As soon as the resource became available, it was shared.

We invested in the fisheries, we behaved responsibly and then we ended up paying for having done that. The Department used the resource to meet its own obligations. If it managed the groundfish resource badly or if actions of that kind have meant that there is less available, that does not mean that others should have to deal with it. It is fine to set quotas, but if there is not enough to go around, then that is all there is.

As Mr. Scantland was saying, we go through the same thing every year. Harvesting plans are announced at the last minute, the last second. It might be a better idea to plan over a two- or three-year period. In any case, if there is not enough of the resource to go around, we will still be facing the same problem.

[English]

Mr. Mike Allen: Madame Metallic, you talked about a decision being made on a percentage basis as opposed to a fixed basis. Are you on a percentage basis now?

Ms. Delphine Metallic: Yes, we are.

Mr. Mike Allen: You started 10 years ago. What has been the impact of the percentage? We've had some high-catch years. What is the difference in the percentage that you've been able to take as opposed to if you were on a fixed basis?

Ms. Delphine Metallic: When Listuguj entered the fishery, it was on a fixed quota. Year after year we'd get agreements. The band officials negotiated with the government. They moved to maybe 550 metric tonnes, and then discussions were made to move first nations—Listuguj in particular, and I think other first nations as well, although I can't be certain—to a percentage. It increased dramati-

cally, almost twofold. From there, once it increased, the TAC began to fall and to fall, to where we are today. Listuguj has 295 metric tonnes for the community.

So we question how the discussions went, what data was given to the band, how the decisions came to be, and why part of the quota wasn't protected with a fixed amount. Because it's an inherent right, and the industry is subject to fluctuations in the market.

We're consulted, but for Mi'gmaq, it's not perhaps appropriate consultation. There could be more consultation involved. The fishery is communal and every member of the community is a stakeholder. It's not just one person; it's not just the band council. All the members of the community own part of this quota.

● (1045)

Mr. Mike Allen: Do you know what the difference is since you started and what you received over that period of time that would have been on a fixed basis as opposed to a percentage? Is it higher under the percentage?

Ms. Delphine Metallic: It was higher at the time they moved into percentage, but with the drop, it's lower than where we started.

Mr. Mike Allen: Okay, but over the 10-year period, is the overall catch lower?

Ms. Delphine Metallic: Yes.

Mr. Mike Allen: Okay.

[Translation]

I would like to address a question now to representatives of the communities. How many people are currently working in the processing industry in the Gaspé region?

Mr. Léo Lelièvre: About 800 people?

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: About 800 people are working in the plants.

[English]

Mr. Mike Allen: Okay.

[Translation]

In New Brunswick, I think there are about 2,000 people working in the plants. It seems the number of workers has dropped by 3% since 2000.

[English]

What is the wage rate they're paid? I know that in New Brunswick the wage rate in the facilities is kind of like...it's a lot of hours and low wages. Can you comment about what the wage rate is here and how many hours...? Is it that traditionally all the work is front-end loaded to the first part of the season, the first four weeks? I understand that a lot of the catch comes in the first four weeks of the season. Is that true?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Desbois: Yes.

[English]

Mr. Mike Allen: Okay. Do you have any comments to make on the wage rates in the plants?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Desbois: The number of workers has not really gone down. Because of new entrants, the number of crab fishery stakeholders has not gone down—in fact, it has gone up. The same quantity of crab is being landed a lot faster by more people; that is all. There is the same number of people, but they do not work as long.

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: That causes a problem in that the processing plants are not operating for quite a number of weeks, which means that the workers are quickly laid off. In our area—the Rocher Percé RCM and, to some extent the Bonaventure RCM—we set up an employer group so that, when the crab fishing season is over, workers can go and work in other fish plants. That made it possible to stabilize employment in the plants and ensure that workers have an adequate number of weeks of work. We are talking about 20, 22, 23 or 24 weeks of work a year, which has stabilized employment. However, with the reductions we are seeing now, it will be far more difficult to find placements for all these workers in other fish plants if the fish stocks have not increased.

That is also part of what I was explaining. We talk about insecurity, and that insecurity also affects the workers, because they will end up leaving the business and we will have trouble recruiting new ones. Right now, some industries are abstaining from developing new products, because they know they will not be able to find workers to come in for only two or three weeks. That is the problem the employer group wanted to resolve, but in a very serious situation such as the one these days, we will have trouble keeping that operation going in our area.

Mr. Mike Allen: Thank you.

How much time do I have left?

[English]

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Mike Allen: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Earlier, Mr. Cousineau, you briefly referred to the cod moratorium. Since the cod moratorium, have you seen any increase in cod and groundfish stocks over the past 10 to 20 years?

[Translation]

Mr. Gaëtan Cousineau: I am not directly connected to the fishery, but based on what we hear, groundfish stocks have improved in recent years. I really cannot elaborate any further, because I am not directly involved in fish harvesting. Nor am I personally aware of the results of surveys recently carried out by the Department.

• (1050)

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Desbois, do you have any comment on that?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Desbois: No, groundfish stocks are declining even if there is no fishing. Only seal stocks are going up.

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: I have a question regarding regulatory changes, Mr. Desbois. Because of the market conditions and resources in decline, is there any need to correct or make changes to regulations to allow fishing enterprises to harvest more economically? Can we change DFO regulations for fishers?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: There are definitely improvements to be made. We also need to give some thought to rationalization in the industry. Mr. Desbois was talking about this earlier; there has been a significant increase in the number of stakeholders in the crab fishing industry. This is happening in other areas as well. Our industry is too sensitive to market fluctuations.

