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Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 5, 2010

—
Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (0850)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Travis Ladouceur): Good morning, honourable members.

I see a quorum.

We can now proceed with the election of the chair for the committee.

I remind members that, pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair needs to be a member of the government party. That being said, I am now ready to accept motions for the election of chair.

Are there any motions for the election of the chair?

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): I nominate Mr. Rodney Weston.

The Clerk: It is moved by Mr. Lawrence MacAulay that Mr. Rodney Weston be elected chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Are there any other motions for the election of chair?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Rodney Weston elected chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Before inviting Mr. Weston to officially take the chair, and if members agree, we can now proceed with the election of the vice-chairs of the committee.

That being said, pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), it is stipulated that members need to vote for a member who is officially a part of the official opposition party.

Are there any motions for the election of the first vice-chair of the committee?

Monsieur Blais.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): I nominate my new friend, a Boston Bruins fan. I am too ever since Jaroslav Halak disappeared.

So I nominate Lawrence MacAulay.

The Clerk: It is moved by Mr. Blais that Mr. MacAulay be elected first vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Are there any other nominations for the position of first vice-chair?

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. MacAulay elected the first vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I am now ready to accept motions with regard to the election of a second vice-chair of the committee.

Monsieur Lévesque.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): I nominate Mr. Blais.

The Clerk: It is moved by Mr. Lévesque that Mr. Blais be elected second vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Are there any other nominations for the position of second vice-chair?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Blais duly elected second vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[English]

The Clerk: I'd now like to invite Mr. Weston to officially take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC)): I suppose you're used to a speech after an election like this. I want to thank my campaign manager, Lawrence. He worked hard.

We're ready to begin. Travis has got me back up to speed quite quickly.

There's a fair bit on our plate at this time. I thought this morning I'd lay out what is on the agenda for the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. We can have a brief discussion today if you want to, and then we can go into a steering committee on Thursday. The steering committee can discuss and come back with a work plan for the fall and winter agenda.

Mr. MacAulay.

● (0855)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I know that there has certainly been a change in the salmon stocks on the west coast, but I still feel there's reason for us to travel to the west coast to find out just what the situation is and why there's such a discrepancy. I'm sure they're not going to be able to answer that, but we can see what equipment is in place and what DFO has to evaluate.

So we would still be in favour of making that trip to evaluate the situation on the west coast.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Basically, that's the first thing on the committee's agenda, or plate, I should say, for the fall. As most of you will recall, there was a lot of discussion in the spring of this year about a trip to the west coast to investigate the impacts of sea lice on the wild Pacific salmon stocks. We have been proceeding with that and have submitted a plan for travel to the Liaison Committee. The Liaison Committee, Travis tells me, generally meets the first Tuesday after the break week. So we would hopefully be on the agenda for the upcoming Liaison Committee meeting and could have a better sense of where we go from there after that meeting.

So the aquaculture study is still ongoing. We've done a significant amount of work on that.

I know there are some new members on the committee here this morning, and I would be remiss not to welcome you to the committee. I look forward to working with you, as I know all members of the committee do. Our committee is certainly one that I have enjoyed, and I know that a lot of members on the government side have. It's a very congenial committee, and I certainly look forward to continuing that.

I know, Rodger and Joyce, that we haven't had the chance to talk a little bit yet. I look forward to getting to know you better as well, Ms. Murray, and to working together on the issues that are important to us all.

So aquaculture has been a focus. We have met with a lot of witnesses, hearing testimony from them in the spring of this past year, many by video conference and many in person. But we haven't travelled to the west coast at this point in time, and that has certainly been something at the forefront of our agenda with respect to aquaculture and the issue of sea lice.

Snow crab has been an issue this committee has taken a huge amount of time to investigate. We have travelled to various locations on the east coast. We have heard from many witnesses before this committee—witnesses from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, witnesses from the industry itself, and outside observers, if you wish, who have come and offered their point of view as well on the snow crab issue.

I know that François, our analyst, has been busy over the summer. He's prepared a summary of recommendations that came out of those discussions and meetings, which was one of the directions the committee gave François. We didn't want him to sunning himself too much this summer; and as you can tell, he's not too tanned, so he did work quite hard here this summer, I'm sure. Anyhow, we look forward to going through the data that François has tabulated for us in trying to come forward with specific recommendations this committee can offer to the House.

There are a couple of motions, I believe, for which notice has been served, including those two motions and some other requests. It's always, I'm sure, the same with other committees. We have requests from different organizations, from different individuals, to come and appear before the committee. So there is a lot we will have on our agenda going forward. I guess probably the best way to look at it today is for us have a bit of discussion within our individual caucuses about what priority we'd like to see placed on certain pieces of work that lie before us. With your member on the steering committee we could have a discussion. I assume they are going to be the vice-chairs and the parliamentary secretary and me again. I think that's still the way it goes with the steering committee, that it will be the two vice-chairs and the representative from the NDP.

