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

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, May 7, 2015**

**Chair**

**Mr. Rodney Weston**



## Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Thursday, May 7, 2015

• (1110)

[English]

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

I'd like to welcome our guests who are joining today by video conference, Mr. Mike Melnik and Mr. Bruce Tufts.

We generally allow about ten minutes for presentations or opening statements—there's a maximum of about ten minutes. Then we move into questions and answers. There are time constraints around the questions and answers for our members, so if you could, keep your comments as concise as possible to get in as many questions as possible from our members.

Having said all of that, thank you very much for joining us.

I'll let Mr. Melnik begin, if you want to make your opening statement at this point in time. Then we'll proceed to Mr. Tufts.

Anytime you're ready, Mr. Melnik, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Mike Melnik (Managing Director, Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association):** Thank you very much.

I want to make sure the mike level is okay, because we had some issues with it before. Is everyone able to hear me okay?

**The Chair:** We can hear you fine, Mr. Melnik, thank you.

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** That's perfect. Thank you.

First I'd like to extend my gratitude to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for inviting the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association to appear before the committee this morning via video conference.

My name is Mike Melnik. I am the managing director of the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association, the CSIA.

The Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association is a not-for-profit organization that, as its name suggests, is comprised of Canadian companies and organizations that manufacture, sell, and promote products that help Canadians enjoy recreational fishing. From rod and reel manufacturers such as Shimano Canada to national retailers such as Canadian Tire, to television personalities such as Bob Izumi, the CSIA speaks on behalf of the recreational fishing industry, an industry that annually generates billions of dollars for Canada's economy.

The health of our industry and to a degree the health of the economy relies on a sustainable, science-based fishery, open and free access to public waters, and a growing participation in the well-

established Canadian heritage activity of recreational fishing. One of the keys to healthy recreational fishing is open access to the many quality fishing opportunities that exist in Canada. Without these opportunities, not only does recreational fishing suffer, but so do the related jobs and the economy.

The CSIA works hard to promote recreational fishing to Canadians through national fishing week each summer and throughout the year via mainstream and social media channels. Also, our association's government affairs chair, Phil Morlock, represents the industry and the interests of recreational anglers on Parliament Hill. Mr. Morlock is a founding member of the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada, which acts as liaison between the all-party Outdoor Caucus of Canada and the fishing, hunting, trapping, and sport-shooting industries.

We realize that this committee's study includes a number of important issues. Because of time constraints today, I thought the best use of my opening remarks would be to focus on our association's observations concerning the positive impacts of recreational fishing on Canada's economy and on the physical and mental well-being of Canadians.

Over the past decade, the CSIA has produced two reports on the impact of recreational fishing to Canada's economy. The most recent survey or report was released in 2013 based on the following sources: Survey of Recreational Fishing 2010 by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and also previous editions; Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; Statistics Canada; provincial and territorial government websites; Travel Activities and Motivations Survey 2007; and of course sources within the Canadian recreational fishing industry.

The CSIA's 2013 economic report entitled "Keep Canada Fishing" concluded that approximately nine million Canadians, more than 25% of the population, fish recreationally. It also concluded that recreational anglers spend approximately \$8.3 billion annually to support their passion, and as a result they create jobs in tourism, transportation, retail goods, boating, vehicle sales, and much more. We have provided the committee with digital copies in both English and French of our "Keep Canada Fishing" document.

As you will note in the document, we present the economic facts of recreational fishing in a fun, relatable format with a number of comparisons. For example, did you know that anglers annually spend on fishing as much as Canadians spend on beer, and more than is spent at Tim Hortons nationally? Did you know that more adult Canadians fish than they play golf and hockey combined? Or did you know that an additional 300,000 Canadians bought a resident fishing licence in 2010 compared with in 2005?

When compared with commercial fishing, in 2010 anglers spent slightly less than five times the total value of commercial fishing—\$8.3 billion compared with \$1.7 billion. It's a fact: recreational fishing has a powerful and positive impact on the Canadian economy, and the good news is that participation levels are growing.

The recently released results of the Canadian Nature Survey by the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Task Force on the Value of Nature to Canadians support our conclusions. In a 12-month period, the task force surveyed 24,000 adults over the age of 18. According to the results, 22%, or 5.5 million adults, stated that they participated in recreational fishing during the 12-month survey period. And 36% were women.

• (1115)

Also, each angler spent an average of 27.3 days fishing during that 12-month period. The last fact alone underscores that recreational fishing isn't a casual activity that Canadians take up once or twice a year when on vacation. We believe it proves that Canadians are passionate about recreational fishing.

I would like to take a moment to address the physical and mental health benefits of recreational fishing. Through our national fishing week promotion each July, we are in touch with hundreds of thousands of Canadians through mass media, social media, and local grassroots events.

To illustrate the reach of national fishing week, allow me to share a few highlights from 2014. We had over 200 media outlets air or run our public service announcements free of charge. Over 100 media outlets held national fishing week contests in major, medium, and small markets. We gave away over 600 rods and reels, courtesy of our members, through media contests such as morning show radio contests or television talk show contests. We gave away 10,000 *Catch Fishing* books through local events such as fishing derbies and family events. In total we received likely at least, if not a lot more than, \$3 million of in-kind exposure through print, television, radio, and digital channels.

National fishing week was created 15 years ago by the former executive director of the CSIA, the late Rick Amsbury. I have been in the lead role of national fishing week since the beginning, and every year I receive hundreds of first-hand accounts from excited Canadians who have just gone fishing for the first time or for the first time in a long time.

This past summer our Facebook page was full of photos posted by parents, children, grandparents, and grandkids showing them smiling and laughing while holding a fish and, in some cases, one of the rods and reels they won through one of our media contests. Consider this just for a moment: all across the country for an hour or two, because of recreational fishing, all screens were shut off by thousands of

people, allowing families and friends to spend time together in Canada's great outdoors chatting, laughing, and fishing.

While this may be anecdotal evidence of recreational fishing's health benefits, it has the power to bring families and friends together in the outdoors to talk, to laugh, to share, and to create lasting memories. I believe it is reasonable to conclude that recreational fishing is good for the body, mind, and soul.

I encourage you to visit our website [www.catchfishing.com](http://www.catchfishing.com) and our Facebook page, which is under Catch Fishing, to see the positive reaction we receive from Canadian anglers of all ages.

Recreational fishing is important to the economy. We believe it's important to the health of Canadians and we, as the CSIA, are eager to work hard with like-minded individuals, organizations, government bodies, and universities to promote and protect recreational fishing.

Again I would like to thank you for inviting me and the CSIA to appear before the committee this morning.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Melnik.

Mr. Tufts, the floor is yours whenever you are ready to proceed.

**Dr. Bruce Tufts (Professor and Fisheries Biologist, Freshwater Fisheries Conservation Lab, Queen's University, As an Individual):** Thank you.

First I would like to introduce myself. My name is Dr. Bruce Tufts. I am a professor at Queen's University. I'm a researcher. I teach fisheries biology, and my research area is fisheries biology. One of my areas of expertise is recreational angling. I've been at Queen's for over 25 years. During my entire career I've worked on different aspects of recreational angling and many of the conservation issues associated with that. I have recently written a major review paper in this area. So that's my background.

I have two important things that I would like to talk about today. The first one is something that points out the difference between commercial fisheries and recreational fisheries. One of the big differences between recreational fisheries and commercial fisheries is that the fish are caught individually. This means that anglers get an opportunity to select the fish that they're going to keep and they get an opportunity to select the fish they're going to put back. These days more anglers are putting back fish and releasing them alive than they are keeping them. While this may seem like a small difference, it's actually tremendously important, because it provides a foundation for sustainability. I think the biggest difference that I see between commercial fisheries and recreational fisheries is that, because of this process called selective harvest and live release of fish, recreational fisheries have the potential to be entirely sustainable, and many recreational fisheries these days are sustainable, which is in stark contrast to many of the commercial fisheries around the world.

This is the first thing I wanted to point out. I think it's extremely important. It speaks to the future of recreational fisheries in Canada and their potential.

The second thing that I wanted to talk about is a major review paper that I've written in the last year that talks about the economic impacts, conservation impacts, and social importance of recreational fishing.