In that sense, consideration must be given to the fact that everyone in the industry needs to be able to draw some benefit from it if we want it to be sustainable. However, under the current system, it is not possible to ensure the cost effectiveness of all the operations, whether it be the fishery, the plants or our communities. I keep coming back to this, but it is absolutely critical to reduce the level of insecurity if we want to increase the cost effectiveness of the industry and develop it further, rather than systematically reacting to the market and to the resource.

I believe we could do a much better job by directly involving all the stakeholders in the development of management and governance structures that reflect local realities.

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Are there any regulations that are currently restricting enterprises from becoming more economical? Are fishers wanting to combine or purchase new licences for additional quota and being prevented from doing so by obsolete regulations?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Desbois: In this region, the answer to that is yes and no. Things are quite difficult. In terms of fishing multiple species, as I was explaining earlier in my presentation, the vast majority of our members have only one licence. Even though fishing other species is put forward as a solution, we are not able to harvest other fish. We do not have the licences and we do not have the right to buy a licence to fish shrimp or lobster. At the same time, the Department is allowing lobster and groundfish fishers to harvest crab. But we cannot do that.

Mr. Gilbert Scantland: There you have an excellent example of a regulation that acts as an obstacle to stabilizing fishing activity. It is allowed in one direction, but not the other. Why? That is the question we should be asking. These are similar, overlapping regulations that result in a fisheries management system that creates a great deal of insecurity, without allowing for stability at all levels. We have to look at potentially rationalizing the fleet. As Mr. Desbois was saying, we cannot be constantly managing economic problems and managing the fishery. It seems as though the two are forever being lumped together.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Blais, please.

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

Perhaps we could give Gérard-Raymond Blais and Léo Lelièvre an opportunity to provide a little more detail about what they were mentioning earlier.

Mr. Lelièvre, you talked about tax exemptions for processors and isolation allowances. Would you mind elaborating on that?

Mr. Léo Lelièvre: Mr. Blais, there was a time, about 15 years ago, when we received an isolation allowance in the Gaspé region. That was helpful to people. They paid less tax because of that allowance. Given that we live in a remote area, something you know as well as I do, the isolation allowance would really help people in my RCM. A lot of people raised it with me and asked me about it. We have even talked about it within the RCM. The government gives an isolation allowance to people in the Magdalen Islands, so why not to people in the Gaspé region?

• (1055)

Mr. Raynald Blais: And what about the tax exemption for processors?

Mr. Léo Lelièvre: That would be a very good thing, as a way of encouraging people to look to other species. You know as well as I do that the US dollar and the current exchange rate are not helping much these days. So, a tax exemption is an attractive option.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Blais, Mr. Cousineau, you talked about the almost invisible impact, or, should I say, insidious effect of the uncertainty, and not knowing what is going to happen from one year to the next, in terms of health care and social services. People wonder whether they are going to have work, and for how long. That has a huge effect.

You also talked about drug addiction, marital problems, and that sort of thing. Can you elaborate a little more on that? Is this a problem that has grown over time?

Mr. Gérard-Raymond Blais: Actually, I would say that the effect is very visible. If you had occasion to talk to the people who work at the CLSCs, the hospitals or other institutions that provide health care in the region, you would readily see for yourselves that there has been more illness in recent years, since the crisis in the forest industry, the fisheries and agriculture—which is perfectly normal.

Clearly, when people never have enough money to get them to the end of the month, that results in physical and psychological problems. I still do volunteer work at the Pabok CLSC where we deal mainly with drug addicts. It is not hard to see that the drug

addiction rate rises every time jobs are lost in one industry or another. I believe you and I had the same experience, when we were without work for a certain amount of time. That causes anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty, and people find themselves asking a lot of questions, but without getting the answers they are so anxious to receive.

Mr. Raynald Blais: What do you think, Mr. Cousineau?

Mr. Gaétan Cousineau: Recently, we had the example of a lady who was fighting a battle over sickness benefits. Mr. Gérard-Raymond Blais talks about stress. Obviously, it can cause illnesses that, in the absence of that stress, were not as prevalent in society, such as cancer, heart attacks, embolisms, etc.

Employment insurance provides 15 weeks of sickness benefits. For about a year now, groups that defend the unemployed have been fighting to secure an increase in the number of weeks of sickness benefits from the federal government, but this demand does not seem to have been very well received, since nothing is being done right now to try and respond to that new reality. There are more and more people being diagnosed with cancer.

As the gentleman was saying, it costs a lot of money to receive care in the region, because you have to go to Rimouski or Quebec City. There is no isolation allowance to compensate for those expenses. All of that just adds to the gloomy atmosphere and insecurity that everyone has been talking about this morning.

I really do not know how we will be able to support these people, who represent a considerable proportion of the population in our region. I am receiving more and more calls from people who say they are entitled to 10 or 12 weeks, that they only have 3 weeks of sickness benefits left, and that their treatment will take 3, 4 or 5 months. They are wondering what is going to happen to them. Employment insurance certainly cannot continue to provide income replacement, since they are neither available or able to work. So, these people find themselves in what is an impossible situation.

• (1100)

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have three minutes. I would like to direct my question to Monsieur Desbois, but if I may, I'll really quickly reiterate what I think I'm hearing overall in terms of some recommendations. One is that DFO needs to reduce uncertainty by changing the governance and management model or structure and shifting to a community-based one, and also that they need to increase job and worker security by protecting fishers and plant workers.