Mr. MacAulay.

● (0900)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: The steering committee is meeting next Thursday?

The Chair: They are meeting this Thursday. The Liaison Committee is meeting the Tuesday after the break week, if that's what you're referring to.

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I would also like to welcome our friends from the Conservative Party, especially Ron and Devinder, who are new to this committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: One moment, I have no translation here, Monsieur Blais.

Mr. Raynald Blais: You don't have to know, Rodney.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I have no power.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Did you not take any French classes this summer, sir?

[*English*]

The Chair: No, I spent my summer campaigning in New Brunswick. You couldn't tell?

I'm good to go now. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I also want to welcome our new Conservative colleagues. It is always nice to have some new blood in a committee like ours. For Rodger, this is a return. You could say he has come back to the future. I am very glad to be working with Rodger once again. I have always enjoyed it very much, and we have always worked hard together. I also want to welcome Joyce. We will get to know one another with time.

As for me, I will say that our priority is to complete the famous snow crab report. Indeed, it is already October, and the crisis happened back in the spring. So we will need to at least make some recommendations this fall, as the budget is coming soon. There is nothing to suggest there will be a miraculous recovery in the snow crab fishery as was the case for the Pacific salmon fishery. Last year, quotas were cut by 63%, and I do not get the sense that snow crab will miraculously reappear next year. So the problem remains unsolved, and that is why I think we need to make it a priority.

Furthermore, I am still waiting for the famous new fisheries legislation. We have been waiting for a while now. It has been a long time coming; the issue has been outstanding not just from this Parliament, but the previous one as well. So we are in a situation where the fisheries sector, in particular, is undergoing changes, in Quebec and similarly in the rest of Canada. It is no secret that the current legislation is more than outdated. It is verging on ridiculous: we have legislation that has not been amended for a hundred years, or thereabouts. So now, we go from one crisis to another, and I have said that repeatedly. If it is not the shrimp, lobster or groundfish, namely cod, it is the snow crab.

All of these events should sound alarm bells. We need legislation that does more to address these situations, these changes, and all the resulting issues and challenges.

So we will have some very important discussions over the next few weeks. We will continue to work with Yvon as constructively as possible to ensure that we make progress.

Thank you very much.

• (0905)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Blais.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: On the new Fisheries Act, of course, we have been talking about that for a long time. Whoever brings that forward, it will be some interesting, because you have to have a lot of consultation on both coasts and it's not an easy issue to resolve.

We also have a number of problems on the east coast with the lobster fishery. First, in areas that are in great decline there needs to be some rationalization. Also the price of the product is just too low for the fishermen. I think if we look into it we'd find that the price on the plate in a restaurant is the same as it was three or four years ago away from here, but the fishermen are just not receiving the price. That's a problem and a major problem for dollars in the Atlantic region.

The Chair: Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Congratulations on your re-election. I know it was a tough campaign.

We would like to welcome Rodger and Joyce to the committee. I think this might be the first time that British Columbians are so well represented; I think they have a majority per province here, and that's always a good thing. So welcome, and we look forward to working with you.

I agree with Raynald that we need to wrap up the snow crab study we did as expeditiously as we can. We agree that going to the west coast would be a good thing. Maybe we can talk about this at the steering committee, but we've talked about it in two respects already, one of which is the aquaculture focus, which is really what we were studying. Lawrence has mentioned trying to get some answers to the discrepancies in the salmon returns. They're two different issues, so we need to make sure we clearly understand what we're going out there to do.

I agree with Raynald as well that most of the Fisheries Act is actually 140-plus years old now, and it's probably due for modernization. Lawrence is right that once we get that it's going to be a lot of work for us, and that will probably be our main task at that point. I believe it's still coming, so I look forward to talking a bit more at the steering committee about the meetings and perhaps some other things that need to be looked at.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the welcome, as a new member of this committee, and really look forward to working with everybody on issues for which we probably all have the same objective.

Since I don't know what you were working on other than what I have read about in the binder, I'm not weighing in on that in my remarks, but I would like to make some remarks about the salmon situation.

My view, as a matter of context for that, is that it remains a huge concern. Salmon, of course, is the iconic species for our first nations and their culture and food provisioning, and the trends have been very negative for a very long time. This year represents the salmon that were hatched and went out to sea four years ago, so it does not necessarily mean the problems have been solved. In fact, there's a possibility that this huge year had to do with the flooding of hatchery-raised salmon that survived, for whatever reasons, but then became a potential risk to wild salmon.

It's very complex, and the science has a huge number of holes in it. Essentially, the scientists tell me that it's a black box. Once the Fraser River salmon get past certain checkpoints in the Georgia Strait, the scientists have no idea where they go for three and a half years, what they do, what the problems are, where the die-offs are, and why they sometimes simply don't return. So we have huge challenges to have a sustainable salmon fishery and to conserve our salmon on the Pacific coast for the long term.

