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

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, June 4, 2015**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Rodney Weston**



## Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Thursday, June 4, 2015

• (1105)

[English]

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

I'd like to thank our guests for joining us today. As you're no doubt aware, we're studying recreational fisheries in Canada. We certainly do appreciate your taking the time today to appear before this committee to provide us with some remarks and comments, and to answer committee members' questions.

I'm sure the clerk has already advised you that we generally allow about 10 minutes for opening comments and remarks, and then we proceed into questions by and answers for committee members. When you're answering the questions of our committee members, I would ask that you try to keep your responses as concise as possible, as members are constrained by time limits. This will allow them to get in as many questions as possible.

Having said all that, I do appreciate your time here today.

We're going to cover one little item of housekeeping before we move to the start of your remarks, so I'll turn the floor over to Monsieur Lapointe at this time.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to draw the committee's attention to the following motion:

That the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans undertake a study as soon as possible, to examine the effects of the declining American Eel population in order to develop an action plan, jointly with the plan prepared by the Quebec Department of Energy and Natural Resources, designed to: (1) reverse the decline in the population; (2) increase the economic activity generated both domestically and internationally by this fishery; (3) preserve the eel fishing techniques in Kamouraska as part of our intangible marine heritage; and (4) designate the American Eel as a species of "special concern" under the Species at Risk Act, and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House at the earliest opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

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

Notice has been given for that motion.

We'll now move into remarks by our guests, and I'm not sure who will lead off.

Monsieur Boudreault or Monsieur Raymond, the floor is yours at this point, if you want to proceed with your opening comments.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault (President, Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique):** Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me to speak to you as part of this consultation.

I am the president of FQSA, the Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique, a non-profit organization that has been around for over 30 years and that represents all parties involved in salmon in Quebec. The federation's mission focuses on everything relating to salmon, including its conservation, its protection and its enhancement.

Our presentation today will touch on three points: the economic importance of Atlantic salmon in Quebec, the management and enhancement of stocks, and the aquaculture of salmon in Quebec.

Let's take a look at the economic situation of salmon in Quebec. In 2012, expenditures of Quebec fishers generated \$573 million and \$160 million in tax revenue for the governments, in addition to creating over 9,000 jobs. With these economic inputs, Atlantic salmon represents over \$35 million in GDP and tax revenue, and maintains over 400 jobs.

For Quebec's salmon regions, salmon generates \$26 million in revenue. Salmon is the species that provides by far the most significant daily benefits, which is due to the amount of daily expenditures observed. It generates \$730 a day on average, which is 10 times more than bass, which ranks second when it comes to Quebec revenue.

In terms of managing and enhancing stock, I would like to make a small correction. In 1984, Quebec adopted the river-by-river management approach as the principle for managing its salmon rivers, unlike the federal government, which adopted a uniform management system by imposing catch-and-release for all large salmon throughout the Atlantic provinces. Under that principle, every waterway is fished based on its own characteristics. The implementation of such an approach is inevitably more complicated than the federal government's approach and requires a certain number of preconditions.

It should be noted that Quebec is at an advantage because a lot of its salmon rivers are small in area. So in all likelihood, they contain few different stocks. A large part of them are under very tight control owing to the organizations to which government authority has been delegated for the administration of recreational fishing and resource protection.

At one time, fishing season didn't open until the appropriate authorities felt that a river could support having a certain number of salmon caught, and salmon control was ensured by general application measures regarding the fishing season and daily and seasonal catch limits. The only possible choice for those salmon resource managers was to open or close fishing based on the status of stock in a given river.

Catch-and-release opens up the possibility for fishing without removing stock or catches geared toward a certain population segment. Catch-and-release is increasingly widespread in Quebec, and the majority of salmon fishers use this practice. For a number of years now, the FQSA has promoted among all salmon fishers in Quebec good approaches for practising catch-and-release. In this context, the FQSA feels that catch-and-release in one form or another is one of the preferred ways for managing salmon populations.

As we can see, the current river-by-river management approach enables Quebec to monitor the development of returns in real time and to order catch-and-release, if necessary, during the season, as it did in 2014 on the FQSA's recommendation. In the context of low salmon returns in 2014 and as a precaution, the FQSA resolved to maintain mandatory catch-and-release of large salmon for all Quebec rivers, with the exception of those in northern Quebec, until a new Atlantic salmon management plan is in place.

The FQSA is greatly concerned about maintaining salmon populations, and is in favour of using management approaches that will ensure the survival of this species while permitting sustainable economic development.

As for creating salmon habitats, the FQSA is currently managing a program to enhance North Shore Atlantic salmon habitats to compensate for the residual impact on the various salmonid species of moving the hydroelectric development from the Romaine River.

• (1110)

In 2011, the Quebec ministry for sustainable development, the environment and the fight against climate change, Hydro-Québec and the FQSA signed a co-operation agreement to develop, implement and manage this \$10-million program over 10 years. Under this program, Atlantic salmon was designated a priority species because of its great ecological and socio-economic value on the North Shore.

This program includes five objectives: first, contributing to consolidating and expanding Atlantic salmon populations; second, creating or improving the production of Atlantic salmon habitats; third, acquiring the knowledge needed to plan and follow up on the performance of projects; fourth, protecting the salmon resource; and fifth, encouraging the participation of local communities and river management organizations.

One of the features of the program is that it can fund up to 100% of the costs for projects, which fall into four categories: major projects, community projects, scientific projects and projects for the maintenance of major facilities. Aside from the fact that it can fund up to 100% of projects, the program has generated additional investments to the tune of 30% by proponents and other funders. In

addition, through these investments, the development potential of salmon populations is 10,000 salmon a year.

Currently, there is only one program of this type in place in Quebec, and it is not enough to meet the demand of the North Shore region alone. The needs in terms of managing the habitat of salmon rivers in the regions of the Gaspé Peninsula, Lower St. Lawrence, Charlevoix and Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean are also very great and present a good potential for population development. There are about \$15 million in investments needed to enhance salmon habitats in these regions. These massive investments to improve the quality and availability of habitats would certainly make it possible to consolidate and develop our Atlantic salmon habitats, as shown by the current program to enhance Atlantic salmon habitats on the North Shore.

A second program has been put in place as part of realizing the development of the hydroelectric complex on the Romaine River. The program has an envelope of \$20 million over 20 years. A corporation was created to manage this program. The FQSA is the agent and is therefore providing all of the administrative services for the corporation. The purpose of the project is to regenerate a salmon population in the Romaine River.

I will now talk about salmon aquaculture.

In countries that raise salmon in cages, the practice has led to heated discussions between industrial producers and environmentalists. Although Canada produces fewer farmed Atlantic salmon than Norway or Chile, it is still the third largest producer of this species in the world, with 8% of global production. These marine cages are concentrated on the west coast and on the east coast, mainly in the Bay of Fundy, which borders the shores of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Given environmental issues like the local pollution of marine environments and the biological impact, including the spread of parasites and disease, and the genetic pollution of wild populations related to escapes, such farming of wild salmon populations and salmonid populations, in general, are banned.

In a resolution, the FQSA is asking the government to impose a moratorium on all new projects for farming salmonids in marine cages; to exercise better control over existing marine cage farming facilities; to put in place an environmental and economic audit for all production sites; to gradually reduce the number of salmonid farming sites farming using marine cages; and to establish and implement a program to convert marine cages to land farming facilities, as is done in various U.S. states, including Virginia.

Following these statements, the FQSA sent letters to federal government authorities, but we have not had an answer yet.

In Greenland, Atlantic salmon fishing is mainly a cottage industry, using small boats and mesh nets. Since 1998, and under a NASCO agreement, no commercial fishing or exports are allowed. Fishers can keep their catches for their own personal consumption or sell them in the local market or to restaurants to support their community, which is often isolated.

•(1115)

Since Greenland's inhabitants have an historic right to catch salmon and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, or ICES, has approved a catch of 20 metric tons, we cannot question this practice.

For the past decade, we have seen an increase in the number of salmon being caught in Greenland. In 2014, these catches amounted to 58 tons. The FQSA strongly questions the monitoring of these catches. The Government of Canada, through its presence on NASCO, should ensure that the harvest set out by ICES, namely 20 metric tons, is maintained and that the reliability of results provided by Greenland are as well.