Mike Melnik has talked about the economic value of recreational fishing in Canada, but one of the things I would like to point out as a scientist is that there's also tremendous potential to improve the economic value of recreational fishing in Canada. It's a sustainable activity. Whether we're looking at the east coast, looking at Atlantic salmon; at central Canada, looking at walleye fisheries and other inland fisheries; or other coastal fisheries, the steelhead fisheries on the west coast, all of these fisheries have issues that could be improved upon. There are numbers out there, such as those produced recently for Atlantic salmon, that show that, if the fishery was brought back to the peak levels of several decades ago, we could actually increase the economic value of those fisheries by, in the case of Atlantic salmon, 50%. So a value like \$128 million, which is the value of the Atlantic salmon fishery, could be increased to almost \$200 million by improving the fishery.

If we're looking across Canada, we see other situations, many of them where we could improve the economic value of the recreational fishery. In inland Canada we still have commercial fisheries for species such as walleye. It's been shown that in every instance, when you compare the numbers for the value of fish to the commercial fishery, you end up with less than a dollar a pound or a few dollars a pound. When you look at the value of those fish from an economic standpoint to the recreational fishery in the Canadian economy, the values are more like a hundred dollars or several hundred dollars a pound for those fish. The numbers are staggering. There are orders of magnitude differences between the value of a fish towards the recreational fishery versus the commercial fishery.

If we go to the west coast, there are also examples where, because of fishing practices, we have unselective harvest or unselective bycatch of species like steelhead. In other salmon fisheries, steelhead are an unintentional bycatch and are killed when they could have tremendous economic value if they were left in the recreational fishery.

• (1120)

I'm not going to get into any more examples, but all across the country, if we dig and look in detail, we see examples of where we could raise the economic value of recreational fisheries, and they are also a sustainable activity—very important thoughts for the future.

Another thing I want to point out is that in our recent review paper we looked at the conservation impact of anglers and the fact that, in many ways, anglers' dollars and anglers' time support science and conservation efforts for fisheries across the country. They're not just benefiting sport fish, they're benefiting habitat and ecosystems, which has benefits for non-sport fish species as well. Anglers become the main drivers of the conservation efforts that affect all of our aquatic ecosystems. That's one important point.

Another important point is that anglers' dollars, and in many cases efforts through logistical support, drive a lot of the science on aquatic species and aquatic ecosystems. We looked at the number of publications on sport fish and aquatic ecosystems versus those on non-sport fish. The numbers are hundreds and thousands of times

higher for studies on sport fish. In many cases the dollars from those studies come from anglers' licence fees, they come from anglers' contributions to non-government organizations, and those studies are supported by volunteer time of anglers. That's a huge impact on science.

The last thing I want to talk about is the social benefit. In scientific circles these days, and in the scientific literature, there's something called nature deficit disorder. As we become more urbanized as a planet, and as a country, many people become so disconnected from nature that it's been described now as a disorder. As Mike Melnik pointed out—and we talked about this in our paper—the enjoyment that youth have going out learning what it is to catch a fish not only takes them away from their computers and their other electronic devices at that time; it also then provides a connection with aquatic resources and with nature that will be very important in the future. If we're going to look after aquatic environments, it's anglers and the young stewards who are coming along who will be the ones to put up money and effort, and to make sure those aquatic resources are defended.

That's the end of my talk for today.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Tufts.

Now we'll move into questions and answers. We'll start with Mr. Cleary.

**Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Melnik, Mr. Tufts, I can totally relate with some of the points you made in terms of the positive impact that recreational fishing has on the economy, has on mental well-being, and has on our society. I picked up my BlackBerry, and the picture I have on the backdrop is a picture of a fire on a beach in Gambo in central Newfoundland—I'm an MP from Newfoundland and Labrador—with an orange sky, the best kind of sky, in the background.

Whenever things get a little stressful, whenever people like Mr. Sopuck speak here at committee—

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Ryan Cleary:** —I open up my phone and I go back to that moment in Gambo in central Newfoundland.

On a serious note, I take at least a week, seven days, even in an election year, with my two sons, and a tent, and an axe, and a truck. I go to central Newfoundland, 20 miles in the woods, and we just connect. There are no cellphones. Even if you did take them, they wouldn't work. So I can relate. I think it's fantastic.

I have a serious question for both of you gentlemen. It is about the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and what more it could be doing to support the recreational fishery in Canada. What more could it do? What is it not doing? What are the weaknesses? Specifically, what more could federal Fisheries and Oceans be doing to support the recreational fishery in Canada?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Mike, would you like me to speak first?

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** Sure.

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** I'd like to point out that I go to fisheries meetings around the country and around the world. There are actually fewer and fewer of us scientists who work on recreational fisheries and the science associated with recreational fisheries in the country. In fact, I have very few university colleagues who work on recreational fisheries. A few of them have worked on recreational fisheries on and off in their career. There are virtually no people, maybe with one exception, who I would know in Fisheries and Oceans who do any science associated with recreational fisheries, and there's a lot to do. So that's one thing.

The other thing I would like to point out is that we have a history as a country in which commercial fisheries had tremendous importance and recreational fisheries kind of took the back seat. I think we're now entering a time when, really if you take a hard look, recreational fisheries have more economic value, they're sustainable, and there are many places where recreational fisheries and commercial fisheries are somewhat in conflict.

As I said, there's bycatch of steelhead on the west coast. There are walleyes that are divided up between the recreational fishery and the commercial fishery in central Canada. There are decisions that could be made there to make some of these species sport fish dedicated to recreational fisheries. We could change the types of harvest on the coast to make sure that sport fish actually can get through, that they can get past the gillnets that are intended for sockeye.

There are a lot of things that could be done. I would suggest it's almost a point where there should be a thorough evaluation of all the different ways that recreational fisheries could be protected and enhanced.

• (1130)

**Mr. Ryan Cleary:** Go ahead, Mr. Melnik.

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** Thank you for the question. I'm glad Dr. Tufts is here to talk more about the scientific side. I'd like to just address the promotional side of recreational fishing.

That \$3 million that we receive in kind from the media—and we're talking CTV, national media, local media, radio, television, print, social media—is generated by our association on a \$50,000 budget. We do it all. I joke about it every spring; I get on my hands and knees and I beg the radio stations, the TV networks, magazines, Sun Media, Postmedia, to please give us some ink, some air time to promote recreational fishing.

We're happy to do it. We believe in promoting recreational fishing. But I think it would be nice to see some government funding to promote recreational fishing, whether it's through our association or on your own, through the DFO or through tourism, whatever the department may be. I don't think we do a great job of that in this country.

We need to tell more stories like the one you just told about the picture on your BlackBerry, the personal stories about how fishing has affected us positively, not just economically, not just because of dollars and cents but because of that family connection. I remember taking my three kids fishing for the first time. I didn't do any fishing. I was untangling lines and putting worms on hooks and taking fish off. But man, we had a blast. Those memories are things that will last forever and ever. But people don't think of fishing as the number one thing to do when they're looking at the options. I think we need to do a better job of promoting it.

**Mr. Ryan Cleary:** Great. Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass it on to my counterpart here.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP):** Good morning, Mr. Tufts.

I was fascinated by what you said about nature deficit disorder and the fact that the economic value of fish in the commercial fishery is about a dollar a pound versus the value in the recreational fishery, which is up to a hundred times more. I'm going to stay on the topic of recreational fishing.

Mr. Melnik, in your presentation, you said that each angler had spent an average of 27.3 days fishing during the 12-month survey period. You also said that 9 million Canadians had participated in fishing. Are there really 9 million people who spend an average of 27.3 days fishing every summer in Canada?

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** I was referring to the Canadian Nature Survey, the report by the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Task Force on the Importance of Nature to Canadians. In the 12-month survey period, of the 24,000 adult Canadians they surveyed, each angler on average spent 27.3 days fishing. That's not our survey, that's their report.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Very good. Thank you.

I just wanted to emphasize the importance of the industry. It's an \$8-billion economy to which 9 million people contribute directly.

We need to ensure the industry's sustainability. But there's a problem that witnesses have often mentioned. They are concerned about invasive species. Protecting species' habitat is a federal responsibility.

In terms of what you've observed, what is your assessment of the invasive species situation? If we don't make a sustained effort to address the problem, what impact will that have on fish stocks and the recreational fishery?