But the third thing I heard was that we need an investigation into the current snow crab situation. There was a reference made that the last time the allocations of the catch levels were this low was 20 years ago. So I'm wondering, Monsieur Desbois, if you could comment further about what this investigation would look like and who would be involved. Could you elaborate a little in the remaining time?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Desbois: As I said, we experienced this kind of drop in 1989-1990. At the time, there were 130 of us in the industry. When that happened, we sat down, acted responsibly and invested a lot of money in research. We gave a lot of money to biologists at Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and that resulted in significant advancements. Until 1994-1995, we were seeing record catches, or pretty well. But from then on, the Department did not let us reap the benefits of the effort we had made and the responsible actions we had taken. The resource allowed the Department to shirk its responsibilities. You may be thinking that I am constantly repeating myself, but it is a little difficult to ask fishers to behave responsibly if they are not going to be allowed to reap the benefits subsequently.

In terms of regulations and what could be changed, first and foremost, the resource has to be protected. That is the first thing, because without the resource, no one can make a living. For three years now in Quebec, the guys have not been covering their expenses. I do not know how it was managed. They based themselves on past years, when crabbers had a few good years, but that has not been the case for a long time now. It looks as though the resource is being managed based on things that happened in the past, on parochial squabbles. It seems that someone who is making money in the region does not have the right to do that. But all of that is over now, because no one here is making any money and no one has for at least three years.

That is more the case in Quebec than in New Brunswick because, since the Marshall ruling, the Quebec region has paid 17%, compared to 11% in New Brunswick, because the quotas were already higher. Starting in 1990, they were individual quotas. Quebec fishers paid 6% more for the Aboriginal communities. As a result, for three years now, these quotas have been incredible. The media are talking about it this year, but for three years now, the guys have not been meeting their expenses.

So, the resource is important, but so is the way it is allocated. So far, it seems the Department is trying to get rid of one enterprise to the benefit of another. We really do not know. It is difficult to understand precisely what the Department is aiming to do. We are sort of swimming against the current, without knowing what is going on, and we really do not know what to do about it. What regulations should be put in place? What exactly is happening with us? What is happening in terms of management? That is the source of the uncertainty. We do not know where we are going, and as a result, we are unable to plan.

The guys have made a lot of investments, but now we are wondering what we should do. We really do not know. I cannot really answer you as long as there is not more stability in certain areas. We will not be able to continue much longer; pretty soon, we will be facing a crisis like the one that hit the groundfish industry. The boats will be tied up at the dock and there will be no fish or shellfish left. That is the direction we are moving in.

• (1105)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kamp.

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

Thanks to all of you for coming here to help us understand this issue a little better.

Let me begin by saying that the Quebec region has often been an example for others in the Maritimes and Newfoundland and Labrador to follow in terms of conservation measures. We thank you for the good work you've done in the past on that.

I only have a few minutes, so let me begin with Mr. Desbois.

I understood that you represent traditional crabbers; I think I'm right there. Are there any temporary... Those who held temporary licences, or quota holders, as they're sometimes called, or core fishermen, as they're sometimes called as well...were there any in this region who got temporary licences in addition to the traditional licences for crab?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Desbois: Yes, in this area we have been sharing since 1995. However, since 2003, the allocations are made to associations of fishers who give them to other fishers, who fish their quota for them. That money is used to rationalize the fisheries. That is why we are saying the Department is using crab to shirk its own responsibilities. Rather than buying back the licences it sells, it rents out this crab stock to a fishers association, which then has to develop a rationalization plan. That money is being used to buy back lobster and fish traps in order to get these people out of the fishery.

[English]

Mr. Randy Kamp: But there are some in this region who have benefited from that arrangement, yes...?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Desbois: Yes, but let me give you an example. For instance, if the price of crab were \$2 this year, the association would send a fisher out to harvest it for \$1. It would use the other dollar for its rationalization program, because the association is not allowed to fish; it does not have boats or licences. Under normal circumstances, only a fisher can get a licence or certain exemptions. Some fishers have corporate licences. Most of the time, an association or a company is not allowed to hold a licence. Fishers take the allocations from the associations, and a certain number of inshore, lobster and groundfish fishers fish these allocations, but for very little money.

[English]

Mr. Randy Kamp: Yes, and I understand that conclusion you're reaching there. But the conclusion that I'm having a more difficult time understanding is the notion that if you add these new entrants—these 15%—and you stabilize them, you give them a quota, that somehow that is affecting the stock.

I mean, we assess the biomass and we conclude what the commercial biomass is, and then we divide it up. I understand how that affects the individual fisherman, but I don't see how the new entrants are somehow responsible for the collapse of the stock. It's a cyclical stock. I know how it affects the individual quota, but I don't see how it's responsible for the collapse of or the reduction in the total biomass of snow crab.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Desbois: Nor did we ever say they were responsible for the collapse of the stocks. On the other hand, if you ask 40 people to pick strawberries in a field, it is likely that more of them will end up being crushed. That is what I am saying. We went from 150 to 400 fishers, and then to almost 700. Even last year, the number was 400. We went from 18,000 to 38,000 traps. It is impossible for that not to have an impact. We are not saying they are responsible for everything that has happened; that is not the case. However, we should not be forcing everyone to consider economics ahead of biology and the environment. If economics are what dictate your course of action, you do not think the same way and you will always be pushing a little harder. Everyone is pushing a little harder.