Given that Canada exploits the natural resources of the North Atlantic under certain conditions, as does Greenland, it would be worthwhile for the government to initiate negotiations with Denmark and Greenland outside of NASCO on this particular issue. Diplomatic and socio-economic solutions could be considered to reduce the pressure on salmon stocks on Greenland's shores. It's important to know that fishing in Greenland directly affects Quebec's salmon populations.

Lastly, I will speak about the capacity to improve recreational fishing.

Salmon fishing is a public right that belongs to the entire Quebec community. The management model for recreational salmon fishing in Quebec is fairly unique in North America, both in how it biologically manages salmon stocks and socio-economically. The socio-economic component is unique in that it means that community and private bodies can offer salmon fishing, but that it remains a public resource. However, the social changes occurring in Quebec, particularly the aging population, are having an impact on salmon fishers.

The four important characteristics of the salmon fishing sector are as follows. First, the resource is in a precarious state, but it helps maintain an attractive economic activity. Second, fishers are aging, and although they are faithful, we are seeing signs that their numbers are dwindling. Third, the network of service providers is dualistic, meaning that a few businesses are flourishing, but a very large number of them are just getting by because of insufficient resources. Fourth, the salmon fishing industry is itself mature because of the state of the resource, but the increasing acceptance of catch-and-release makes it possible to keep fishing a worthwhile activity.

For a few years, we have seen an increased interest in fly fishing in Quebec. This interest, combined with a greater practice of catch-and-release, should help the salmon fishing sector to remain sustainable and possibly develop based on Atlantic salmon populations. To benefit from this interest, ad campaigns should be organized to maintain and develop the economic contribution

generated by salmon fishing in Quebec, especially in a number of remote regions.

Finally, greater access to the funding of projects, including the program to enhance North Shore Atlantic salmon habitats, would allow for greater salmon production and for significant economic benefits for Quebec's regions.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we'll move into the question period. We'll start off with a 10-minute round by Mr. Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, I would like to thank you for being here to help us with this study.

First, can you please briefly remind us of the concerns that people had in 2014 about the Atlantic salmon stocks in Quebec rivers? In the decisions that have been made in 2015, how many rivers will require "catch-and-release" because of the state of the stocks?

•(1120)

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** In 2014, about 50% of the salmon population was returned to the river. That number normally varies between 70% and 80%. So there was a significant drop. The FQSA reacted to that in early July, asking the Quebec government bodies to impose catch-and-release. That started on August 1, 2014. From that point on, all fishers on Quebec rivers were required to catch and release all large salmon for reproduction.

In 2015, we are in an interim phase. The ministry has added 16 rivers to the 30 rivers where catch-and-release is in place. In Quebec, there are now about 50 rivers where all or some salmon is returned to the water. There are still between eight and 10 rivers where it is still possible to catch large salmon, but quotas are imposed in those cases.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** What is the direct impact on tourism? Will the fact that catch-and-release is now required discourage some fishers from continuing to fish recreationally in Quebec?

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** There is certainly an impact. About 80% of fishers are willing to use catch-and-release in Quebec. In other words, there has been marked change with fishers and in the population. It's really interesting. However, the measure that the Quebec minister implemented a few weeks before fishing season had a major impact on certain Quebec rivers. It was done too quickly. When fishers are given a few years as a transition period, things can go fairly well. However, caution is needed because the impact can be felt. We saw that in 2014. The minister made his announcement on August 1, and rivers were deserted for the rest of the season.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** As you said, the annual benefits of about \$573 million were quite threatened. That's major.

Could we try to work together to determine solutions that could be used to establish the sustainability of stocks in the longer term, in the decades to come?

Out of all the witnesses we have heard from, you may be the one whose position on farmed salmon is the clearest and firmest. You immediately associated it with the risk of disease and pollution. You concluded by saying that a moratorium should be imposed. That's the first time I've heard that. You even suggested that we consider converting marine production to land production.

Could you provide more factual details about what you've observed? Have you seen any impacts of salmon farming that led you to make those conclusions?

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** There are a number of studies, but we won't address the scientific details here. That said, the impact on the environment has been demonstrated. We're more concerned about the genetic aspect. Genetic transfer occurs when these salmon escape and mix with our wild salmon. Some elements may result in contamination and reduce the ability of our salmon to migrate and survive in the ocean.

Since we haven't had a response from the federal government, we have verified which fish farms—on land or elsewhere—existed in Quebec. In western Canada, there are—

**Mr. François Lapointe:** I'm sorry. I want to be sure I understand. You have communicated your concerns to the federal government several times, but no one has responded. Is that right?

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** Exactly.

Letters were sent to the minister, Ms. Shea, so that the issues could be addressed and follow-up done. But we haven't heard anything since. The letter was sent two years ago. As we have proclaimed on all platforms, we oppose these fish farms. Quebec has spoken out against them. We have the support of the minister of sustainable development, the environment and the fight against climate change, as well as the minister of forests, wildlife and parks. There will be no fish farms in Quebec in the coming months or years.

Since consumers really like salmon, we have done some research in Canada and elsewhere to see if there are any other ways of farming them. The idea is not to reduce the market, but to find a constructive solution. In western Canada, an aboriginal community, the 'Namgis First Nation, set up a fish farm on land. They are now producing about the same quantity as an ocean fish farm, but they are doing it ecologically. So this is ecological salmon, farmed very effectively on land. The output of the farm has been completely bought by elders in the community, and they have distributed the salmon to grocery stores and elsewhere.

We are currently trying to develop this procedure in Quebec, with investors and people who might be interested in setting up fish farms on land.

• (1125)

**Mr. François Lapointe:** So there are two things: your concerns about farmed salmon and your concerns about Atlantic salmon

stocks in Quebec rivers. I will put you on a track. The witnesses we have heard from almost all agree on the following question.

Do you think that Fisheries and Oceans Canada has demonstrated some disengagement when it comes to its obligation to ensure an appropriate level of research and study on these situations to be able to make the best possible decisions?

You think that stocks in Quebec are doing fairly badly, and you are asking for a moratorium. Could you tell us if you have observed a disengagement and whether the federal government could take a better approach so that the problem could be studied using resources that are consistent with the size of the issue?

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** We share your opinion. As everyone says, the ocean is a black box. Our federation feels that the federal government is not doing what it should in this respect. There have certainly not been enough studies. There isn't information because very few studies have been done.

In Quebec, there is some control and a good knowledge of the quality of salmon habitats and production, but once the salmon is in the ocean and moving toward Greenland, there is no control. It falls into the federal government's jurisdiction. We think we are being very poorly served in this regard.

People in Greenland have the right to commercial fishing, as do aboriginals in Quebec. The 20-ton limit is adequate. It has risen to 58 tons, and the number is climbing. What is the federal government doing? That's why I gave a few suggestions in my comments. We need serious negotiations to reduce this limit. It's important to know that salmon caught through commercial fishing in these places comes from Quebec.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** These are largely schools of fish that return to Quebec rivers.

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** That's right.

There is also commercial fishing. There is local fishing in Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. All that fishing will give us less control.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Thank you for your comments and your observations.

There is another aspect of your testimony that I would like you to comment further on.

You spoke about the difference between the river-by-river management approach and the different approach taken by the federal government. You said simply that it was more complex. What are the advantages or disadvantages of the federal government's different approach to managing Atlantic salmon stocks?

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** I will speak about management in Quebec. I said that it was more complex. In fact, since we go river by river, there is a larger amount of data to manage and it is more precise, and it reduces the management-related risk. That was what I meant by my comment. The data is much more precise, and our evaluation of the production and number of salmon in our rivers is more accurate. We can manage salmon populations much more shrewdly and work with the river manager to ensure the sustainability of the resources.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** If I understood correctly, you spoke about a \$15-million investment that would be required to improve the North Shore salmon habitat. What are your impressions about these investment needs? What role should the federal government play here?

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** First, the \$15 million would be for regions other than the North Shore. The current enhancement program managed by the FQSA, which amounts to \$10 million, involves part of the North Shore. The \$15 million is for an assessment for other regions of Quebec, including Saguenay, the Lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé Peninsula. These regions also have needs related to salmon habitat development. The federal government has not invested in salmon in Quebec in over 10 years. The species has been ignored. There has been no investment, no support from organizations. An organization like ours receives no support from the federal government. That is why we have identified this aspect.

• (1130)

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Thank you. That's all the time I have.

Thank you very much, gentlemen.

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** Thank you very much.