•(1135)

[English]

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** I am happy to speak to that. Certainly there are a number of different threats to our freshwater aquatic ecosystems and our coastal fisheries. Aquatic invasive species and habitat destruction are the number one and number two problems for inland fisheries as well as many coastal fisheries.

The point of my talk, I think, was really that it is surprising to me as a scientist that we have problems like this to figure out, that have such huge economic potential implications, and there are a few of us who are virtually alone in the room trying to figure these things out. I have colleagues in academia who work on invasive species, but I think one of the things government scientists could bring to the table when they are there is to have a focus, and to have issues they are trying to get to, such as how to enhance the potential of recreational fisheries.

These days, there is no one at the table from government helping to figure those things out. I'm sorry to say that, but I was told I could speak frankly at this committee.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Mr. Tufts, that's a harsh comment. You said there are no federal government officials at the table. That's putting it bluntly. Would you mind elaborating a bit further on the problem?

[English]

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Absolutely. And sorry, I didn't mean to say that in exactly the way it was said.

My point is that I'm talking about recreational fisheries here, as a scientist, and when I look at the people who are working on recreational fisheries these days in the country, it is a small group of people. There are people who work on this from time to time in academia, but in terms of recreational fisheries, there are very few people working on recreational fisheries. As I say, I don't have any collaborators who I can say, in the federal government who are still there, work in this area.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Thank you, Mr. Tufts. Hearing that view was extremely important.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Monsieur Lapointe.

Mr. Sopuck.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC):** Thank you.

Thanks for the presentation.

Dr. Tufts, I very much agree with you in that the federal government does have a lack of effort in the recreational fishery. In fact, one of the reasons the Conservative members of this committee insisted on the study being done was to do an evaluation of the federal government's role in recreational fishing and to make recommendations for the future. The testimonies from both of you have been extremely helpful in that regard.

On that, Dr. Tufts, I gather that the walleye is considered the most valuable fish in Canada by and large, is that right?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Yes.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Unfortunately, to date, DFO's research efforts have largely been focused on commercial fisheries on the coasts, and other things. Does DFO do any walleye research that you are aware of?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Not to my knowledge.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Okay. It is important to get that on the record as well.

In terms of funding, Dr. Tufts, are you familiar with our recreational conservation partnerships program?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Yes, I am. That was a very good step forward.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** We recently added \$30 million to that budget, and we'll have a total budget of \$55 million. To date, almost 400 cooperative conservation projects with angling communities have been done.

What effect overall, both on the angling groups themselves and on the resource itself, will those projects have in terms of conserving fish and fish habitat?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Those are tremendously positive steps forward. I think there's no doubt that many of those projects will have positive impacts. The important point there is that it's a big piece of the puzzle, but there are still some major pieces missing.

As a scientist, I can say that many of us talk about a lot of the habitat work that's being done around the world these days and point out that while it's all well intentioned, in many cases there's an absence from science directing where those projects are done, how well they are working, and documenting their impacts. So I think this speaks to my point about scientific expertise around the country and the fact that another important piece of the puzzle in that direction is to have a strong science base that evaluates and directs a lot of that work.

•(1140)

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** In my own career as a fisheries biologist early on, there were a lot of us who worked on recreational fisheries, and I certainly agree with you that the trend has been to get away from that. As I said, one of the purposes of this study is to take a look at exactly what you're talking about, Dr. Tufts.

Mr. Melnik, at the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association, you sit the hunting and angling advisory panel, is that correct?

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** I do not personally. Phil Morlock, our government affairs chair, does.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** But the CSIA is represented there.

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** Right.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** What can you say in terms of the effectiveness of having anglers, hunters, and sport-shooting groups basically in the engine room of government, so to speak, advising key ministers?

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** It is very valuable, and I often say that to our members when they ask what it is their membership dollars are doing. The first thing I point to is the work of Phil Morlock, Tom Brooke, and others who look after our government affairs committee. To have the opportunity to rub shoulders with MPs, as we did a few weeks ago at the outdoor caucus breakfast, is amazing. To be at the table is valuable and certainly appreciated.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Great.

Dr. Tufts, given that catch and release is vital to the maintenance of the sustainability of our recreational fisheries, can you talk about hooking mortality and what is being done to minimize hooking mortality when fish are released? Perhaps you could comment on some of the research you're doing in this field as well.

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** That's a great question. Thank you.

I've actually been involved in that research area for almost my entire career. I was on the east coast of Canada working at Dalhousie University when mandatory catch and release came into play for Atlantic salmon. There was a lot of debate and controversy about that. My research ended up looking at the survival of Atlantic salmon after catch and release, and whether there were any instances where that could be improved upon.

Over the years I have done many, many different studies on different species to look at the impacts of live release and whether there's any mortality associated with that. I can say that without doubt from all these studies the vast majority of all of those fish survive.

We just looked in the laboratory the other day at a bass we collected that had been in the bass fishery in Lake Ontario for 18 years. It was 18 years old. Bass is a really important target species for recreational anglers, and the fact that there are 17- and 18-year-old fish swimming out there tells you those fish are being caught and released, and surviving. We've done tagging studies on fish that have been caught and released and virtually all of those fish survived.

In the few areas where there have been issues, where there's been a problem with live release, my research has actually helped anglers understand important things like keeping fish in the water if they're releasing them and the significance of water temperature for live-release situations. One of the great things about the recreational angling industry is that it's well received. This information has been put into practice and anglers are very conscientious about making sure that the fish they release are in very good condition.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Can you comment on the key angling species, species by species, and the what hooking mortality is, just in general terms?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Sure. I probably would preface that by saying a lot of the work I've done has been to look at things like water temperature and how something like that, even in one species, such as Atlantic salmon, could influence survival or mortality.

Really, what you see if you look at this literature is this. If conditions are appropriate for the fish—water temperature is reasonable and the angling practices are reasonable—I can say without exception that virtually every study shows that survival is over 90%. Then when you're talking about mortality, you're talking about usually less than 5% as a hooking mortality in fish species.

Maybe some exceptions to that would be when we get into situations with very high water temperatures, things like that which are actually unnatural for fish these days. In some of these cases the mortality is higher. But I think in a lot of the situations, such as the Atlantic salmon fishery, anglers and managers have recognized that they have to close the fishery in some cases now when the temperatures get that high.

• (1145)

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Right.

Mr. Melnik, this study is the first of its kind that the fisheries and oceans standing committee has ever undertaken, to my knowledge. I think it's extremely important. We're getting some profound and interesting testimony.

Can you talk, Mr. Melnik, about why a study like this is important?

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** I think any time we pause to take a look at what we're doing and what we're not doing, whether it's in government or in business, it's always a good thing. We were thrilled to be invited to testify before the committee.

I think we have to ask hard questions. I'm impressed that the DFO standing House committee is looking into the practices of how things are done currently. I'm very impressed with that, because that's the only way we move forward, by looking at what we're not doing right, correcting it, getting a plan of action in place, and going forward.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Dr. Tufts, to go back to you again, what is the state of stock assessment monitoring work in relation to our recreational fisheries across Canada? I know it's a big country and a tough question, but what's your general sense of the stock assessment work that's being done on our recreational fisheries?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** I guess it depends on where we're looking. I think, historically, there was quite a lot of effort to evaluate numbers for species like Atlantic salmon. The nice thing about salmon is you can count them when they come up rivers. My impression of the effort in stock assessment and other aspects of the Atlantic salmon fishery is that it's been greatly reduced in recent years and that we have very little understanding of many aspects of the Atlantic salmon fishery on Canada's east coast.

In inland fisheries, I think we still have provincial presence monitoring a lot of the stocks for inland fisheries, but in those cases that's where that jurisdiction really belongs. On the west coast of Canada I guess I'm less familiar, but my sense on the west coast of Canada is that we pay far less attention to the recreational fishery and the recreational species on the west coast of Canada, such as steelhead, which has tremendous recreational value, and that most of the effort and understanding of the stocks is directed toward commercial species such as sockeye and species of salmon like that.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** I think my time is up. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. MacAulay.



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

I welcome the witnesses, very much so. Coming from Prince Edward Island, I well understand the importance of the commercial and the recreational fisheries. They are both very important.

I also want to assure you that from the understanding I have, this is what we're here for: tough questions. This is not a promotional event. This is an event to find out just how we can improve the situation. That's why I, on this committee, pushed so hard to make sure that this study moved forward and that we heard from people like you.