Last year, we asked for 19,900 tons; the Department said it would have to be 19,200 tons. We are talking about a difference of 700 tons. Departmental officials made a big deal of it, saying that fishers were always asking for larger quotas. Today, even with an additional 700 tons, I think we would still be facing the same problem. The Department, even its own biologists, did not see this coming. Economically speaking, though, we need certain quotas in order to live. For three years now, we have not been living. We all know about the cyclical collapse of the stocks; it will happen again 10 to 12 years from now.

• (1110)

[English]

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the committee, I'd like to say thank you very much for taking the time out of your busy schedules to come and meet with us here today to offer your points of view and share your answers to the many questions our members have had.

We certainly do appreciate your hospitality. Thank you once again, on behalf of the committee, for taking the time.

We will take a short break while we set up for our next witnesses.

• _____ (Pause) _____

• (1125)

[Translation]

The Chair: Welcome to all our witnesses.

[English]

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for taking the time today to come to meet with our committee. We really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedules.

We'll allot four minutes for opening statements and then we'll move right into the questioning time for our members to ask some questions of you, based on your statements and whatever other interests the members may have. You will hear a beeping noise up here; the timer will go off when the four-minute timeframe has expired. I would ask that at that point in time you try to bring your comments to a conclusion shortly afterward. I'd appreciate that. Thank you very much. Members have times they are confined to as

well. They are fully aware of the time constraints they have to work within.

Mr. Hunt, I'll let you proceed, if you'd like to make your opening comments at this point.

Mr. Ronald Hunt (Dockhand, As an Individual): To start, I'd like to comment that I'm a fisherman, and what happens to us is that when the fishing quota comes out every year, it's 72 hours before we go out on the sea. If something bad happens in that period of time, I don't have time to turn around and find myself another job, because I'm a seasonal worker. On the Gaspé coast we are nearly all seasonal workers.

I can always work somewhere else, but if I find out two weeks before the fishing opens that I'm going to have about four weeks' work, and my *chômage*, my UI, is going to finish in about four or five weeks, I don't have time to turn around and find myself another job. All the other jobs are probably taken. Everything else has already started.

The other problem we had when we had the announcement is that a crab fisherman is a company, so when we put down the quota, the first line of action the captain had was to lay off people. The second action, for the ones that he kept, was to reduce the workload, so he gave us maybe four or five weeks of salary.

That's what I have to tell you today.

• (1130)

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

Monsieur Méthot.

[Translation]

Mr. Lorenzo Méthot (Secretary, Association des membres d'équipages des crabiers de la Gaspésie): Good morning everyone.

My name is Lorenzo Méthot. I am secretary of the Association des membres d'équipages des crabiers de la Gaspésie.

I would like to begin by giving you some brief background information about the crab fishery from 1980 to 1989. At the time, there was a great deal of competition. Many crabbers had more traps in the water than what was authorized by the legislation. Some traps stayed in the water over the winter and the fishers would recover them in the spring, in order to have more traps to fish. That was the case until 1989, when the crab catch fell, because the fishing harbour was too big. I am not telling you anything you do not already know. This is just some background information.

In 1990, in order to open up the fishery, DFO decided there would be individual quotas for each boat, so that the crab stock could be rebuilt; this was the case until about 1996. After that, the Asian markets started demanding a better quality of crab. As a result, companies wanted better quality crab. For most of the fleet, this was the beginning of the practice of grading and dumping different categories of commercial crab.

A little later, the First Nations entered zone 12 with additional cash that allowed them to purchase boat licences. In order to integrate aboriginal fishers into the fishing system, several traditional fisher helpers were laid off and received no assistance from the federal government. After that, the fact that non-traditional fishers were able to secure crab allocations in zone 12 resulted in a surplus number of traps, which is why we are at the same point now that we were in 1989.

There is also the white crab fishery until July. At every meeting we have held, we have always said we want that fishery to be closed at the end of June, but they have never wanted to do that. Throughout the last decade, DFO has allowed Aboriginal fishers to continue to harvest fish until the end of July. In 2010, coming at the same time as reduced quotas, that was the last straw. With the blessing of the same troublesome party, the transfer of quotas to other boats once again led to many crew members being laid off and several boats remaining in drydock, where they are likely to stay.

After the fishery opened in 2010—there is white crab this year—four weeks passed before the fishing areas were closed. According to crew members, the significant decline in the resource is due to excessive fishing effort, too many people, too many traps and too much white crab fishing.

Nowadays, with the new boats and the new so-called Japanese cages, fishers harvest three to four times more than was the case before, in the traditional fishery. In my view that has not been considered.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Méthot.

Mr. Diotte, please.

Mr. Marc Diotte (Representative, Association des morutiers traditionnels de la Gaspésie): Mr. Chairman, Mr. Blais, good morning.

My name is Marc Diotte and I am here representing the Association des morutiers traditionnels de la Gaspésie. I would like to begin by thanking the members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans of the House of Commons for coming to the region to give us an opportunity to voice our opinion on the snow crab fishery in zone 12—that is, in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

To begin with, I would like to point out that the members of our association are all single-licence groundfish fishers who have been fishing snow crab for many years now, as a result of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans deciding, several years ago, to provide greater access to this fishery. Therefore, each of our members has a temporary snow crab allocation which varies from year to year, depending on the total allowable catch set by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

In recent years, with the exception of 2010, our members had averaged temporary snow crab allocations of about 20,000 pounds a year. In 2010, a 63% cut in the total allowable catch for zone 12 meant that our temporary allocations averaged 8,000 pounds for each of our fishing enterprises, which you will certainly agree is very little.

For all our members, the snow crab fishery is one of the only fishing activities we are able to practice nowadays because, as you probably know, we no longer have access to the cod fishery in the southern Gulf as a result of considerable restrictions being introduced when a third moratorium on that fishery was declared last year.