[English]

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

Mr. Sopuck.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC):** Thank you, and thank you to our witnesses for appearing for this most important study. We had to work very hard to get this study going. The Liberal Party was strongly against it; we had to overcome that resistance to get this study off the ground. So we're very pleased about our ability to do that.

How do you monitor the size of salmon runs in your specific rivers?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** Are you talking about the size or the number of salmon?

[English]

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Yes, the number.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** It's quite variable in Quebec. As I mentioned earlier, in 2014, about 50% of salmon populations were returned to the river. As for larger regions, the North Shore is currently having more difficulty compared to the Gaspé Peninsula when it comes to the run of large salmon. The Gaspé Peninsula is doing fairly well. I would even say that fishing is really very good, if not excellent, there. The North Shore and Saguenay regions have the most need.

Does that answer your question?

[English]

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Yes. I'm also interested in your habitat projects. What kind of habitat conservation projects do you undertake in Quebec?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** The Government of Quebec is currently developing a legal approach to designate what a salmon river is and to establish guidelines for that. The salmon rivers that will be designated will have a special status. It will in some way make it possible to develop special legislation for protecting those environments. As a result, all development, restoration or infrastructure projects will be subject to specific regulations and standards.

Of course, the North Shore project that we spoke about earlier is very important for creating new salmon habitats. Those rivers can now produce 10,000 salmon a year.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Are you familiar with the federal government's or DFO's recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program? That's a specific DFO program to assist groups like yours with habitat projects. Just recently 43 projects were announced for Quebec alone. Are you familiar with that program?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** Yes, we are quite familiar with it. In fact, the three largest projects in this program, in Canada, were completed using our North Shore program. We paired that program with the North Shore program to realize these three large projects. But the program you are talking about is a little lacking in terms of the percentage of funding allocated to the projects.

The North Shore program funds the entire project, while the program you mentioned funds only 50%. In many cases, local organizations have difficulty finding the other 50%, which prevents major projects from being carried out.

In the list of projects you have before you, you will see that they are mainly small projects. For the North Shore program, we already have funds from the program. So we were able to add the other 50%, which made it possible to carry out major projects, including the development of very large segments of rivers.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** The program was changed shortly after it was announced. So you can get 25% from other levels of government, and the other 25% from the group can also be in kind, the work that you do.

I was interested in the catch and release rules that apply to Atlantic salmon now. What do you know about the hooking mortality of Atlantic salmon? My information tells me that most of the salmon that are released survive. Has that been your experience?

• (1135)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** Yes, absolutely. Studies have been done in Quebec specifically on that. Our federation produced a video that shows people how to safely release salmon back into the water. More and more fishers use a single hook, which reduces the probability of mortality.

Also, when river water becomes warm, managers generally stop or reduce fishing to allow the salmon to avoid fighting in low-oxygen conditions.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** From previous witnesses, it's become apparent that open ocean mortality is quite significant, starting from the estuary and all the way to Greenland and back. The issue of striped bass came up in New Brunswick. Is there a problem with striped bass at the mouths of rivers in Quebec?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** In Quebec, there are two populations of striped bass. There is the one that comes from New Brunswick and migrates along the shores of the Gaspé Peninsula to the tip of Gaspé, and the one from the St. Lawrence, which was introduced about 15 years ago. The Chaleur Bay population is said to be a migratory species. It migrates in its nordic distribution area, which is the Gaspé Peninsula Shore, in Quebec.

When it arrives on the shore, the small salmon, which are called smolts, have already left Chaleur Bay. There is no conflict between the arrival of the striped bass and the departure of the smolts to the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Quebec has done scientific studies on the Chaleur Bay population to demonstrate this finding. So we can say that there really is no problem in Chaleur Bay.

However, the St. Lawrence population is growing and is spread out over the entire waterway. Studies are being done to ensure—since it is a resident population—that there is no impact on the downstream migration of smolts on the North Shore and in Saguenay—Lac-St-Jean.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** In your testimony did you talk about your organization undertaking salmon stocking programs? I thought I heard you say that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** No. Here in Quebec, it's a government responsibility. In the Quebec government's new salmon management plan, which should be ready for spring 2016, the possibility of fish stocking is being considered. There is currently no fish stocking program in Quebec at the moment, except for the project I mentioned earlier where \$20 million was allocated to restore the Romaine River. The FQSA is carrying out a fish-farming project there, where the small local population in the Romaine River is reproduced to ensure that it increases and can be reintroduced to its habitat.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Do you have any information on the survival and growth of the Atlantic salmon that have been stocked?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** No, unfortunately. The Romaine program is only in its first year. Data will be published in two or three years. For the moment, we are still in the labs. Fish stocking should take place starting this year. The program will run over 20 years.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. MacAulay.

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

I certainly welcome the witnesses, who, I might add, are very informed.

You indicated, Mr. Boudreault, that some of the programs were only funded by 50%. I think, of course, this is why the Liberal Party and I, if you check correctly, were so insistent that we have this study and to make sure that people like you were able to present to the committee the problems that you face in your province.

I understand it quite well, but I'd like you to do some explaining to the committee about what problems this creates, because there are areas that cannot come up, no matter if you're talking about fish enhancement development programs or whatever. If there's a 50% requirement on smaller areas and smaller groups, it just means that they're not able to participate in programs.

I'd like you to expand on that so that the government would fully understand how important it is that they fund these things properly.

Thank you.

• (1140)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** Thank you for giving me an opportunity to provide some clarification.

In the regions of Quebec, managers of salmon rivers are non-profit organizations. As you may suspect, there are a lot of volunteers within these organizations. The financial aspect is critical for them. When the time comes to invest in development projects, to stabilize banks or restore salmon habitats—we're talking about spawning grounds or ditches—they don't have the financial means required to take on 50% of the envelope because it may cost up to \$100,000, \$200,000 or \$300,000.

I would like to give you an example. On the Saint John River, in Saguenay, a log jam over a kilometre long blocked the transit of salmon while inhibiting the descent of the smolts. It took two or three years to secure the funds to correct the problem. We used this program. If I'm not mistaken, it took \$400,000 or \$500,000 to do the work. The people had to work very hard to find half of the budget. Certainly, this formula prevents organizations from having access to a program.

Why has the North Shore program been successful? Because there was 100% funding. We submitted an application, and the projects were filed.

[English]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Sir, it also means that you're losing smolts at that time too, and there's a loss of fish I would believe too.



[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** Exactly. There is a direct impact.

[English]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much, and we hope that's well understood.

You mentioned Greenland and the fish they take—about 58 tonnes. I was not aware that they were not allowed to sell the fish. Did I understand you correctly? What happens? The general rates went up, the take increased by about 300% over the years, if I understand correctly. What took place? Where are the fish going? It's also our stock.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** Yes, indeed, part of it is our stocks, but part of it is also from northern Europe.

Previously, these people took about 20 tons of fish. There was an increase because they built a processing plant. Before, consumption was local; families ate unprocessed salmon. The processing plant allowed them to increase their domestic market. That's how they were able to develop the commercial salmon industry.

[English]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Is there a great need in the investment area? I'd like you to elaborate on the required investment for your province—and I think eastern Canada as far as that's concerned—and how we're to maintain or increase the supply of salmon in our rivers. With the decline taking place, how would you explain to the committee what's needed to reverse the decline and to make sure that the numbers increase instead of decrease?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** We're talking about Greenland. First, it's important that there is a decrease in catches. Second, research also needs to be done to document what is happening in the ocean. Third, a massive investment is needed, like we have done for the North Shore through our salmon habitat creation program.

The \$10 million that we are investing in the North Shore will help generate 10,000 new salmon a year. We aren't using fish stocking. We are simply freeing up habitats to give salmon access to new habitats, which were previously limited because of obstacles like impassable waterfalls and things like that. We open up sections of the river and give salmon access. We are improving the habitat. So there is greater production, which increases the populations.

Fourth, fish stocking might be a worthwhile approach in some regions where populations are very low in order to generate a new population, which is what we did for the Romaine River.

•(1145)

[English]

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

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

Now we'll move to Mr. Kamp.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for appearing. I appreciate your testimony and the work that you do.

Mr. Boudreault, I think you said in your remarks that you consider the approach to management of Atlantic salmon to be unique in North America. I wonder if you could elaborate on that a little more?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** We use river-by-river management. We identify the biological features of the river. We describe each salmon population and its habitat is catalogued and counted. We then use a digital model to assess the capacity the river can support. We can assess each salmon river's conservation threshold and prescribe the potential harvest or conservation, depending on the condition of each river.