The diversity of salmon is another concern. We may have a huge run of one set of salmon species that originate in one area of the interior, and yet we are seeing that other salmon stocks are species at risk or are on the verge of extinction. And that hasn't changed either.

I know there will be a process for determining the priorities of the committee, but I just wanted to weigh in on the issue of salmon. We are not out of the woods by any means, and the fact that we couldn't predict this abundance and have no idea how it fits into the research and the science that we've seen points to the fact that there's a lot that needs to be done so we can be good conservators and good stewards of our salmon.

Thanks.

• (0910)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Lévesque.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Chair, congratulations on your election. I also want to congratulate the vice-chairs.

There is a lot of talk about salmon, lobster and crab. Can we talk about the beluga? Up north, along the coast of Hudson Bay, along the coast of Ungava Bay, and probably in Nunavut as well—I have not checked—there are problems with the allocation of beluga quotas, because of the location of some villages.

Quotas are calculated, but they end up discriminating against certain villages that are farther away from the beluga passage. These people are very dependent on the beluga for their survival. It is one of their main sources of food. It may not take long, but I think we should consider hearing from the people in charge of the quotas to see whether anything can be done.

[*English*]

The Chair: Merci, Monsieur Lévesque.

Mr. Donnelly.

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

Congratulations to you on your re-election and to our vice-chairs.

Welcome to our new members on the committee.

Just in reaffirming some of the work items we've been looking at, I would agree that we do need to finish the snow crab recommendations and continue the focus on the aquaculture study. Also, I think it's still important to get out to the west coast to visit. I also agree that we need to be ready for the new Fisheries Act when it is introduced. As well, we'll be rolling into budget 2011 quite soon, so we should be keeping it open for those.

As far as new requests are concerned, I've put two motions in front of the committee for consideration. Maybe I could provide a bit of background information.

One is on Fish Lake, which is associated with a mine project in British Columbia, the Prosperity Mine proposal. Part of that proposal includes the draining of Fish Lake for a tailings pond. I was approached by some people in that area in terms of the fisheries

impact. They were looking to come to the committee to present information from their perspective and let it be known what their concerns are. That is one motion that's before the committee for its consideration.

The other is another request from an organization in British Columbia. It's the Sustainable Marine Fisheries and Communities Alliance. They have a focus mainly in the Skeena River in terms of the commercial fishery. They have some particular issues and concerns that relate to their area of focus, but also they have I think some positive management options for consideration and a vision of a way forward of what a commercial fishery might look like. They're very interested in coming to the committee to present that model or that vision.

So I put it out that these two motions be entertained by the committee at the appropriate time for inclusion in the work plan.

Thank you.

• (0915)

The Chair: Mr. Weston.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would also like to congratulate you, as well as the vice-chairs.

We also have some new members.

[*English*]

Particularly since you bent over backward to welcome our new members from the other side, I thought it was interesting in the spirit of the non-partisan nature of this committee that you didn't actually acknowledge the Conservative members.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I'm used to seeing them, I guess. I apologize. I intended to do that at the end, but I appreciate your pointing that out, Mr. Weston.

I might want to point out that you're the only one who didn't vote for me, but I'm not offended.

Mr. John Weston: And now you know why.

The Chair: Now I know why.

Please go ahead, Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston: At any rate, I see a rising consensus around our agenda. I think finishing the snow crab study would give us all a great sense of satisfaction, and clearly the Fisheries Act issue is one we're all looking forward to.

I will pose a specific question around the aquaculture study. I think we're all committed to doing that. The question is on the timing. Since the Liaison Committee will be meeting next Tuesday, clearly we're not going to go in October. November may be a bit premature if we're trying to get people to organize their schedules around that. I had in my mind that we had originally intended it for October, and obviously that's not the case any more.

Travis, I'm wondering if you've thought about the timing, both in terms of availability of members as well as the appropriateness of our looking at aquaculture at a certain time of year.

The Clerk: We'll be contacting companies, with a focus on salmon farming facilities on the west coast. The best option would be for the committee to travel before mid-November, but no specific restrictions were expressed by the companies that accepted welcoming a parliamentary delegation to their facilities.

I think it would perhaps be left up to the steering committee on Thursday to determine the timing according to the schedule of members of the committee, as well as what the work plan will render as being options or priorities.

The end of October, as you were saying, might not be a plausible option, considering that the Liaison Committee has not yet approved the funds pertaining to the committee's travel. This being said, the beginning of November could be an option. I know there's a break week in November, so this could be considered.

I think the committee will be able to decide the best option and what they consider is the best scenario for this particular initiative of the committee according to all those factors.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weston.