On the information we've received, I certainly did not know some of it. Some of it is quite important, and perhaps some of it is not so important. You indicated that they spend more on the recreational fishery than at Tim Hortons or on beer, which is somewhat interesting.

Mr. Melnik, you indicated in your presentation that it's important that it's a science-based fishery. You mentioned open access opportunities. I'd like you expand a bit on that. I agree, certainly, that it's a science-based fishery and that open access is vital, but I'd like you to elaborate further on that.

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** I wish our government affairs chair, Phil Morlock, was not travelling in the U.S. today and was able to be here, because he could be much more eloquent than I.

Access issues are certainly under way in the United States. We're witnessing that happen on both the east and west coasts.

I think Dr. Tufts would have more knowledge on that than I do, as well.

• (1150)

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** I could add to that when the time comes.

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** Okay.

We don't want to see that happen in Canada. We are not putting out fires as they are in the United States, but we're also not living separately either. We are connected to things that are going on south of the border—all around the world, but especially south of the border.

That's an access issue but also science-based. We always stress that term as much as we can. I think we all agree that sometimes decisions are made maybe politically, perhaps for popularity, or based on emotion. When it comes to fisheries—and again, Dr. Tufts, I defer to you on this—science-based research has to be the order of the day when decisions are made regarding recreational fishing. That's our position as an association.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Do we have enough, and how do we improve it?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** I think the issue that Mike is speaking to, a tremendously important issue around the globe these days, is that one of the solutions that people are putting in place, and governments are putting in place to protect the world's fisheries, is protected areas. There are many areas now being developed around the world that are protected from fisheries so that areas can recover. But I think the big misconception in that area for a lot of people is

that they don't understand the distinction between commercial fisheries and recreational fisheries. This is one of my areas of expertise.

Commercial fisheries have a long history of overharvest and some habitat issues, things like that, and in many cases they're not selective. Protected areas make a lot of sense to provide areas where there's no commercial fishing. However, as my research on live release has shown, there is no threat from recreational fisheries. You can release fish alive, you can decide which fish to release, managers can decide that for you—which species, which fish, which sizes of fish—and this is where the importance of live release and selective harvest and sustainability comes in.

When you have protected areas that are being proposed, and some approved, around the world, it really doesn't make a lot of sense to protect them from recreational fisheries in a lot of cases. I think this is one of the big misconceptions, because the general public doesn't always understand. To them, fisheries are fisheries, so protected areas should protect all fisheries. But if you understand the science—and this I think is where Canada has been doing well so far—if you're going to have protected areas to recover fish stocks, it makes a lot of sense in the case of some commercial fisheries but it doesn't make sense to have areas where there's no access for recreational fisheries. For recreational fisheries you can still have the economic value, but you can have a sustainable fishery anywhere you want it, because most fish can be released, or all fish can be released, and it doesn't impact on the numbers of fish in the population.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much. I understand what you're saying, Doctor, but sometimes it's not overly easy for governments to implement what you are saying, because when somebody can fish and somebody cannot, it causes difficulties. But what you're saying is absolutely correct.

You also indicated something that is of interest to me. You've done some work on the Atlantic salmon, and you tell me it's worth about \$128 million. But you also stated it could be worth a couple of hundred million. I'd like you to elaborate and indicate what could take place in order to have that happen, including what governments could do. Do you need more funding, more programs, or whatever? I also believe that education, in this area and in the area that you were talking about under the recreational fishery, is so important so that the general population understands. It's not easy for governments, whatever stripe they are, to do something that's very unpopular to the rest of us.

Perhaps you could expand on that, including how you feel more education in this area would benefit your organization.

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** I could speak to that.

In the case of Atlantic salmon, it's a complex issue. I think this gets back to the idea that we really need scientists—and we need some scientists mandated, in my opinion, by government—that are trying to work on some of the important issues to bring back Atlantic salmon stocks. There's a lack of understanding of what's going on with Atlantic salmon in the ocean. I think most people agree that there are serious problems going on in the ocean for Atlantic salmon and that this is affecting the numbers that come back to the rivers in eastern Canada. There are many potential reasons why that's occurring. People have suggested aquaculture in open net-pens. There are many other possibilities. But we need, first of all, the science to understand what the issues actually are—which is missing—and then we need the funding to provide the solutions.

I think in the past one of the problems that we as humans have had is that we tend to go to the first quick fix. In fisheries, a lot of the time the first quick fix has been to just provide more hatcheries. Many studies have now shown that hatcheries aren't always the solution and that, really, if you don't understand what the problem is and if you don't fix things like habitat issues, then hatcheries won't solve the problem. In fact, they may cause more of a problem.

With Atlantic salmon, I think we need the science to understand where the issues are, and then we need efforts. For example—here's a subtle difference—instead of a hatchery simply pumping more fish into a river, in some cases around the world these days we have hatcheries that are preserving particular genetic stocks, strains of fish that are particular to certain rivers. We could do that, for example, on the east coast of Canada, trying to keep those genetics around, trying to use those then as a base to provide fish to go back to the rivers that they were native to, and keep the genetic diversity we have until we figure out what the problems are.

From that I think you can see that there are more complex issues that really require full-time Ph.D. scientists working on those problems.

• (1155)

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I want to thank you for the excellent information for the committee. Basically you're telling us that we need people to tell us what the problem is first. If you know what the problem is, possibly you can do something about it. Also, you're telling us that probably hatcheries are not all the answer, that fish can reproduce themselves if we take care of the ecosystem itself.

I think that's basically what you're trying to tell the committee.

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Absolutely.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** You also mentioned steelhead on the west coast. Is it basically the same way with the steelhead on the west coast, that the economic value could be improved? Is that what you meant, Doctor?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Yes, sorry, that's what I meant to say.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Okay. Thank you very much.

In Alberta the commercial fishery has been stopped. Could you comment on that and respond on how it's helped, or not helped, or revived the species?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** I could speak to that in some ways. I'm not an expert on the status of stocks in Alberta, but I can say that in many different instances when commercial fisheries have been stopped,

although it takes some time, you'll get a rebuilding of the population. In some cases, for example, walleye can be over 20 years old.

It could take some years to get the kinds of numbers that we would like to see back in the fishery, but I can't think of too many reasons or situations why, in an inland fishery like that, reducing the harvest from commercial fisheries would have anything but a positive impact.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much. That's great information.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Mr. Leef.

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Great.

Thank you to both of our witnesses for appearing today. We've certainly heard a lot of similar comments from many of our witnesses in terms of the dollars invested by conservation groups, angling groups in particular, back into stream and fisheries restoration and habitat. It was interesting, actually, to hear some commentary that was I think new in terms of the value or potential challenges with hatcheries being the default go-to. So that certainly was important for us to hear. It's great to have a little bit different input into this study as we start to move forward now.

I'm going to ask you both, in terms of very specific recommendations, if you had your choice of one or two that you would make to this committee to move forward, what would they be? I say that in light of the one realization that a good portion of fisheries management falls in the hands of provincial governments. Is there anything specific we can do to partner up with our provincial counterparts so as not to step on their toes in terms of that inland fisheries piece? It is the same with wildlife: we have a certain federal role, but always it seems to be provincially dominated.

If both had an opportunity, or had a specific recommendation for the committee, what would those be as we go forward?

• (1200)

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Maybe I could answer that first. I would like to point out that one of the things that has been missing in a lot of the different initiatives in the past that would, I believe, do wonders here is that the funding that becomes available to try to enhance different fisheries across the country needs to have a piece that is associated with science. And so, as you're speaking, if you were to consider making funding available, for example, as a partnership between perhaps federal and provincial groups and scientists, that would help. It should not just be directed towards one particular fishery. I think the thing that's maybe missing here is that some of the things that are found out in science don't just apply to one particular fishery; they apply to all fisheries. I think a lot of the funding ends up being directed towards particular geographical areas or fisheries. It often doesn't have a science component. I think when science is done well, it doesn't apply to one situation, it applies to all situations.

So one recommendation from me would be to have personnel in the federal government who might have expertise as scientists in recreational fisheries that could apply across the country. Perhaps they could partner some of those people to work on issues associated with provinces in particular areas that could affect particular fisheries. That's a really important part that I think has been missing.

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Melnik.