Except for very limited access to the Atlantic halibut fishery, most of our income is derived from the crab fishery. That limited access to the snow crab fishery has therefore allowed us to save our fishing enterprises in recent years, even though the amounts allocated to us annually are quite minimal.

Like many people in the fishing industry, we were surprised by the 63% reduction in the TAC for snow crab in zone 12 for 2010. All stakeholders were expecting smaller catches, but not a reduction of that magnitude. Members of our association therefore saw a major part of their income vanish into thin air from one day to the next, and the fate of each of our fishing enterprises is now in question, since we no longer have anything to fish.

At the present time, the snow crab fishery in zone 12 is in crisis and all stakeholders, both the fishers and the processors, are paying a very high price for that state of affairs. It will take several years to rebuild the stocks.

We are firmly convinced that, had the Department of Fisheries and Oceans given greater consideration in recent years to the assessments of snow crab stocks in zone 12 prepared by its own biologists, the current crisis could have been avoided.

Gradual reductions of 10% a year in the TAC would have brought greater stability to this fishery. The most recent scientific assessments clearly showed a decline in the commercial biomass. However, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans maintained a high harvesting rate.

There is no doubt that we benefited from that fishery, as did all participants, but now we are facing a situation which is difficult for everyone. Pressure on that resource has often been caused for economic reasons. Many people in the region depend on the snow crab fishery. It is a major industry.

We are very concerned about the effects of this crisis. We are inclined to think that the primary manager of the resource, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, has not properly performed its job of conserving the resource. That is very worrisome in terms of the future of this fishery.

Before closing, I would like to add that in 2004, 2005 and 2006, we worked directly with Fisheries and Oceans Canada on a rationalization program in an attempt to reduce the size of our fleet and provide a better income to the remaining members. We introduced a program that lasted for three years in a row and for which we were commended by the Department. At the end of those three years, we were told by the Department that the program would remain in place for another three years.

•(1135)

But then, the Department pushed us off to the sidelines; I do not know what happened. Furthermore, the Department prohibited cod fishing. Right now, we are just trying to earn a living. We fished 8,000 pounds of crab at \$1.50 a pound, for a total income of \$12,000. We are not even eligible for employment insurance benefits at this point; there is nothing for our dock workers either, and we are wondering why. I have been working with provincial, and especially, regional officials for two years now. They asked us to develop plans and the like, but the only answer we have been given is that Fisheries and Oceans does not have any money for us, that there is no money to help us with the rationalization program.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Diotte.

Ms. Langlois.

Ms. Mireille Langlois (Plant Workers Representative, Unipêche M.D.M. Ltée): Good morning, I represent the plant workers that process snow crab.

Our situation is as follows. Since 2000, plant workers have not been getting enough hours and weeks of work in the plant. They have no choice but to turn to projects developed by the Quebec government, to leave the plants to go back to school, to completely change their type of employment or to leave the region altogether. We are having trouble getting enough hours and weeks of work to qualify for employment insurance, because you need 420 hours and 14 weeks, which is practically impossible to have every year. In order to be eligible for projects developed by the government, you must have worked four 40-hour weeks at the plant since 2003. People who did not work four 40-hour weeks in the plant in 2003 are left to fend for themselves; they are not considered to be plant workers. They have not been plant workers since 2004.

In 2005, there were 300 of us working at Fruits de mer Gascons Ltée. Since it closed, 120 people have secured a job at Unipêche M. D.M. Ltée in Paspébiac. Today, only 75 former employees of Fruits de mer Gascons Ltée are working. There have been huge job losses, and people have either relocated or left the region altogether.

This year, with a 63% reduction in quotas, the boats have gone to other plants. Unipêche M.D.M. Ltée has had to diversify into other species, such as lobster and whelk, so that people are able to work the mandatory four 40-hour weeks. If there is a quota cut next year, all these people are likely to be in real trouble.

We just wanted to describe the actual context. These days, the average plant worker is between 45 and 60 years of age. There are not many people applying to work in the plants. The fact is that few people are interested in working for only four weeks.

That is what I wanted to say.

•(1140)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Delarosbil, please.

Mrs. Linda Delarosbil (Plant Workers Representative, Unipêche M.D.M. Ltée): We are part of the same team; we both work for Unipêche M.D.M. Ltée.

We need a lot of assistance to meet all these needs. Also, all these employees have to be recognized as real workers. Every year we fight for that recognition, but are never successful. They are part of the same industry, it is the same crab, and we have tried everything to make ourselves heard. It is hell having to depend on employment insurance and sickness benefits. We are prepared to start petitions, or do whatever we have to do to get the help we need.

We are part of the same team. And that is basically our story.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll probably go in reverse order here and see how much time I can get in.

With regard to plant workers, have there been any discussions with the provincial or the federal governments about an early retirement package for plant workers, and is it applicable to your situation here?

[Translation]

Ms. Mireille Langlois: We asked for that, but it was refused.

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Why?

[Translation]

Ms. Mireille Langlois: There is no plan for people aged 64 and 65, or even 62. There is no program whereby these individuals could retire.

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Would removing some of the older plant workers from your plant alleviate that problem so that people could get their 420 hours?

[Translation]

Ms. Mireille Langlois: I am sure it would, but there would still be another problem. It would be very difficult to recruit replacements for the people who had left.

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Okay.

Lorenzo, you mentioned transfer quotas to other boats. Could you just explain that a little bit more? Are there some DFO regulations that are restricting that? Would you like to see the ability to transfer quotas? Do you use the buddy-up system and the combining system with enterprises here in the Gaspé?