[English]

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** When you say “we”, who are you referring to? I think you used the word “organization”. Are these non-governmental organizations like yourselves, or are the Quebec government and DFO involved? Who and at what point is somebody deciding how many fish? Who sets the escapement targets and the allowable catches, if there are any?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** Quebec manages all activities related to salmon in rivers. In freshwater, the federal government delegates the power to the provincial government. So the Quebec government is the one managing the resource and sport fishing. However, for sport fishing, the provincial minister signs agreements with river management organizations. Each river in Quebec has an organization managing it. Its mission is to manage the development of the river and sport fishing, according to the conservation rules prescribed by the Government of Quebec. In that regard, in terms of the development, power is delegated from the federal level to the provincial level, and from the provincial level to the salmon river managers. For instance, managers will allow fishing based on the context and the dynamics of the river's salmon population, in partnership with the Quebec department.

[English]

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** Forgive my ignorance here, but are the organizations you refer to created for the purpose of doing that, or are they existing organizations delegated by the Government of Quebec to be the manager of the resource on their behalf?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** These are non-profit organizations specifically created for managing salmon in Quebec. The term used is “controlled harvesting zone”, which we call ZECs. There are controlled harvesting zones for salmon, just like for hunting and fishing in Quebec. The government has made salmon management organizations out of them. An agreement was signed with the government on various points, including management and salmon development, all the sport fishing infrastructure, lotteries, accessibility for anglers, and so on.

• (1150)

[English]

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** It's an interesting model. I'd like to ask you more about that, but I want to share my time with my colleague, Mrs. Davidson.

Let me ask you about one more area, and that's the whole process around species at risk. What is your involvement in the process that's been ongoing now for a number of years to designate Atlantic salmon or populations of Atlantic salmon as species at risk?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** When the federal government expressed its interest in registering salmon on the list of endangered species, the FQSA prepared a brief, which was actually presented to the federal government. In the brief, we criticized this approach. We find that it is not necessary.

First, there are two different management levels between the federal government and us. The study carried out by COSEWIC contains items that we think are debatable. We don't think adding salmon to a list of endangered species will help us. We think that the attention we give to our rivers in Quebec is important and unique, in addition to allowing for good salmon concentration.

If we can receive assistance from the federal government for the black box in the sea and commercial fisheries, I am sure that we will be able to bring back the salmon. There is no doubt about that. I don't think we need a procedure that endangers our salmon to achieve that objective. Furthermore, our brief includes the comments I am sharing with you today.

[English]

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Davidson.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for appearing before us today.

Part of the mandate of this committee, when the study was approved, was to study participation in recreational fishing. During your opening remarks, if I understood you correctly, I think you commented that salmon fishing is seen as a public right in Quebec; that you do have an aging population of fishermen; and that you're seeing a decline in activity. Could you confirm that I understood you correctly?

If so, could you talk a bit about who is participating and where you see the decline? Are the young people not participating? Is that the issue? Or is the issue the aging of existing fishermen? And what could be done to turn that around?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** That is a very good question. It is a major issue. Are we seeing a decline? I think so. In fact, this decline is partly related to the catch and release system imposed in other rivers. Not all people are educated to catch and release. So people stop doing it.

In terms of the new generation, the average age of Quebec anglers is about 55. However, since we are talking about the average, many of our anglers are aged 55 or 70 and over. This baby boomer generation will be out of the picture around 2018 or 2020. We expect to see them leave our rivers then. Right now, the biggest concern of all wildlife stakeholders in Quebec is to focus on the next generation.

Why is there no next generation? We can answer this question in a number of ways, but I would say that the FQSA is making a great deal of effort in that sense. Every year, we develop mentorship programs across Quebec so that young people can participate. There is a lot of training right now in Quebec.

Will we be able to make up for the shortfall? It is very difficult to say. Earlier, in my comments, I said that it would help if the government supported us through funding, promotion and fishing development programs. That is very important because it would help us. We could then make sure that we maintain an economic activity that often comes from urban centres and whose economic benefits are good for the regions in Quebec where the need is greater.

• (1155)

[English]

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

We've also had a fair amount of discussion this morning on the difference in the regulations between, say, Quebec and New Brunswick when we're talking about the river-based approach of management and the catch-and-release management regulations that are in place in New Brunswick. You've also talked about how much catch and release is now being used in Quebec, and the success you feel that's having when it comes to repopulating and sustaining the stock.

Would you be in favour of a harmonization of salmon management regulations for Atlantic salmon?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** What types of regulations are you talking about? Are you talking about tighter regulations?

[English]

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** No, I'm talking about harmonization between the New Brunswick rules, which are strictly catch and release, and Quebec's, which are river-based.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Boudreault:** I think those two contexts are different. The problem that we see in the Maritimes—I am talking about New Brunswick and Nova Scotia—is much more dramatic than what we experience in Quebec.

In Quebec, our rivers are almost natural. The water is pure, the salmon habitat is in very good condition and our rivers' production is excellent. So we don't see the same threat to salmon as in New Brunswick or elsewhere. I think there is a way to keep the activity in its current form.

The catch and release measures apply to adult salmon, the large salmon. When we talk about small salmon, the grilse, you can always catch them in Quebec. By the way, more and more people release them back in the water. In that sense, we prefer a voluntary approach to a legal approach.

The question was not asked this morning, but I'd like you to note that when you buy a salmon licence in Quebec, there are seven stamps. Anglers are able to catch seven salmon, big or small. Of course, there are 15,000 anglers, but not all of them catch seven salmon every year. Most of them take one or two.

So we would like to review the number of stamps. However, there is a small problem and I think this is a good place to talk about it this morning. In the transfer of the salmon stock management between the federal government and provincial government, one aspect was forgotten: the stamps. The forestry, wildlife and parks minister does not have the legal ability to change the number of stamps per licence. That still falls under federal authority, so under Ms. Shea. However, the power needs to be delegated from that level so that the Quebec minister has that ability.

Right now, we are working with the office of the federal minister and the office of the provincial minister to try to establish a single channel, or a fast lane to be able to deal specifically with this aspect. By 2016, we want to be able to reduce the number of stamps by 50% and to perhaps have three or four stamps. We will see what the anglers are ready to accept. We would therefore have a direct impact on the number of catches in our rivers. Right now, we are stuck because of the political circumstances and we are not able to do anything about it.

[English]

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

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Davidson.

Gentlemen, on behalf of the entire committee, thank you for appearing today before our committee and taking the time to answer our questions. It was greatly appreciated.

This committee will suspend for a few moments as we prepare for our next witnesses. Thank you, gentlemen.

• (1155)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1200)

**The Chair:** I'll call this meeting back to order. I'd like to thank our guests for appearing before us today and taking the time to make presentations, opening remarks and comments, and answering committee members' questions.

As you're no doubt aware, we're studying recreational fishing in Canada, and I know committee members are quite anxious to hear from you about your perspective on the situation here today.

I will ask that when we go into questions, perhaps you could keep your responses as concise as possible, as committee members are constrained by certain time limits and want to get in as many questions as possible in that timeframe.

We generally allow about 10 minutes for opening comments and remarks by our presenters. Once again, we do appreciate your taking the time to appear before us.

I'll ask Monsieur Plourde to start. If you're prepared to make your opening statements at this time, the floor is yours.

• (1205)

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Plourde (Chief Executive Officer, Quebec Outfitters Federation Inc.):** Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to appear before your committee today.

My name is Marc Plourde. I am the CEO of Quebec Outfitters Federation, which has been in existence since 1948. The federation represents a group of 350 outfitters and 12 regional associations. Its mission is to represent and promote the collective interests of its members from a sustainable development perspective.

Quebec has a legal definition of what an outfitter is. An outfitter is a company that provides, for a fee, accommodation or services, equipment for the recreational practice of hunting, fishing and trapping activities. There are just over 600 active outfitters in Quebec. Our network welcomes over 425,000 people annually who come for hunting, fishing, trapping and outdoors recreational activities. The Quebec Outfitters Federation is the largest network of accommodation in nature. In Quebec, this means 5,000 shelter units and over 32,000 beds.

There are two types of outfitters in Quebec. In both cases, they provide accommodation since that's part of the legal definition. We have outfitters with non-exclusive rights, whose mandate is economic development. They are mostly located on public lands. There are also outfitters with exclusive rights. In addition to having a mandate for economic development, they have to protect the land.