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** I think it comes down to one word, "communication", whether you're communicating, as Dr. Tufts said, by sharing information from the federal government or the federal researchers with the provincial counterparts or communicating with the industry. Quite often we as an association feel left out. That's why, again, we were thrilled to be invited to testify before the committee today.

If I had a couple of wishes on a list that I could submit, one would be more communication with the industry. We're on the front lines. We're Canadian Tire. We're seeing people buy fishing tackle. We're manufacturers. We're promoters. We deal with Canadians on a first-hand basis through national fishing week and other events.

So we have a lot to offer. We have a lot that we can communicate back to you, and I hope we have done that today as well. But that would be my one big wish: more communication between the industry and the government.

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** Thank you. You both made very good points.

What do you see as the largest challenge facing fisheries in Canada today?

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** I can maybe speak to that.

I think in my world there's a global misunderstanding about the distinctions between recreational fisheries and commercial fisheries. The vast majority of the population doesn't understand that distinction, and would be willing to close areas to fisheries entirely, in their understanding, for conservation, whereas really, I believe we need to promote people to go out and recognize how important those fisheries are to them, in the case of recreational fisheries, and become linked to them in a very strong way by participating and by using them.

As I've seen over the years, a child holding for the first time a fish that they just caught, releasing it, having a bit of an understanding of how that's sustainable use, or even taking a few medium-sized fish home to eat and understanding that that's a sustainable use of a resource that has natural capital and you're living off the interest—those are the kinds of messages we need to get out. It's not to just close down entire wilderness areas and aquatic areas to participation. That would be the worst threat we could do, because then we'll lose habitat, then we'll have invasive species in there, and we'll have nobody on the watch.

• (1205)

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** That's a good point.

Go ahead, Mr. Melnik.

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** I totally agree with Dr. Tufts. I think one of the biggest challenges to recreational fishing is the next generation.

You know, I've heard that the CFL suffered by losing touch with a generation of kids. A whole generation—I think my kids would be that age—started following the NFL as opposed to the CFL. We have to continue to market recreational fishing and its benefits to the next generation. As Dr. Tufts said earlier, those who use the resource are the ones who roll up their sleeves and work to protect it. They put their dollars in, they put their time in, and they volunteer hours.

I think one challenge for us is that, if we don't convert, if you will, the next generation to the joys and the benefits of recreational fishing, we could lose a whole generation who just won't care when they're in their twenties and thirties and busy with life. Plus, there are the distractions of electronics that we all know about. We need to market to kids for recreational fishing.

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** That's excellent.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

**The Chair:** You have two minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** Good. I still have a bit of time.

Thank you both for those points. It's interesting when we look at the numbers. Some of us have known them for a long time. They're staggering in terms of both GDP contribution and participation hours, and then, of course, the subsequent conservation benefits that come from angling groups and organizations.

It's interesting, though. Maybe you have some insight into why this would be the case; I know you've touched on the marketing piece a little bit. You can go into most shops and see fishing poles. You see them in Canadian Tire and in sports stores; and fishing is well branded in magazines. But when we speak with fishing groups, which we do a lot of, and we tell them that more Canadians fish than play golf and hockey combined, even anglers are stunned by these metrics.

Is it just so overt that we take it for granted? Or what are we missing in terms of even angling groups not understanding the impact they themselves have on all these fields?

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** I can respond to that first, if that's okay, Dr. Tufts.

**Dr. Bruce Tufts:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Mike Melnik:** I was shocked by some of the research that came back from our independent research group. I didn't realize that more adult Canadians fish than play golf and hockey combined. I thought golf would supersede fishing in a heartbeat. Yes, I was shocked too. We all were, and we were elated, at the same time, to see the great statistics.

I hate to keep coming back to the money part, but that is one of the problems. We, as an association, are trying to promote recreational fishing on a shoestring budget of \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year. We receive millions of dollars of in-kind advertising, and we appreciate that, but wouldn't it be great if we had a budget of \$10 million to spread the word about the benefits of recreational fishing? Wouldn't that be amazing, to drive these facts home to people?

I agree with you. I am sure you've heard a lot of groups maybe question those statistics, but we stand by them. I've been in ad agencies where I've held up our document, and the hardened marketing ad agency people couldn't get enough of this information. They had no idea how big recreational fishing is.

Again, it's a matter of spreading the word, and that takes dollars and cents.

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** Thank you both.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Leef.

Thank you, gentlemen, for taking this time to appear before our committee today, answer questions, and make presentations. We certainly do appreciate it. On behalf of the entire committee, I want to extend that thanks.

We'll suspend for a few moments until we set up our next witnesses.

• (1205) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1210)

**The Chair:** I call this meeting back to order.

I'd like to welcome our guests here this afternoon. Thank you very much for joining us. I appreciate the time you've given to this committee today. As you are well aware, we are studying recreational fisheries in Canada.

We generally allow about 10 minutes per witness to make opening statements or deliver remarks, and then we move into questions from committee members.

With the time constraints on our members, I would ask that you keep your answers to their questions as concise as possible to allow them to get in as many questions as possible.

I am not sure who wants to go first, Mr. Huber or Mr. Smith. When you do, please identify yourself for the record, for Hansard.

I'll throw the floor to you first, Mr. Huber, if you want to make your opening comments. Whenever you are ready, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Robert Huber (President, Thames River Anglers Association):** Thank you very much. My name is Robert Huber. I'm the president of the Thames River Anglers Association here in London, Ontario, Canada.

First of all, I'd like to thank everyone for inviting us to participate in this committee session. Hopefully we have some ideas and some perspective that will help with the goals of this committee.

The Thames River Anglers Association itself was formed in 1986 as a hands-on environmental group made up of volunteers and governed by a formal constitution with bylaws. Every member of the Thames River anglers is active in their advocacy for the health of the

Thames River itself, the watershed, and its inhabitants through a variety of fisheries-related projects and education.

It has been our experience that encouraging ecosystem-focused stewardship directly correlates to improving recreational fishing activities. Our motto is, ironically, "Dedication Today, for Tomorrow".

In my planning for this, we took a close look at the economics of fisheries within southwestern Ontario, and there are some interesting things about it. The Ontario fisheries themselves are a very important part of our cultural history and contribute very substantially to the economy locally. Over 41,000 person-years of employment are driven through the industry itself. There are more than 1.2 million resident and non-resident anglers who contribute nearly \$2.2 billion annually to the Ontario economy for fishing purposes. The driving force for Ontario's tourism industry and a key economic component in many communities is fishing, particularly in northern Ontario, where there are 1,600 licensed tour operators generating hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue annually. There are also 1,200 commercial bait-fishing licences that are issued annually, with \$17 million in direct sales of live bait. These numbers are from the Ontario provincial fish strategy, titled "Fish for the Future". That's where we got that data.

We built our perspective on this around what we call four pillars of improving fisheries. The first two pillars are habitat and protection of species. We feel that there needs to be a more authoritative oversight to both protect environmentally sensitive habitat and maintain and improve fisheries that attract tourism and provide cultural and/or recreational benefits to the community.

In particular, we'd like to see the provincial and federal governments take on more financial and legislative support that would be helpful to remove, for example, recreational dams and weirs that actually harm ecosystems, and evaluate and consider decommissioning others that do not serve a specific flood control or are no longer deemed cost-effective to taxpayers for hydroelectric generation.

The Thames River, where we base most of our work, is one of the most species-rich rivers in all of Ontario, with over 90 species of fish and many aquatic species that are listed as threatened, endangered, or of special concern. This includes 12 fish, six reptiles, and seven mussel species.

We have a dam here called Springbank Dam—not to be confused with the projects in Calgary—built back in the early 1900s. It served a historical recreational purpose to create a reservoir for rowing. It was repaired in the early 2000s using federal and provincial funds but failed the first time it was operated in 2008. Since that time it has been left open. The entire ecosystem has gone through a dramatic recovery, but currently there are plans to actually repair the dam and re-establish that impoundment, which in effect could threaten all that has actually been improved. For example, while the impoundment is in place—while the dam is operational—E. coli levels have been found to be over 55 times higher than the provincially acceptable levels within that reservoir that it creates. This is sourced through the Trout Unlimited Canada technical report that was published in April 2007.