[Translation]

Mr. Lorenzo Méthot: In past years, we were not allowed to make transfers. This year, DFO authorized full transfers of boat quotas, so the boats stayed tied up at the dock. There are three in Paspébiac and one in Gascons, I believe. Those boats will probably never return to the fishery. Also, those quotas were transferred to other boats, and there were licence transfers as well, albeit not many. There was one in New Brunswick—in other words, two licences for the same boat. Since then, the crew has been dwindling and, over time, there will be no one left to replace them. That is the point we are at now.

•(1145)

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Are there any DFO regulations you'd like to see changed to make the enterprises more financially stable?

[Translation]

Mr. Lorenzo Méthot: It is quite complicated. The problem is always the resource. The resource is no longer there, and everyone has done their share to get rid of it a little faster. DFO did not help matters; it did not make the right decisions. It did not stick with the decisions it had made. The fishing industry put in a great deal of money to help DFO, but the biologists made recommendations that the Minister did not see fit to consider. This year, he decided to do the exact opposite, by announcing major cuts. As far as we are concerned, the price of crab is important, but the important thing for dock hands is that there be crab. If there is, there will be work. It is really quite simple: there will be plants operating, but there has to be crab.

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Do you see a decline in crabs, as scientists have suggested?

[Translation]

Mr. Lorenzo Méthot: I absolutely agree with them that there is less crab. However, there was less last year as well, and the same quotas remained in place. The Minister did not want to make a decision. I do not know what happened, but the Minister opted for the status quo. There had already been a decline last year and in previous years. The crab that was not fished then would be available now. There would be more crab, which would have resulted in new crab stocks being developed, but now it is gone. We do not know how much of it is gone, because it is not like trees that you can easily count; the crab is in the water. And the studies on where the crab is going are not very extensive. We saw this; we were harvesting the resource from our boats. There is clearly less crab. Everyone is aware of that, but it is impossible to say how much is left.

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: What about the cod moratorium? Is that justified as well?

[Translation]

Mr. Lorenzo Méthot: Well, the problem is the cod moratorium. They waited too long. Once fish stocks have declined, it is easy to blame people, but the cod fishery completely disappeared. We do not know exactly what the problem was, but it is a consequence of the large ships that fished off the coast of Newfoundland. The draggers changed the fishery. The draggers were very effective 50 years ago. Then the cod nets scooped up all the large egg-bearing females. Everybody emptied their [Inaudible—Editor].

Now we are fishing crab, where we had some expertise, but everyone has let it go. We are facing the same problem as before. People do not learn from their mistakes; man will be the author of his own destruction, just as people have been saying forever. It is too bad.

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Cloutier, welcome.

If you'd like to make any opening comments at this point in time—the others have all made opening comments—we try to keep our comments to around four minutes. You'll hear a beeper go off up here when you reach the four-minute mark. If you go over that, I'd appreciate it if you could bring your comments to a conclusion around that point in time.

Please proceed, Mr. Cloutier.

[Translation]

Mr. O'neil Cloutier (Director, Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie): My name is O'neil Cloutier, and I am the Executive Director of the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie. Today I am representing some 200 multi-species inshore fishers holding primarily lobster licences, and for whom 30% to 40% of their income has been derived in the past from the cod fishery.

Before I begin, it is important to know why you are here today. I understand that you wanted to hear from all the stakeholders in the fishing industry with respect to problems in the crab fishery. However, I am wondering what has prompted you to leave Ottawa and come here in a hurry, hold meetings and hear our representations regarding the crab fishery. I would really like to know what you do not know. I am very surprised to see you arriving here in the region by bus and by plane, to meet to us and talk about this problem. I would like you to explain your reasons, because I did not find them in the agenda or in the notice of meeting. I found nothing about that. What can we tell you that you do not already know? That is what we want to know. Do you have special reasons? Do you want to close the crab fishery? Do you want to disrupt the crab fishery or transform it? What do you want to do, and what do you want to know?

•(1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cloutier.

Mr. Blais.

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

I am going to try to answer O'neil's question. We, the members of this Committee—myself or the others—will not necessarily be learning something new. We did not come here with that in mind. As a general rule, the Committee holds its hearings in Ottawa, which means that we do not have an opportunity to meet with people on the ground and visit them. That is one of the reasons.

What will that change? Well, I would like to be able to say that, with the report and recommendations that Committee members will be tabling, a solution can perhaps be found for the problems you are currently facing. But I am not one to be taken in. You know that, and you are living through this. This is not the first time we have examined different issues. We did so for the lobster fishery, for the seal hunt and for small craft harbours. I do not know what other Committee members think, but it seems to me that, without the work of this Committee, it would not have been possible to move forward, if only slightly, as regards the seal hunt and small craft harbours. I do think we have made some progress, even though I do not believe it is enough.

Now, what will come of all this? Well, I think we can exert additional pressure. I think it is important to meet with you on your home turf, rather than waiting for you to come to Ottawa and running the risk of hearing from only a few people. That is why we are here.

Mr. Hunt, let us talk about your experience. You had a feeling this decision was coming, since everyone was saying that 40% to 50% would be laid off. You were somewhat apprehensive, but you thought that, if that did happen, you would be taken care of. But the announcement came suddenly, and you did not feel the Department was there for you.