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I would like our researcher to look into something. Just yesterday, I read an article in *La Presse* about a very particular situation in New Brunswick involving sea lice and salmon farming.

In short, what it said was that the products used to deal with the sea lice had caused a reaction in the nearby lobster population. There has been a lot of discussion on sea lice in western Canada in terms of salmon, aquaculture and the coexistence of farmed salmon and wild salmon. And this made me realize that the problem also exists out east.

I think that, when the committee meets with the people from out west, it should talk about that a bit and not hesitate to get more information on what is happening or what has happened in New Brunswick.

This leads me to wonder whether it is happening elsewhere as well. As we all know, fish and ocean life are not limited by borders. It would be worthwhile to find out what is happening elsewhere, if there are other situations like this in other places, because it involves the aquaculture industry, regulations, the manner in which diseases are treated and the way that companies act or react to difficulties or problems. It automatically has a domino effect.

That is why I think it would be a good idea for our researcher to look into that, so we are better educated when it comes time to examine the issue of sea lice.

● (0920)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Blais.

Mr. Allen, sorry, I can't see you. There's kind of a bright light over here.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): I want you to look into the bright light.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all our new members of the committee, and welcome to our chair and vice-chairs. Congratulations.

Just as guidance to the steering committee, I guess I'm hearing and agree that our top three priorities are snow crab, the Fisheries Act, and west coast aquaculture—finishing them up.

Before we take on any more, and as guidance to the steering committee, I would like to propose that we finish snow crab first, and blend in the west coast trip if we get approval from the Liaison Committee to do that.

Let's say the Fisheries Act were to come within the next few weeks or month. Will that pre-empt everything else, or are we going to finish the snow crab in spite of the Fisheries Act coming and then move to the Fisheries Act? Or are we going to finish the snow crab and west coast aquaculture, at least to a point, and then go to the Fisheries Act before we take on anything else?

As guidance from the steering committee, I suggest we rank them in that order. We would do snow crab, then west coast aquaculture, and then the Fisheries Act would pre-empt anything else after that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allen.

Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): It's great to be back on fisheries again. I think this is my third stint here. It's good to see Randy, Raynald, and "Saint" Lawrence still around the table here.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I'm still here.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Lawrence first worked on the Fisheries Act a hundred and how many years ago?

This committee has always been collegial, productive, and has worked toward a common purpose. I think the last time I was here they did a little summary. There was one juncture in 2000 when 23 reports had been presented by the committee, and 21 of them had been unanimous. I think that's a pretty substantive body of work done in collaboration with this committee. So it's always been a pleasure to be on this committee, and I look forward to being productive.

Mike, I think you're right on about what we're looking at, as far as being realistic about what we can accomplish here in the next couple of weeks and months.

When the Fisheries Act was brought out the last time, the biggest concern from the fishing community was they didn't believe there had been sufficient consultation. So we could get out in front of that as a committee, take that on as the next big project, and begin the consultation. If that consultation is reflected in the legislation that's brought forward, then maybe it will have a better chance of surviving.

For very different reasons we saw group after group last time saying they weren't consulted and there was no reflection of their industry in the legislation. So I agree with what you're saying.

• (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Rodger has said what I want to say, but there's no question that if the Fisheries Act comes, it will take precedence over everything.

We will be travelling, or somebody's going to be travelling, for consultation. I don't think we'll have much choice. That's all I'm going to say. It's a big job to get enough consultation to get agreement in the fisheries community. So we can rate all the other issues, but if a new Fisheries Act comes, that's the issue for us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston: I'm actually surprised by what Lawrence just said, because I thought that Mike and Rodger were on the right track: low-hanging fruit, things are almost done, get them done. Then the Fisheries Act is overwhelming, large, open-ended, and would push out anything else. So I liked what Mike was saying. Go for those two things and get them done.

We could be in the middle of the Fisheries Act, be suspended by a you-know-what, and it would never get done. Then if we started with

the Fisheries Act without finishing off the snow crab and aquaculture, there would be three things not done instead of only one. So I'm disposed to go with Mike and Rodger on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weston.

I think the steering committee has heard ample input. If you have any other ideas or thoughts, you might want to convey them to your representative on the steering committee. I think we have lots to work with for the meeting on Thursday. At this point I would suggest that we leave it to our steering committee to come back with a work plan for us a week from today.

Unless there are any further thoughts, I want to take this opportunity to welcome all members to the committee, as pointed out by my namesake. He does ride me hard every now and then.

An hon. member: You need it.

The Chair: I agree. My wife tells me that all the time. I need it.

Welcome, Devinder and Ron. I look forward to working with you on the fisheries committee—and Joyce and Rodger. We have a lot of work ahead of us, as you can see. There are some projects, some reports, that are close to being complete, and others that still require a lot of work. So we look forward to your input and thoughts on all of that work as we go forward together.

If we have no further business, I move the meeting adjourned.

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