The term "outfitter with exclusive rights" does not mean that they have exclusive access to lands, but that the exclusivity applies to the practice of hunting and fishing activities.

There are around 180 outfitters with exclusive rights in Quebec. In Quebec, lands where outfitters have exclusive rights range from 2 km<sup>2</sup> to 400 km<sup>2</sup>, for a total of almost 25,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

There are almost 420 companies with non-exclusive rights that are, as I said, mainly located on public lands. However, some of them are on private lands. A number of those companies are also located around salmon rivers.

Let's talk about the management of fish by outfitters. First of all, outfitters are required to produce an annual activity report. All outfitters therefore provide the government with a registry of the clients and a registry of catch. They also list the wildlife development sites and the stocks on their land. The outfitters with exclusive rights have a management plan that is revised every three years and submitted to the department. The management plan is based on inventories and on the knowledge available on the ecology and the biology of the bodies of water on the land. Each outfitter has management objectives that are set according to the knowledge and operational monitoring carried out every year. All our member outfitters provide fishing opportunities. Over 256,000 fishers go to our outfitters. The estimated revenues are over \$75 million.

Among the most sought-after species, the most popular in our outfitters in Quebec is the brook trout, commonly known as speckled trout. There is also walleye and pike, the predatory fish that are extremely popular, as well as lake trout. In northern Quebec, you find the Arctic char. Clearly, as I was saying, about 30 outfitters provide salmon fishing opportunities.

Let me turn to the profile of our outfitters' clients. Our most recent numbers are from 2011. The visitors to the outfitters contributed to almost 1,200,000 days of activity. Almost 80% of those activities are performed by Quebec residents, and almost 5% by people from the rest of Canada, 10% from the U.S. and 6% by people from abroad. We see that just over 20% of clients who come to the outfitters are from outside Quebec.

• (1210)

Clearly, outfitter fishing is the most popular activity, generating over 65% of all the days of activity with outfitters.

In terms of fishing management, the QOF is one of the founding members of the Quebec round table on freshwater aquaculture. Almost all the fish stocked in our water comes from private fish farms.

Outfitters represent about 60% of the stocked fish market in Quebec, so about 425 tonnes a year. There are 125 outfitters that stock some of their waters, primarily with brook trout. In those outfitters, the most popular technique is the put-and-take. We work with our people to increase the recapture rate by sport fishing, so that there is maximum return on the stocking. The economic benefits of outfitter stocking are estimated at over \$40 million a year.

I will now talk about the issues in our sector.

In Quebec, there is an issue with the protection of indigenous sources. We are particularly vigilant when it comes to maintaining the indigenous populations and strains. We make sure that we don't use more bodies of water for stocking than necessary. There is a particular issue with allopatric brook trout pools. Those are pure brook trout populations, meaning that they don't live with other species. We are talking about the Croissant Vermeil and the Monts-Valin in the regions of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and the North Shore. That is characteristic of Quebec and we hope to protect it.

Invasive species are a different issue. This includes the diseases that those species can bring because of the use of bait fish, among others. In Quebec, there are discussions about the need to be cautious about that. The importing of bait fish has been banned recently in Quebec. Once again, we need to preserve the indigenous species.

People are afraid for the river system. The Asian carp seems to have reached the Great Lakes. For us, that is a very clear threat.

In terms of the issues that we are starting to think about, I would add the impact of new technology on the success of fishing. The sonar is increasingly sophisticated, which significantly increases the success of fishing. Clearly, we need to err on the side of caution in that respect.

Let me turn to the major outfitter trends. Fly fishing has regained popularity. It used to be associated with catching salmon, but it is increasingly developed for other species. Young people are

particularly drawn to this type of fishing. As I said earlier, there is an issue with the next generation of clients. The baby boomers are getting old and they represent a major part of the clientele. So there is a concern about renewing the clientele.

Fly fishing is growing. It is appealing to us because it attracts young people in particular. Fly fishing is often associated with the practice of non-retention or catch and release. This practice could reduce the pressure on fish populations in our bodies of water.

Fishing is increasingly being practised in a context of multiple activities. Young people between 25 and 44 are still interested in fishing, but much more in a context where they can do other outdoor activities.

• (1215)

That is bringing about a change in our clients' traditional practices. Usually, they came on three-, four- and five-day trips to fish, pure and simple. Today, outfitters have to have a range of products, providing the opportunity to discover nature and observe wildlife, as well as the more sporting activities. Finally, we are seeing—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Plourde, I'm going to have to ask you to start to bring your remarks to a conclusion.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Plourde:** I was on my last sentence, Mr. Chair.

Finally, in terms of our clients' behaviour, the sport angling population seems to be holding steady, but habits in the way it is practised are changing and its intensity is dropping. That translates into shorter stays. We have to adjust to those new trends.

That's it, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Monsieur Plourde.

Monsieur Lévesque, Monsieur Bouchard, the floor is yours now.

Could I ask you gentlemen to each identify yourselves for the translation and for Hansard purposes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean Lévesque (President, Association des pêcheurs du lac Saint-Pierre):** Mr. Chair, thank you for inviting us to your committee.

My name is Jean Lévesque. I am the president of the Association des pêcheurs de Lac St-Pierre. My colleague, Marcel Bouchard, is also a member of our association.

The Association des pêcheurs du Lac St-Pierre was created in response to the decision by the Quebec Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs (forests, wildlife and parks) to impose a five-year moratorium on fishing yellow perch. The anger was so great that after only two weeks, we had more than 1,000 members. For the first time, a democratically elected organization represents and provides a voice to professional, sport and commercial fishers, outfitters, fishing centres, retailers, traders and service providers, municipal officials and regional associations. We currently have almost 1,900 members.

Over the following winter, the Association des pêcheurs du Lac St-Pierre worked with its members on a study of the number of catch and releases per fishing licence for the following species: walleye, yellow perch, pike and eelpout. This information was used exclusively to develop a daily measurement of the impact of ice fishing on the resource, as well as to measure changes in the numbers of certain species in the entire lake. You will find the document in the package we sent you.

Lac St-Pierre is an extraordinary lake. It is large but not very deep and favours abundance of every kind. Fish, ducks, mammals of all sizes and clean water were part of everyday life. The quality of this environment made it an extremely rare treasure that must be conserved.

Total ignorance of the necessary precautions to prevent a deterioration in quality resulting from the discharge of grey, and even black, water from factories and municipalities. Negligence in monitoring discharges from ships using the St. Lawrence, not to mention the refineries in East Montréal. And then the federal Minister of Defence shamelessly decided to use this environmental gem as a dumping ground for shells.

Something like 400,000 projectiles of all sorts were fired into the lake. More than 8,000 of them are potentially dangerous because they were loaded with explosives but not discharged, or they were defective. These were simply noted in a registry. Today's laws call action like that criminal, and liable to severe penalties and even imprisonment. Officials are proud to announce today that they recently recuperated 80 shells. At that rate, they will complete the recuperation process by the year 4975.

Next came a period of erosion along island shorelines and the banks of tributaries. The causes are known: agricultural drainage is one, as is failure to respect and enforce the basic regulations governing commercial navigation and pleasure crafting. A typical pleasure craft today causes as many waves as a lot of large ships. Those responsible are not reprimanded, much less punished. The main consequence is the obstruction of river mouths, reduced current, and the accumulation of polluted sediment, creating a dream environment for cyanobacteria.

In the 80s, a new "necessity" was born. This was to unblock rivers as early as possible in the spring using the famous Coast Guard hovercrafts. Of course, cottages and homes that had been built in the flood zones were protected. This practice brought disastrous consequences, however. The Lac St-Pierre flood plain, as its name suggests, needs these spring floods to eliminate decomposing vegetation in bays and river entrances. As a result, bays that were once attractive to wildlife are being lost, having rapidly filled up in

the last 10 years. Glaring examples include Lavallière bay and St-François bay, which are both in a pitiful state.

The commercial and artisanal fishery practised on Lac St-Pierre in the 40s, 50s and even 60s was easily tolerated by the lake at the time, and had no consequences for fish populations. Then along came the demand for sturgeon, particularly smoked sturgeon, and with it, high prices. The Americans discovered the north just beyond the border, and the wonderful finesse of yellow perch, especially filleted. And so it began: bigger boats, more powerful engines, much larger nets for greater capacity, and fishing on the spawning grounds where catches were easy and abundant.