Mr. Ronald Hunt: What we did was get together. We had a meeting with people from Paspébiac to Sainte-Thérèse. There were more than 150 of us in the room, and we had no idea what was going to happen to us. We knew we would not be receiving employment insurance this year. However, we did want to know what the process was to qualify for it, before going out to sea and working for four weeks to fill the fish plants and supply the global fish market. Personally, I ended up with nothing. That was all we were interested in. We wanted to ensure there would be someone behind us giving us some support.

Personally, I did not have time to find another job. My work was seasonal. Like all the others, I waited for the fishery to open in April. When the quota cut was announced, we were not expecting to work much. At that point, I wondered whether I should leave my boat and the crew and go away immediately, or whether I should try to work in my region and qualify for employment insurance.

Today we are being told we will receive training at the École des pêches. Training is not something new for me. Since I lost my job at the Gaspésia plant ten years ago, I have spent five years in school. I am not afraid to either go to school or work. That is what we need: a little help.

Mr. Raynald Blais: And the help you have received so far was from the Quebec provincial government.

Mr. Ronald Hunt: The first contacts I had were with provincial government officials. I do not know who is looking after us, but I know a meeting is scheduled for today. This afternoon, the captains will be meeting with some people, and I believe they are from the local employment centre. The Quebec government will probably be providing the training.

• (1155)

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mireille, I assume the atmosphere in the plant was not great.

Ms. Mireille Langlois: No, because people are wondering whether they will have work for four weeks. Those four weeks are mandatory to qualify for Quebec government programs. This week was the fourth week for people. Last week, some people were saying they had worked six hours in the plant, which is not very reassuring, since we all know that, in order to receive government assistance, you must have worked four 40-hour weeks in the plant. If you only worked six hours last week, that means you are a week behind.

Of course, the fisheries are diversified, with the addition of lobster and whelk. However, there is no guarantee that everyone will be processing the lobster and whelk. At Unipêche M.D.M. in Paspébiac, people were transferred from Port-Daniel—Gascons to

Grande-Rivière, while others remained in Paspébiac. On the other hand, we never really know how many weeks we will be working. To qualify for Employment Insurance, you have to have worked 620 hours, which is not easy to do when you do not even have 420 guaranteed work hours.

So, a lot of people were worried. This year alone, 12 landing jobs were lost in Port-Daniel—Gascons because of boat mergers; some boats have decided to deal with other plants.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To Monsieur Cloutier's question about the purpose of the committee, I think it would be great if the chair could comment on that at some point in the agenda, but I know I have limited time, so I'll get right to my questions.

Marc, if I could, I'll ask you my question. I'm wondering if you agree with the past scientific recommendations, those of the biologists, on the snow crab catch levels. Also, did you see these recommendations reflected in the different quota levels over the past few years?

Secondly, what do you think would have been a better way to handle the situation? For instance, what levels or quotas would you have recommended back in 2006, 2007, 2008, last year, and, for instance, this year?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Diotte: I have participated in the crab stock peer review in each of the last 10 years. Each year, and particularly in the last four years, biologists were recommending a 10% cut in the TAC in order to maintain a small crab stock for future years. The snow crab stock follows a cycle. After a certain number of years, the stock declines and then it increases continuously. Because we were heading towards the low point in the cycle, in the last four years, biologists were asking for a 10% cut.

That recommendation was rejected by the industry in each of the last four years. Even last year, at an advisory committee meeting, I remember that Mikio said that we would feel the impact and it would hurt. If we had accepted the 10% cut in the TAC in these last four years, it is possible that we would not be going through what we are now this year.

This year, the scientific reports were taken into consideration by the Minister's office. As I mentioned earlier, the problem is that biologists are hired by the Department and prepare reports, but ultimately, the Department pays no attention to what they say. So, the industry carried on regardless. No cuts were made to the TAC in the last four years, and that is why we have ended up with such a significant cut this year. The same thing will probably happen again next year, depending on the scientific report, which will soon be submitted.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly, there's an answer to the question from Mr. Cloutier.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Cloutier, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. O'neil Cloutier: My comment is along the same lines as what Mr. Diotte said. I no longer attend meetings of the Rock Crab Advisory Committee. I participated for 10 years, but I decided to stop, because when you go to the meetings, you realize just how much control the traditional crab industry has over the committee and its decisions. If that is what you came to hear, well, I can tell you it is true. As far as I am concerned, it is primarily a political issue. Last year and the year before, despite the recommendations made by Canadian scientists, who are paid by the Government of Canada, the political party currently in office decided to maintain crab quotas at too high a level. This is what everyone had been saying and it was well understood by the traditional industry, the other industry, the Aboriginal industry and the people with temporary or permanent allocations, as well as other fishers.

In my opinion, that is a very serious weakness, and it has led to the kind of disruption we are seeing today in the region. It is government weakness. Despite the fact that these scientists are paid with our tax money, the government completely ignored them and preferred to believe what a biologist paid by the traditional crab industry had been saying, particularly in 2009. That is what happened. They preferred to rely on an outside professional who was being paid by the traditional crab industry, rather than relying on the reports prepared by our own scientists. That was a very serious error.

We were in full agreement with what the scientists were saying. The quotas should have been cut four years ago to avoid the kind of disruption we are experiencing today. But, unfortunately, the political decision-makers did not listen to that advice, with the result that we are now facing a very serious situation. That is the problem. It is not because the crab stock disappeared; it is currently in a declining phase. We are seeing what is left of the crab stocks. Five or six years from now, we will be in a growth phase.

We surfed at the crest of the wave for a little too long, and allocated crab quotas that were too high every year. We artificially inflated what was there. It is always the same mistake, whether we are talking about herring or cod. It is a political decision that leads to mistakes. Why do we bother paying scientists, if we are not going to listen to them?