The next part is what we consider our advocacy and how we work with different levels of government and other agencies. In 2008, as part of the ecological framework for recreational fisheries management, Ontario was divided into 20 fisheries management zones. The Ministry of Natural Resources also created regulatory specific tool kits for the 15 most popular species. As a result, each zone would establish an advisory council, create a fisheries management plan, and amend the fisheries regulations under the Fisheries Act based on the plan. This would then include monitoring and assessing the zone on a regular basis, then amending the plan to include management actions, if necessary, based on those results.

•(1215)

Our region is called fisheries management zone 16. Prior to 2008, when these changes were made, over 30 million walleye were caught in Ontario by anglers, making it the most targeted species of fish in the province. For some strange reason, we never had an advisory council formed for our region, which resulted in decisions being made without adequate stakeholder involvement. That resulted in both lost fishing opportunities and economic fallout. For example, the walleye season itself was closed each spring since 2008. A slot size base-limit system was put in place. This has had a very direct impact on both anglers and the businesses that are directly affected by that fisheries activity. No follow-up monitoring has been completed, and no species-specific tool kit was created for walleye even though they're the most popular fish that's targeted.

Any effort that can be made to follow through on these commitments would have a widespread benefit to southwestern Ontario's angling community along with the businesses that rely on those recreational opportunities.

Our last element is young anglers and education. We feel strongly that encouraging youth to learn and participate in fishing is a rewarding outdoor physical activity. It educates them and their parents on responsible stewardship practices. It cultivates our next generation of volunteers, business owners, and future legislators. It is one of the most absolutely certain ways that we can ensure future economic growth in the industry.

This can continue to improve through educational programs available to schools; continued support for community hatchery programs like our own; and environmental initiatives that encourage volunteer efforts such as river cleanups, Yellow Fish Road programs, and other programs that through a variety of media, including social media and events, demonstrate how angling connects us to each other along with the rivers and lands that are such an important part of our heritage as a country.

That's it.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Huber.

Mr. Smith, the floor is yours.

•(1220)

**Dr. Darryl Smith (Provincial Fish Chair, Alberta Fish and Game Association):** Thank you very much.

My name is Dr. Darryl Smith. On behalf of the Alberta Fish and Game Association, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to

present to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans regarding recreational fishing in Canada.

My background is as a long-time angler, volunteer, and advocate for responsible resource and land use planning. I am currently the Alberta Fish and Game Association provincial fish chair. My home is in the Peace River region of northwestern Alberta.

As a bit of background, the Alberta Fish and Game Association is the largest and oldest conservation organization in Alberta. It represents more than 24,000 anglers, hunters, and conservationists. At our core is the sustainable use of both our fish and our wildlife and the protection of the habitat they require.

We believe there must be a change in the focus of the direction we're presently going in to manage our fishery resource, if we are to see improvements in recreational fishing opportunities. There are two primary reasons for this concern. The first is societal and is related to the changing attitudes and choices of Canadians in what is, I guess, an increasingly urban society. The second is our failure collectively to deal with the cumulative impacts on the environment from all use, whether from recreation, agriculture, industry, urban growth, or infrastructure needs.

In his 1998 report *Rising to the challenge: A new policy for Canada's freshwater fisheries*, Dr. Peter H. Pearce stated that he was concerned not just to correct the deficiencies of the past, but to suggest the kind of changes we should be making to provide for the needs of coming generations.

Many of the recommendations from the report have been enacted, particularly in the area of regulation, management, and allocation of the fishery resource. But today the real determinant in the health of fisheries is maintenance of the productivity of the aquatic ecosystem.

Alberta is really a study in progress, as nowhere else in Canada are we seeing so many changes or impacts occurring societally, economically, and environmentally at the same time. I've been fortunate to travel right across this country, including through the northern territories, and the changes here, this having been my home since I was born, are quite amazing.

Today the reality is that the vast majority of Canadians live in urban environments. Alberta is no different, with more than 80% of its citizens now taking up residence in urban centres. A utopian viewpoint has developed, in that many residents have a very limited understanding of what fuels the economy or even where food comes from.

From a fisheries perspective, Alberta faces challenges due to a complex web of circumstances that set it apart from the rest of Canada. This results in a high risk to sustainability for many fish species. Despite the risks, there is no indication that other jurisdictions would have made radically different choices to balance societal, economic, and environmental pressures if faced with the same circumstances.

Regulatory change aimed at the angler is only effective where the productive capacity within the ecosystem is not compromised. The use of catch and release regulations to allow for stock recovery comes with real concerns. It has become a panacea and a front-line action that delays or masks other long-term impacts that must be addressed beyond angling. In fact, in Alberta they're about to say "Let's close down the fisheries" without addressing the fact that we have coal mines, forestry, and oil and gas development on the same landscape. Without having places to fish, it will be a real problem.

Catch and release has another dimension in that it transitions angling into solely a pastime. As angling becomes diminished, we perpetuate the myth that the fish on our table come from the supermarket. Compounding this is that urban settings have many competing leisure and lifestyle activities. Access to angling opportunity in such settings is often extremely limited. The relevance of angling and participation in the future should be of great concern to all of us.

• (1225)

Fish populations continue to decline. In Alberta the listing of bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, Athabasca rainbow trout, and Arctic grayling, as species that are either threatened or endangered, despite the fact that limited or no harvest regulations have existed on these species for up to 25 years, shows us that the necessary environmental stewardship across all government policies has not actually been effective. I guess the most disturbing thing is that numerous strategies and policies clearly show what the problems are, but we haven't fulfilled the actions necessary to achieve the objectives.

The vision of intensive and focused management where fish and their habitat are the priority across large geographical spaces that are simultaneously undergoing rapid change or development is an ideal, but it is really not based in reality. Trying to achieve this, as has been sort of the focus in Alberta, has led to the result that even most productive fisheries in this province are under threat. What I am proposing will be heresy to some in the scientific community who, like their urban counterparts, have become trapped in a utopian viewpoint.

What we're suggesting is that the focus must shift to the few remaining intact and productive aquatic ecosystems. This is not about orphaning other systems, because they will still be managed under the best practice philosophy of the past and the landscape approach. What it will ensure is that at least refuge populations are established as we rethink our approach to dealing with cumulative effects.

The policy and direction changes required to deal with cumulative effects include the following: develop watershed-based land use and water management plans; apply the highest level of protection to riparian and littoral zones; develop habitat banks; establish offsetting requirements for all developments, including even those that are a result of urban expansion; establish compensation programs for landowners to maintain habitat; provide effective and non-competing program management across all government agencies—DFO, provincial, municipalities, right across the board; and put a total emphasis and commitment on prevention of impacts, compliance monitoring, and remediation enforcement of current standards.

I don't think we see a problem with the standards that exist; it's just that we're not using those standards the way we should be. Essentially this means that habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement become a priority in the way we approach fisheries management in the future. The current model revolves around single-species action plans with little visibility when we have other competing priorities. Without healthy aquatic ecosystems that maintain their productivity, fish populations, whether naturalized or native, are at risk.

This brings us back to the area of relevance of angling in the future. Dr. Pearse in his report lists no fewer than nine recommendations to increase the public participation of anglers in fisheries management. In Alberta, the angling constituency has largely been shut out of playing a role. We must focus on our increasing urban demographics to ensure that people have access to fishing opportunity in their communities supported by policies and programs that preserve our angling heritage.

The decision-making process has become overly bureaucratic and often extends over multiple years. Anglers' viewpoints appear lost and of no importance. The frustration level among anglers is at a boiling point, particularly in this province. Anglers deserve to play a role in policy development and priority setting if we are serious about the future of our angling heritage.

It's not just about integrating policy across all levels of government; it's also about integrating the needs and priorities of anglers and fish into this policy. Essentially, without habitat that maintains its productivity there will be no fish or anglers. I ask you, are we prepared to make such a trade-off?

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Smith.

We'll go to a seven-minute round for questions, and we'll start off with Mr. Chisholm.

**Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP):** Gentlemen, thank you both for being here today to participate in this committee's discussion of the recreational fishery.

I want to ask you both a couple of questions, but I'll start with Mr. Smith.

I appreciate what you've said about the frustration of anglers in trying to get some action in some of those areas that you talked about, habitat protection and management and so on. But I'm sure they're feeling better now that the NDP government is in place in Alberta, and then, once we get in place in October federally, we'll be able to work together to solve those problems that you've outlined.