Suddenly, stocks began to decline. Techniques were improved and catch sizes maintained, and the alarms were ignored. In the 80s, surveys and studies began to be conducted with sports fishermen, while statistics from commercial fishers were provided on a voluntary basis. But the quality of the fishery continued to decline. Commercial fishermen reported that spring fishing for yellow perch in streams, holes and river entrances, where this species traditionally reproduced, was no longer producing results.

• (1220)

It became necessary to fish further offshore to be successful during a period that had previously been so easy.

What are the causes of the destruction of these special places? The main one is well known: the complete transformation of agricultural practices around the lake. Rather than growing fodder or straw cereals, the trend is now corn, rotated with soybeans. The requirement for ethanol, production orders and attractive selling price destroyed our traditional agriculture in favour of industrial agriculture. This required pulling out all the stops: excessive drainage, elimination of ditches, use of herbicides, fungicides, insecticides and chemical fertilizer, and so on and so forth. Yield per acre of "modern" land has been improved to at least double what it was 20 years ago. Farmers haven't done anything they weren't allowed to do. The blame lies with managers who looked the other way for fear of demands from the powerful well-known union. Too bad for the environment, the fish can go somewhere else.

That's when provincial officials responsible for the environment, wildlife, fisheries, food, and so on, finally wake up. Late as usual, because the tradition in Quebec is to react, but not to act. And so the fishery is more strictly regulated, but the studies show no improvement. Licences are bought back and 80% of the pressure from the commercial fishery reduced with the same results. Fishing is banned during the spawning season, but nothing changed. Despite dramatic opposition, a community wildlife area is imposed on sports fishermen. Finally, miracle workers have been found; they will save the lake, the fish and the fishery. This absurdity is costing us fishermen several thousand dollars a year for absolutely nothing.

Archaic regulations are put in place, such as minimum length. In fact, fishermen were told to keep the largest mature brood stock and to put back the medium and small ones, even if the risk of mortality is very high. Many believe that the opposite should have been proposed. These measures did absolutely nothing to improve the situation. In fact, a wildlife area has no place in an open body of water such as the St. Lawrence River, where there are so many obstacles to local wildlife management and where there is not the capacity, budget, authority or commitment to address the real environmental problem in Lac St-Pierre. The then minister was completely fooled by the promoters of this concept and in fact gave us the impression that he wanted rid of the hot potato that Lac St-Pierre had become in its lamentable state.

So, studies are ordered, luminaries are hired at great expense and further studies are requested on specific topics. Was it so they could be told what they wanted to hear? We will never know, but we do know that this so-called expertise was used to punish the guilty, the fishermen. It's so simple: no more fishing. Too bad for the local economy and the economic impact of this decision. But there is a but: first of all, the ministry does not even think about its creation, the wildlife area, before taking such decisions, it just goes ahead. And the decisions are admittedly useless. Then it is reported that scientific studies are predicting the collapse of fish stocks.

I mentioned earlier that I have been fishing the lake for over 50 years. I have never fished in places where the devices to measure and capture have been installed over the years. Want to know why? Because those places are just not worth it. Yellow perch are very selective about their living environment. But I have never seen this equipment in favourable locations. Why? It's a mystery. The scientists are too busy, too full of themselves and far too capable and knowledgeable to consult those who went to the school of nature and who know at least as much as anyone else about the environment they have been spending time in for many years. Do you not believe that such cooperation would have been helpful?

In a document published when the moratorium on fishing for yellow perch was announced, the ministry itself states that there are multiple reasons for the deterioration of the lake's habitat, including climate change, the low water level, the favourable environment for bacterial growth and the overpopulation of cormorants, which consume a lot of yellow perch. This is proof that they were well informed about the situation.

Why did they not act when there was still time? Nowhere in their statements is there mention of overfishing, or even fishing. Yet the only action was the panicked closing of the commercial fishery, as well as the sports fishery, which contributes even more to the economy.

In response to my question during an informative meeting last spring on the guarantees that this measure offered for improving the situation, the answer was "none, we do not know." But they penalize anyway; those "responsible" must be punished, even if the ministry admits openly and in writing that they are not responsible.

• (1225)

There was a lot of smoke and mirrors when it came to the subject of cormorants. Ministry employees undertook a slaughter of 600 nesting cormorants, mainly on the islands, and analyses of the

stomach contents indicated that 60% was composed of perch aged about two years. During the migration period from mid-August to late September, there are between 5,000 and 6,000 cormorants at Lac Saint-Pierre. We therefore estimate that about 30 tons of two-year-old yellow perch are consumed by cormorants annually.

Given all the other factors that reduce the yellow perch's maximum reproduction, this excessive predation will not permit the recovery of perch stocks. In our opinion, it is critical that there be an even more intensive slaughter than in 2012 to control and reduce this predation. Before spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to set up reproduction areas, we should first systematically reduce the population of cormorants. It's ridiculous that Quebec is unable to take the bull by the horns when it comes to resolving problems.

Fishing is permitted at either end of the lake without a size restriction. The only restriction is a general limit of 50 yellow perch. Studies have shown, however, that yellow perch from Saint-Nicolas near Quebec City go upriver as far as Lac Saint-Pierre, so we can certainly assume that those downstream do as well.

About four tons of adult yellow perch are caught annually. There is a quota of 10 per day per licence, generating badly needed economic spinoffs of \$4 million for the region. The specialists and researchers are unfortunately not able to see the absurdity of this.

In conclusion, we have witnessed a game of ostrich, with authorities burying their heads in the sand as the water pollution rate reached intolerable levels in the lake, as National Defence used the lake as if there were no communities or people around it, as agriculture was completely transformed, as construction was permitted in most of the flood zones around the lake, as the essential spring flooding was prevented, as the population of cormorants—whose numbers double every two years—was maintained, as we inherited substandard wildlife management, monitoring and protection mechanisms, and so on.

Is it too late? It's never too late. Just look at the spectacular results achieved in the Great Lakes, particularly Lake Erie. We want to have it, though. It isn't absolutely necessary to spend astronomical amounts every year to achieve our purpose, but we have to want it and we have to ensure the cooperation of all stakeholders and users.

Penalizing without guarantee of success will not earn the favour of fishers for their willing cooperation. We have to be convinced that helping the environment can reap political rewards. We have to convince our fellow citizens so they will elect politicians who care about the environment. The same politicians have to use the authority delegated to them to command obedience from their employees, who were not chosen by the taxpayers.

• (1230)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, gentlemen.

We'll now move into our question period with an eight-minute round, starting with Monsieur Lapointe.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Thank you, gentlemen, for being with us today.

I am the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. I'd like to speak with Mr. Plourde first.

Congratulations on your outfitters' success: 425,000 users and 256,000 fishers. The economic spinoffs are tremendous. Many of our previous witnesses have talked about their concerns over invasive species. You touched on that when you discussed Asian carp and your concerns in that regard.

Witnesses said they had two main concerns. First of all, they are appalled by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' withdrawal of investment in research that could provide a better framework for dealing with invasive species. Second of all, border resources and oversight are lacking, making it impossible to ensure that, when an American comes into Canada on their boat, they aren't inadvertently bringing in an invasive species.

Do you share those concerns?

**Mr. Marc Plourde:** We absolutely share those concerns, Mr. Lapointe. Quebec's network of cleaning stations is growing slowly. Our outfitters are located on numerous large bodies of water, and they have a certain degree of influence over their customers. Of course, our members are especially vigilant and encourage their customers to follow practices aimed at preventing infestations.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** If we lose the ability to control Asian carp, what impact would it have on your members' operations?

**Mr. Marc Plourde:** Asian carp affect the river corridor. We heard what the people at Lac Saint-Pierre, which has a number of outfitters, had to say about the matter. We are already seeing problems stemming from habitat degradation. We are familiar with the impact of Asian carp, given that there are more than one species. We've seen the impact south of our borders. Clearly, we're extremely worried about the potential impact on the river system. They could eventually colonize inland waters, where the fish have migration opportunities. It's a major concern.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Now I'd like to speak to the Association des pêcheurs du lac Saint-Pierre representatives.

One of the problems affecting the lake is tied directly to the federal government. I have here excerpts from some fairly recent *Courrier du Sud* articles. According to the articles, 40% of Lac Saint-Pierre is still condemned because more than 300,000 shells—forgive me for laughing, it's anything but funny—were fired into the lake, and nearly 8,000 of them were never discharged. Those are similar to the figures you gave us.