• (1200)

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Madam O'Neill-Gordon.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I also want to thank Mr. Blais for the warm welcome to his constituency, I and thank all of you for being here with us today.

I am from Miramichi, New Brunswick, where I have many fishing communities in my area as well. I grew up in the fishing community of Escuminac basin and that area. Fishing is the main industry of that area, so I certainly am happy to be here to hear the concerns of this area as well.

As we all know, and as was mentioned along the way, the snow crab industry is cyclical and variable in nature. What do you see as

the current outlook for 2011-12, or later, for the rebound of the resource? Anyone can answer.

[Translation]

Mr. O'neil Cloutier: We have to act on the scientists' recommendations, because they know the resource and know how to stabilize it. Why not accept their recommendations? Why not listen to what they are saying? That is what they are there for; we are paying them, so we should start listening to them, once and for all. If we do not, we will face similar situations in future. That is what happened with cod and that is what is happening right now with spring herring. We allocate fish on paper, everybody knows that, it is common practice in the industry; that is the way it is done. If you want to play around with the wages of plant workers, dock hands and fisher helpers, just keep doing the same thing.

I think we will manage to stabilize things. We are at the low point in the cycle now, but quotas have to be kept to a minimum. The industry is even seriously thinking that the fishery may not be opened next year, so that crab levels can be restored as quickly as possible.

• (1205)

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: You mentioned the plant workers. Are there many of the plant workers who are within the ages of 62 to 65? Is that a majority of them or is it just a small number or what?

[Translation]

Ms. Mireille Langlois: I would not say that half of them are in that age group, but certainly three quarters of them are.

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: So there are a lot of them at that age who are waiting to get their pension and trying to get unemployment in the meantime.

My other question had to do with—

Pardon?

[Translation]

Ms. Mireille Langlois: They are anxious to reach retirement age. They are really anxious to reach the age of 65.

Mrs. Linda Delarosbil: There are some who are 67 and are still there.

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: I had another question. We all know that we're speaking of the highs and lows in the biomass. I'm just wondering, with all the research that is being done, if you can explain why there are highs and lows in the biomass that we have to deal with. Is there a reason for this?

That's for anyone.

[Translation]

Mr. O'neil Cloutier: It is because of natural recruitment. The fact is that natural recruitment means the biomass is very high for a certain number of years, average at other times, and, occasionally, extremely low. When you start playing around with that natural cycle, you are asking for trouble. And that is what is happening now. We had some very good years.

The cycle was well known. Scientifically speaking, the crab industry is the best known of any; it is one where scientists are most able to predict what is going to happen, because crab is a sedentary species. Although it is not necessarily found in the Gulf, crab remains where it is; it is sedentary. Therefore, scientists are able to predict its cycles, and their best research is on crab.

But nobody listens to them. I am telling you, once again, that nobody listens to them. There are reasons why we do not want to or cannot listen to what they have to say. In my opinion, one of those reasons is that the industry, the vessel fleet, has developed to such an extent, and has become so large, that all the crab is being used to make payments on boats that have become incredibly large and super efficient. And that is unfortunate. It means that there have to be fairly high crab quotas year after year. People cannot afford a low income year.

As a result, there is a lot of pressure on politicians to keep quotas high, despite that disagreement with the scientists. That creates situations like the one we are in today.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Mr. Cloutier, you asked a question earlier and Mr. Donnelly asked that I respond to it. It was in the middle of a questioning period.

The Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans is comprised of members of all parties and members from all across this country of ours. They come from various walks of life and they come here with the intent to provide advice to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

There is an issue that has been raised within our standing committee by various members, and it was agreed upon by the standing committee to study the snow crab industry in Atlantic Canada and Quebec. The reason the committee is doing that is because of concerns that were raised by the sector. Whether it be from the plant workers, the industry itself, the deckhands, the associations, there have been concerns raised about the situation that the industry, the sector, finds itself in this year.

This committee takes its responsibility very seriously so we certainly took it upon ourselves to venture out into the communities to hear first-hand from members of the communities their advice and their thoughts on the sector and how to ensure its sustainability. The committee and politicians in general are often criticized for staying in Ottawa and remaining in a bubble, if you wish. The committee

found that in its decision to come to your community, to come to this community, where we can feel first-hand the impact of the decisions that governments take. That's why we're here today.

We're here today to hear from you, to look you square in the eye and hear what concerns you have about the decisions that government has taken, so that we are able to go back and provide advice to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and provide recommendations to her, so this situation doesn't repeat itself and the concerns this community and other communities like this have aren't repeated.

Once again, on behalf of the committee, I want to say thank you very much for taking the time out of your busy schedules today to provide us with that advice so that we may be able to provide that advice and those recommendations back to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Thank you once again, ladies and gentlemen.

The meeting is done, Mr. Cloutier.

• (1210)

[Translation]

Mr. O'neil Cloutier: We would like to make one last recommendation which is a large scale recommendation. It covers all the species, and it concerns the adoption of a new Fishery Act, which died on the *Order Paper* the last two times around.

When we do pass this new legislation, I hope it will include measures that deal with the wishes of the Minister in office. I would like to see it passed, because that is probably what will save us in future.

[English]

The Chair: Whether it's that bill that was on the order paper or any other bill, I can assure you that there will be plenty of opportunity for consultation. When that opportunity comes, and this committee or whatever committee comes to your community, or you go to that committee in Ottawa, I hope you take the opportunity to provide some sound advice so it can be taken into consideration for that bill.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>