I'm being somewhat facetious, of course, but I do hear what you're saying about the problems around habitat management. I was interested in what you seemed to suggest, that instead of focusing on all of the rivers and streams and lakes and so on, there needed to be a greater focus on fewer ecosystems. I think you called them viable ecosystems. Is that what you were saying?

• (1230)

**Dr. Darryl Smith:** Essentially; what I'm really concerned about is that our broad landscape approach, where we basically have a common set of rules, isn't effective, and that where our most productive ecosystems are, we're going to lose those as a result. Generally what's happened in fisheries management is that we go to where the problems are worse, rather than doing the very best on what we already have, and protecting it.

I think there are examples of that. I guess the Thames River is an example of a highly impacted system, but we still have systems here that, by just really good policy, we could save.

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** Okay. Thank you.

That question about how to focus becomes more of a priority as government... DFO, for example, has cut back on a lot of its resources, both in terms of field people but also scientists and research enforcement people. That creates the compounding problem that you've identified.

Mr. Huber, I appreciated your presentation and what you had to say about the Thames River. I noticed that the first of your four pillars is habitat management. The principle you talked about is that if we don't have healthy fish habitat, we're not going to have any fish, and that's your priority. I'd like to ask you about your organization's relationship with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans as it relates to questions of assisting you on, or dealing with, habitat management issues and science.

**Mr. Robert Huber:** You're absolutely correct; in a lot of the projects we take on, we don't start with stocking fish, we start with habitat restoration primarily. You can stock fish into any river system, but if the system can't sustain them then you're really creating a put-and-take fishery, which is not accomplishing a sustainable result.

That forces us, by nature, to have to work directly with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. It's an extensive process. It's one that's not, by nature, something that anglers learn to do. You really need to want to do this and actually have a commitment to improving things long term. You have to be looking 10 years in advance to take a system and make the type of changes that need to happen in order to re-establish or improve a fishery just on one river system. If you're not willing to commit that time to it, then it's not necessarily going to succeed.

• (1235)

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** How does your organization accomplish that? The Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in the last two years, has developed this new program that allows partnerships with organizations like yours to do ecosystem restoration work. Have you been able to avail yourself of that funding?

**Mr. Robert Huber:** Yes, we have. It was primarily managed through the province beforehand. Since that time they've deferred

some of the management of those funding and grant opportunities to other agencies, like the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. In many cases, this has actually improved the process, where you have people who are more directly involved in fisheries management being more directly involved in decisions around funding and how it's going to be delivered. That's actually been a really positive improvement that we've seen. It's made it easier for other hatcheries and groups like ours to do projects.

From a habitat standpoint, there's still a lot of paperwork involved in order to do a project in an area, but that's something we're willing to do because we know that means that if somebody else has a major infrastructure project or an energy project or something else that requires them to go through environmental assessments and other processes, they're there for a reason, so we hold ourselves to the same standard we would expect everybody else to be held to.

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** Mr. Smith and Mr. Huber, if either one of you could make a recommendation to this committee about how the Department of Fisheries and Oceans could better support the recreational fishery or your organizations, what would that be?

Go ahead, Mr. Huber.

**Mr. Robert Huber:** I think the better the communication is and the more consistency there is across all levels, from federal to provincial, and then working with groups like ours.... When there's consistency, it's very easy to get things done. At a policy level that's really important. I think we really need to be looking to the future and at how we're going to bridge this generational gap of who those next anglers will be.

I have two kids who love to fish. I eat the fish I catch. Every day I think about the fact that sometime down the road they'll be doing exactly what I'm doing; it will happen by nature.

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** Thank you.

Mr. Smith?

**Dr. Darryl Smith:** I think the biggest thing the federal government could do is simply get DFO back into the western provinces. Basically, there's very little footprint of the federal government in Alberta. That would be my number one recommendation. I would just say that.

In terms of the program the federal government has to support recreational angling, that is a positive. Obviously we'd like to see that expanded, and certainly we've leveraged those funds.

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** Thanks very much to both of you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Chisholm.

Ms. Davidson.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being with us today.

We've been hearing some consistent reports from different areas of the country and we've been hearing some differences.

Mr. Smith, according to the information we have, there's been a fairly significant decline in licensed anglers in Alberta in the last few years, actually going from 14% to 6%, which is fairly significant. Do you have any idea what factors are playing a role in this decline? Why are the anglers participating less? Has contribution to the recreational fishing in Alberta declined proportionately? Is there a connection there? How do you see the federal government stimulating the anglers' participation?

• (1240)

**Dr. Darryl Smith:** You're totally right. There has been a huge decline in the last 20 years, and that's despite the fact that the population has increased by over 1.5 million people. We used to have 350,000 licensed anglers. We have 250,000 today.

It's actually a multifactorial problem. The very limited amount of water here in the province is a factor. I alluded to the other issue about that real shift to urban. Everyone thinks we're a rural province. We're not a rural province.

How could the federal government help? I think it's really making sure that those fisheries that we do have maintain their productivity. That is the biggest focus. The focus of the habitat protection provisions of the Fisheries Act need to be forefront in how we go forward. That would be my biggest way to keep angling, because again, without habitat we're not going to be there.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** What does your group do when it comes to preserving habitat and conservation? What's your involvement?

**Dr. Darryl Smith:** We actually have a fairly large involvement. We have a wildlife trust fund. It's about 45,000 hectares of land that we directly have purchased, I guess.

We work very closely in cooperation with other organizations. We're fortunate in Alberta with the Alberta Conservation Association, which is somewhat of a misnomer. It's actually tied to an MOU with government. Basically anglers and hunters make a contribution to it out of every licence sale. Through that organization and its professional staff working with our clubs, we have everything from education through habitat programs throughout the province. But it's very much a cooperative approach.

This is a large province, and the difference here is that the development is spread across it. We're not like Ontario, which fortunately, has basically the north and the west. You can go 400 miles north of me, and industry, agriculture, and urban growth are still there.

That's why I come back to why we need to focus on these few intact places. Let's spend our dollars where they have the greatest bang for the buck.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** When you're talking about development being a huge influence—negative, I guess—on the recreational fishing, is it because more land use policies need to be put in place? What needs to be done?

**Dr. Darryl Smith:** Unfortunately, the way our policies are, we haven't figured out a way to deal with cumulative effects. We have actually pretty good policies nationally and provincially.

Let's say you have a mine, for example. We have an environmental impact assessment process that deals with the

problems locally. How do you deal with problems when it's the collective of many players on the landscape? We have not solved that.

I'll just take one good example. We've had roads throughout most of the boreal forest here for some 60 years. There are increasing numbers of roads. The road construction standards have gotten better, but we still have more roads and more silt getting into the streams, so we need to have policies that can deal with that type of collective effect from everybody. That means really a partnering with industry, municipalities, and recreationalists to do the best we can, because we're not doing the job right now.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** In other areas, we know the management of the recreational fisheries is a joint responsibility. In your estimation, is there good corroboration between the federal and provincial governments at this time?

• (1245)

**Dr. Darryl Smith:** I certainly know the head of the policy branch in Alberta, and I know he regularly meets with his federal counterparts, but again one of the problems is that the federal legislation deals with basically the stream bed, and the provincial legislation deals with the watershed and the habitat around it.

If we're going to be successful, we need integration of that ecosystem-based approach, which means more involvement provincially and federally, because right now we're treating each item individually rather than the collective ecosystem-based approach.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** Thank you.

Mr. Huber, you're with the Thames River Anglers Association, not too far from my riding of Sarnia—Lambton, so I am familiar with the Thames River. What area of that river are you involved with?

**Mr. Robert Huber:** We work from the headwaters, north of Woodstock and Stratford, right down to where the mouth, the river itself, empties into Lake St. Clair. I fish a lot in Sarnia as well.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Lawrence MacAulay):** Thank you very much, Ms. Davidson.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** Am I done?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Lawrence MacAulay):** You're all done.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** We have a new chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Lawrence MacAulay):** You do have a new chair.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Lawrence MacAulay):** Thank you, gentlemen, and welcome.

First, to Dr. Smith, you indicated, if I understood correctly, the lack of education where people don't really understand, probably, where our fish come from and where the fuel comes from. I believe you indicated that closing the fishery is not really the answer to the problem that's afoot. Possibly, if I understood you correctly, there's a bit of a problem with what's going on in the province of Alberta and across the nation as far as the regulations are concerned. Let's say there's sediment into the waterways that's hurting the fishery production. You indicated that all fish could be under threat, if I understood you correctly. I'd just like you to expand on that.