Could you discuss in greater detail the impact on the lake of those thousands of shells, many of which are flat-out dangerous? You also mentioned the department's slowness in dealing with the problem.

**Mr. Marcel Bouchard (Treasurer, Association des pêcheurs du lac Saint-Pierre):** The problem goes back to 1950, when the practice began. Unfortunately, the dump was shameless and unregulated. People at the time didn't seem angered by such practices; they simply tolerated them.

Luckily, since the 1980s, the public has become much more aware of the practices and voiced strong opposition. The Department of National Defence no longer permits the firing of projectiles into the lake. It still goes on in the Nicolet sector, but they are fired into mounds of earth.

The problem we have now is that it's impossible to verify exactly how many potentially dangerous shells are in the lake. Everyone recalls the accidents that occurred a few years ago. Fixing the problem is going to take time, and unfortunately, it will have an impact on the environment.

• (1235)

**Mr. François Lapointe:** What sort of action plan should the Department of National Defence put in place to fix the problem? How long should it take to fix? What decision needs to be made?

**Mr. Marcel Bouchard:** I'll give you an example. They had a very serious problem in Europe after the Second World War, but they took the steps to fix it. Obviously, the problem can't be fixed without doing some damage to the environment.

When I asked the department to act more quickly, I was told that it would have an environmental impact. And yet, for 50 years, no one cared about the environmental impact. And now that it's time to fix the problem, they say it will have an environmental impact. Really, now.

I've seen explosives discharged. Mud and water levels rose 300 feet in the air for days, but that wasn't an environmental impact. It didn't matter. The vibrations that shook our homes weren't an environmental impact. But now that it's time to clean things up, we're being told that the impact will be huge.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** I can see how frustrated you are with the situation, and rightfully so. The NDP is taking note and won't forget about it.

I'm going to turn the floor over to my colleague, Robert Aubin, the member for Trois-Rivières, which is directly affected by the situation at Lac Saint-Pierre.

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Good afternoon gentlemen. Thank you for joining us today and sharing your field expertise with us. It's a good counterbalance to what the scientists can tell us.

My question is for the Association des pêcheurs du lac Saint-Pierre representatives.

Something you said in your presentation really stuck with me. You talked about how successfully the problem has been dealt with in the Great Lakes, particularly Lake Erie. Which proven measures at Lake Erie do you think should be applied to Lac Saint-Pierre to help the ecosystem there?

**Mr. Marcel Bouchard:** I would say that the most transferable measures are those that bring all of the stakeholders to the table. The problem we are having in Quebec right now is that people aren't cooperating because it penalizes them to do so, and so they are disregarded. They aren't even taken into account. I'll give you an example.

The Association des pêcheurs du lac Saint-Pierre offered to help with at least three activities, surveying stock numbers, assisting scientists with sampling, and reducing the population of cormorants. The last service we offered for free, whether in terms of time or money.

Every single time, we were brushed aside and told that we weren't needed. We were also told that we needed a permit if we wanted to conduct a study and that we wouldn't be given one. Those certainly aren't the right conditions to replicate Lake Erie's successful results.

Lake Erie has become a fisher's paradise. It's impossible for us to measure the economic spinoff of the lake's revival given that we don't have the local data, but one thing is certain, the people who go there are enamoured with the area when they come back.

**Mr. Robert Aubin:** You said your assistance was turned down by the government. Was that just on the part of the provincial government or the federal government as well?

**Mr. Jean Lévesque:** It came mainly from the provincial government, regional management at the ministry of forestry, wildlife and parks. They are responsible for the file and made the decisions.

At the federal level, we had the opportunity to work with such groups as the Bureau environnement et terre d'Odanak. Actually, we requested funding under the St. Lawrence action plan to continue doing studies, but because of certain restrictions, we didn't end up making an application, so in that case we weren't turned down.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** You said you weren't able to obtain the data pertaining to Lake Erie.

[English]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Lapointe, your time is up.

Mr. Weston.

[Translation]

**Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank our witnesses.

Mr. Plourde, since you're in Quebec City, I should tell you that I spent a lovely summer there, back in 1982, working in Édifice H, not far from where you are. I'm probably the only federalist from British Columbia to have worked in the department responsible for constitutional affairs while René Lévesque was in power. As the Prime Minister and many other Canadians have said, after my own hometown, Quebec City is my second favourite city.

You provided quite a few statistics on Quebec fisheries. I have a number of questions for you about that.

Could you give us more details on the projects carried out under our recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program, which is now in force in Quebec? Projects are meant to protect fish habitat.

• (1240)

**Mr. Marc Plourde:** Absolutely. In Quebec's regions, a lot of outfitters and groups have benefited from the program. It's greatly appreciated. In fact, we recently met Minister Blaney here, in Quebec City, during a meeting to gather proposals for improvement. The stakeholders were unanimous in singing the program's praises and hoped that it would be extended.

At the Quebec Outfitters Federation Inc., we did a project last year, in 2014, where we joined forces with forestry stakeholders. The purpose was to improve our practices, particularly in terms of water crossings. That's one of our biggest inland water concerns. We know the damage that deficient, poorly designed, forest roads can do. So we used the program to improve our practices not just from an economic sense, but also from a habitat protection standpoint, namely spawning habitats in the rivers and streams where our outfitters are.

**Mr. John Weston:** Overall, the program was useful in improving practices in Quebec and protecting fish habitat. Do you know how many projects were carried out under the program? You don't have to tell us, but if you do know, we'd appreciate that information.

**Mr. Marc Plourde:** We didn't submit a project this year given that we had completed a major project. We opted, instead, to help our members with the application process and assist outfitting businesses and regional user associations submit their projects targeting areas where our outfitters are located.

We also work very closely with the Fondation de la faune du Québec, which administers funding that, in some cases, rounds out the resources needed for projects under the federal program. Unfortunately, however, I don't have any specific figures for you today. Sorry about that.

**Mr. John Weston:** Did you say you have over 400,000 members?

**Mr. Marc Plourde:** Our federation has 350 members, and there are about 600 outfitters in business. Our membership makes up about 70% of industry capacity in Quebec. But 425,000 customers, or visitors, went to outfitters in 2011.

**Mr. John Weston:** Do you know if those visitors are from Quebec or outside the province?

**Mr. Marc Plourde:** Roughly 21% of those who use our outfitters, so just under 100,000 people, are from outside the province, mainly from other parts of Canada and the U.S. About 5% of visitors are from Europe or somewhere across the Atlantic. Not all of them, however, came for the fishing. I don't have the breakdown by activity at hand. There were 425,000 users overall, and 21% were from outside Quebec, so tourists.

• (1245)

**Mr. John Weston:** A significant chunk of tourists clearly go to Quebec for the recreational fishing. Is there any coordination between your federation and Quebec's tourism agencies?



**Mr. Marc Plourde:** Absolutely, we work closely with the ministry of tourism. In fact, we are currently working on a tourism development plan. One of the strategies in the tourism industry development plan revolves around nature and adventure, and that strategy is currently being developed. Sport fishing has been clearly identified as a development priority for the tourism industry, in terms of attracting tourists to the province.

In addition to working closely with the ministry of tourism, we also belong to the national organization. Quebec founded the Canadian Federation of Outfitter Associations, so there is now a national federation representing outfitters across the country. We work together and hope to eventually take meaningful action at the national level.

We recently spoke with representatives of the Canadian Tourism Commission, which could do more to promote sport fishing. We're working with tourism organizations to figure out how we can do a better job of marketing Quebec, and Canada as a whole, as sport fishing destinations for tourists.

**Mr. John Weston:** Maxime Bernier, the Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism, and Agriculture), is a huge supporter of Quebec. In fact, he's originally from Quebec City. Is there any coordination between your federation and his departmental tourism-wise?

**Mr. Marc Plourde:** Yes. Some of our discussions with the Canadian Tourism Commission take place through the Association québécoise de l'industrie touristique, which we belong to and which I am on the board of. Naturally, our organization, which represents Quebec's tourism industry, is building a relationship with the Canadian Tourism Commission. The federation's executive director, Dominic Dugré, is also on the advisory committee set up by Prime Minister Harper. Meetings were held at the beginning of the week. We are at the table and doing everything we can to give Quebec's tourism and sport fishing industry a voice at the national level.