As well, you indicated that possibly the standards that are in place are not adhered to. The committee would like to hear you elaborate on that. I want you to indicate not only whether they are not adhered to but whether there are enough regulations in place.

**Dr. Darryl Smith:** Our focus right now is that we do believe that the regulations that are appropriate are actually in place. However, we spend a great deal of time, in our estimation at least, in terms of meetings, policy development, strategic direction, and all of that type of stuff, where really what we need to have is more people on the ground looking at where the problems are and fixing them.

In terms of the compliance monitoring component, certainly one of the changes in the federal fisheries regulation is of course the ability for self-regulation, self-monitoring, and all of those components. I don't think that's necessarily wrong. I come from a health care profession where we're self-regulating, so I understand that. But what we do need is more boots on the ground. Let's fix the problems that are already out there. It's not about new policy. It's going forward.

That's the compliance monitoring. It's in my brief. We simply need to do the compliance monitoring. I think in many cases it's simply that we do have people on the ground; if the problem's identified, they'll fix it. But that's a huge part of it.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Lawrence MacAulay):** I believe what you're saying is that there could be a lack of education, too. Quite often no matter what you're talking about, whether it's invasive species or a number of other problems that take place, many times people do not understand what's taking place, or the harm that they're truly creating. If there was more education, possibly, and more boots I would imagine, too, but education in itself...

I'm suggesting to you that people do not wish to cause harm and truly wish to know when they're causing harm. I'd like you to elaborate on whether the education aspect is very important.

• (1250)

**Dr. Darryl Smith:** Yes. It's again a shifting of priorities from management strategies into things that actually do create change in society. I'm a firm believer in education. We have a very good invasive species monitoring program, an education program, in Alberta. It's very, very good. It's educationally focused, and it's the way to go.

It's the same thing with the industry. We need to spend a lot more time with industry in saying, okay, it's these small problems that we need to fix. The big things they're actually very, very good at. It's the small things; we need to solve those problems, which is education as well.

Anglers are part of the problem. We have anglers here who have difficulty identifying a westslope cutthroat trout from, say, a native rainbow trout, or our non-native rainbow trout. I mean, we need education right across the board.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Lawrence MacAulay):** Thank you very much.

Mr. Huber, you spoke about the four pillars. One of them was oversight, that more oversight was required. I'd like you to elaborate on that.

As well, you mentioned the advisory group that was put in place. What was the situation previous to that? Am I to understand that the advisory group gives you advice on what the catch should be? How are the regulations set, and what does the advisory group do?

**Mr. Robert Huber:** The purpose of the advisory groups was to create better stakeholder engagement between anglers, first nations communities, commercial fisheries, bait licensees, and even business owners, such as charter operators and tackle shop operators. Say there is a study done on a fishery and there are potential changes that could be made, whether in regulations, stocking allowances, or whatever. There is a council that exists to be able to vet those ideas with and to share those ideas.

Southwestern Ontario, having one of the largest populations of anglers in the country and one of the most significant economic contributions for angling activity, does not actually have that council in place. We are left at a grassroots level, trying to go after those things and create those networks ourselves because the organizations that split everyone apart didn't actually follow through on the commitment to create those councils, at least in our region. There are plenty in other regions of the province, but not in southwestern Ontario.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Lawrence MacAulay):** Thank you very much.

Mr. Weston, go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mr. John Weston:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you to Mr. Huber and Dr. Smith, our guests today.

I want you to know that you are a part of a very important process. This fisheries committee and committees when they work are really the glue between people and their interests and government policy. What we have seen is that the recreational fisheries partnership program, which is very much a focus of our discussions today, raised by my colleagues from all parties and by us, came about because individual members of Parliament, notably Mr. Sopuck and other members of this committee, lobbied to get the program put in place. What it attempts to do is take the concerns raised by you, and by people whom you know and work with, and put them into policy.

Dr. Smith, I want to get right to the heart of a concern that I see commonly raised in my role as a fisheries committee member and a west coast member of Parliament. I represent the riding West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country. You made comments about fisheries officers' smaller footprint on the ground in Alberta.

Just a couple of days ago, we heard a completely different philosophical bias from anglers in Manitoba, who expressed the view that you couldn't have a fisheries officer on every foot of waterway. You need some level of enforcement, but the stronger promotion of habitat comes from enabling the anglers and the recreational community to—I'll quote Shakespeare—take up arms and, by opposing, end the harms and prejudices to the waterways.

Can you comment on that? In your world, where would you put the resources? Would you put them into fisheries officers? Would they bring back the streams, or is it the recreational community that is best able to do that?

• (1255)

**Dr. Darryl Smith:** My point is that looking at the streams doesn't solve the problem. You have to look at the land. Really, without looking at the watershed, which is looking at what's happening within the watershed...

If I were going to do a shift, we have an excellent enforcement from a fisheries standpoint of fisheries officers who look after anglers. What we don't have...in fact, if you look at, from Edmonton north, the Alberta Energy Regulator, which is responsible for public land, really has no people on the ground looking at what's happening: where our river crossings are, whether we have a pipeline going through, and what type of reclamation there is.

I am suggesting that we need to go to that ecosystem approach, and it's more than having the so-called fish cop. It's about having stewardship people on the land base. I am an angler. We have a hotline here in the province, and certainly if I see something that's wrong, I'll phone it. However, you need a fair amount of knowledge to understand what's happening, which goes back to the earlier questions of education. Certainly, we have a very major job to do in terms of looking at our land base, which affects our watersheds.

**Mr. John Weston:** May I direct the question in a similar way to you, Mr. Huber? If you believe, as I do, that we're never going to achieve perfection, but excellence is continuous improvement... It's learning, it's adapting, it's incorporating best practices. It's going back to engaging the community and getting the community to do the best we can in these practices.

I don't want to lead you, but what's your sense about this? Do you see a tension between putting our resources into fisheries officers and equipping the recreational communities? Where would you put your emphasis in terms of creating habitat?

No one is saying we're going to take all our fisheries officers away, and certainly in British Columbia where there have been cutbacks it's been in administrative staff, not in front-line officers, to a greater extent.

At any rate, how do you feel about this very engaging discussion?

**Mr. Robert Huber:** It's an interesting topic, because it has evolved so much with the social media presence over the last couple of years. The fishing community as a whole and the ways that

anglers communicate with each other are changing faster than any policies or anything else could evolve.

We firmly feel as a club that spending the money on education delivers a far greater value than enforcement, and you can put more conservation officers out there, but you're going to get a better bang for the buck by actually focusing on educating anglers and ideally creating better opportunities for access to fisheries.

Looking at the actual costs of angling, we've seen our licensing costs in Ontario skyrocket over the last couple of years, to the extent that seniors are now actually charged when applying for a fishing licence. So you might see, provincially in Ontario, a spike in the amount of licensing over the next little while. It's because there's an entire user group that never had to buy fishing licences before who now have to go out and spend money on them.

It's also about productive fisheries. If people know that they can go out and catch fish, they're much more likely to go out and buy a licence and buy equipment, go out on a charter boat, or do something that's actually going to contribute to that economy. If there's no fish there, people aren't going to go. I think it's a combination of those elements.

**Mr. John Weston:** You also mentioned that it takes a long time to rehabilitate a stream. In your comments earlier you talked about it maybe taking generations. In your opinion, does this recreational fisheries partnership program set us up to have that longevity of commitment that you need to rehabilitate a stream?

**Mr. Robert Huber:** Most of the community hatchery programs and a lot of the volunteer organizations, the NGOs, all these different groups that work to try to build habitat and improve fisheries, are going through a succession challenge that we see in a lot of different industries where you have a group of anglers who have volunteered and worked really hard for the last 20 years, and they're looking for that next group of 20- to 30-year-old people who are wanting to take on the responsibility and the work that's involved in doing that literally boots-on-the-ground work itself. If we're not looking at ways to engage those people and get them out there and actually be more actively involved, it will die off on the vine.

• (1300)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Lawrence MacAulay):** Thank you very much, Mr. Weston.

Mr. Huber and Dr. Smith, thank you for your excellent presentations. You've given valuable information to the committee, and we thank you very much.

Having no further business, this committee is adjourned.







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