**Mr. John Weston:** You should be especially pleased about all the measures supporting the tourism industry in this year's budget.

Thank you kindly, Mr. Plourde.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. MacAulay.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I certainly want to welcome the witnesses. Thank you for your excellent presentations.

Mr. Plourde, the Quebec Outfitters Federation Inc. interests me. You're involved in taking care of 425,000 Quebecers and people from outside Quebec, and approximately 2,000 to 3,000 from overseas. I would just like you to explain to the committee what the outfitters in your organization do. You indicate that you have a management mandate. You spoke about invasive species. It looks like you're an outfitters federation that might be involved with retail, but it looks like you have an in-depth involvement in the fishery itself. I'd just like you to give an outline to the committee of just what you do and what your responsibilities are.

• (1250)

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Plourde:** First and foremost, our federation's role is to represent the industry. We are contributing to the national round table on wildlife, an advisory group established under Quebec's act respecting the conservation and development of wildlife. The round table, then, reports to the ministry of forestry, wildlife and parks.

At the national wildlife round table, we are helping develop management plans for every species of sport fish. In recent years, we've done a lot of work on lake trout and walleye, and we consult with our people and our regional associations as part of that work. Together with other partners throughout Quebec, we are working on those plans.

Not tied to sport fishing quite as directly, something else we are working on for Quebec is a rating system and categories for outfitters' accommodation units. We inspect the 5,000 units every four years. We were mandated by Quebec's ministry of tourism to report on the conditions of the facilities, infrastructure and amenities, and we make that information available to the public.

Furthermore, we work with the ministry of forestry, wildlife and parks to manage the licences issued every year and collect outfitters' fees. That, too, was a role delegated to us by the ministry. We provide that function on behalf of the ministry of forestry, wildlife and parks.

Lastly, we also have special teams that include forest engineers. They work with outfitters to plan industry activities in the area. We provide support to our outfitters in their discussions with other regional users, mainly forestry companies, to ensure that forest management is compatible with our businesses' tourism needs and the wildlife activities in our region. We are very careful to keep the impact of forest activities on outfitters to a minimum.

[English]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Mr. Lévesque, you were talking about Lake Saint Pierre. If I understood you correctly, there's fishing on both ends of that lake, and it's a sports fishery. First of all, I'd like you to explain in a short form what needs to be done. Also, when you look at the small amount of fishery that takes place there, and the \$4 million that it generates in spinoffs, I would think that the potential, if the clean-up is done properly, would be a major economic benefit to the area.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Lévesque:** Definitely. Lac Saint-Pierre is a widening of the St. Lawrence. At one end, in Sorel, the catch limit is 50 yellow perch, and that's also the case slightly downstream from the bridge, towards the Batiscan sector. The restriction applies only to the Lac Saint-Pierre sector. Area experts probably wanted to protect reproduction areas by preventing yellow perch fishing there.

We think that's ridiculous. The only measures that were taken came from the Réseau de suivi ichtyologique, or RSI. The measures, in our view, don't provide an accurate picture but, instead, may serve to describe a trend. We asked the ministry to tell us what available biomass it used to ascertain the number of yellow perch in Lac Saint-Pierre and determine whether stocks were actually dropping significantly. When the moratorium was lifted, everyone expected the catch limit to go up by 10 to 50 because yellow perch can be found all over the lake.

The RSI is the only authority claiming that the yellow perch population has declined or disappeared. We told them that they were indeed right that no more yellow perch remained in the sample areas, but we also pointed out that it was the result of cyanobacteria—a proven fact—and agricultural waste.

The yellow perch changed their patterns. They migrated around the lake and changed their location. Obviously, if the samples don't come from the areas with yellow perch, the findings will be negative. Better measures are needed to manage the biomass and ascertain how many yellow perch there are.

We've realized that slaughtering cormorants is the key because they are responsible for an excessive predation of young yellow perch. Everyone wants to focus on setting up reproduction areas, but what's the point given that we know the growing cormorant population will just eat the yellow perch. Just to give you a sense of the scale involved, 30 tons of yellow perch between the ages of 0 and 2 years is equivalent to an annual commercial catch of 200 tons once they become adults. The pressure is much too strong. And, as everyone knows, the province is responsible for the cormorant, which isn't a protected species.

It's really important to bring these cormorant populations under control to give yellow perch populations the opportunity to brood year after year and allow for better reproduction. We are calling for tighter control of the cormorant population to generate more representative cohorts of yellow perch and ensure their reproduction.

● (1255)

[English]

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

Mr. Leef.

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses today.

Part of the purpose of our study is to expose some of the things that I think all of you gentlemen have clearly articulated today, which is a clear understanding on the part of the fishing community, outfitters, and organizations like yours that not only have the knowledge about what's going on in the fisheries ecosystems, but also invest your time and your financial resources, your volunteerism, and technical expertise into vibrant and healthy fish stocks.

On that point, thank you and congratulations. I hope there is some measure of success for all of us in undertaking this study, us, and that Canadians more generally will understand and appreciate the value of your organizations.

My first question will be for Mr. Lévesque and Mr. Bouchard. You noted, and if I've written this correctly, the damage of pleasure crafts to the river mouth and the reduction of currents leading to an increase in cyanobacteria in the area and, as you just mentioned, some of the migration of yellow perch. You also spoke a fair bit about the cormorant populations and a cull in that respect.

I see some overlap here between provincial responsibilities and federal support. I'm wondering if you can talk most specifically about some solutions around how to deal with the pleasure craft issue and the other things that lead to an increase in cyanobacteria. In other words, what solutions would you propose that would fall under the federal mandate to assist with improving the water pollution conditions in Lac Saint-Louis or Lac Saint-Pierre?

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Bouchard:** First and foremost, it's necessary to recognize that the federal government has the final say over laws and regulations that govern fisheries. We can't figure out why the province is able to make laws and regulations that would normally have to be approved by the ultimate fisheries authority, in other words, the federal government. How is it that the province can put in place such archaic regulations, regulations that don't make sense or contribute to the solution?

I'll give you a very basic example. When we're talking about farming, that is, of course, in the provincial domain, but when we're talking about shoreline erosion, especially along Lac Saint-Pierre as a result of navigation and pleasure crafting pollution, the issue is federal. Both levels of government clearly need to work together if the goal is to fix the problem at Lac Saint-Pierre. If that isn't the goal, all the government has to do is take a hands-off approach, since the lake is disappearing anyway. Within 50 years, Lac Saint-Pierre will be no more if we don't take the appropriate steps to save it. We're losing a real gem.

● (1300)

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

[English]

Mr. Plourde, you were mentioning a number of outfitters and you described non-exclusive and exclusive outfits—non-exclusive operating on crown lands, and exclusive ranging in size.

Could you expand on the typical regions in which these exclusive and non-exclusive businesses operate in the province, and maybe on what the typical demographic of the community they support would look like? Are they small or medium-sized communities? How important are these businesses to the vibrant nature of those communities?

Additionally, if you know, what size are the supporting industries, such as tackle shops, hotels, gas stations, and the baitfish market, and how important are those to the communities and indeed the entire province of Quebec?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Plourde:** First, most of our outfitters are in what I would call resource-rich areas, so forest areas. The bulk of our outfitters are concentrated north of the St. Lawrence, on the North Shore, in the Mauricie region, in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, in the Laurentians and in the Outaouais. Normally, they are located not too far from small communities, including regional centres such as La Tuque in the Mauricie region, as well as Forestville and Les Escoumins in the North Shore region. We have outfitters in the Témiscamingue region, the Pontiac region and the Gatineau Valley, home to Maniwaki, the birthplace of our outfitting industry. Our first commercial outfitters emerged in those sectors.

The economic spinoff from the outfitting industry is estimated to be over \$250 million. The industry generates considerable tourist traffic for these communities. Businesses supplying goods and services in these communities have benefited significantly. La Tuque

comes to mind. When fishing season starts, the town really comes to life. Our outfitters really do bring in a lot of tourist traffic. Small communities and small regional centres, where forest areas are often most easily accessible, enjoy most of the spinoff from our industry. The impact is really quite tangible.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Monsieur Plourde.

Thank you, Mr. Leef.

Gentlemen, on behalf of the entire committee, I want to say thank you today for taking the time to make presentations to this committee and to answer committee members' questions. It was greatly appreciated.

There being no further business, this committee now stands adjourned.

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