HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

FOPO • NUMBER 026 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, October 5, 2016

Chair

Mr. Scott Simms

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● (1545)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)): Folks, thank you for joining us. We will now continue on.

We're going to try to do this in this way. Because we're 15 minutes behind, we're going to shorten all of the segments. We have another guest. We'll also be talking to Mr. Parsons regarding salmon. We also have drafting instructions, folks, so I hope you brought your recommendations for a salmon study.

First of all, to our guests, I'm sorry about that. We had some voting to do in the House that ran a little late. Joining us by video conference first, we have Susanna Fuller who is a senior marine conversation coordinator at Ecology Action Centre, and she's joining us from Halifax, Nova Scotia. We have also Andrew Bouzan, who is the president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation, talking about cod. He is joining us by video conference also, from the city we just left, St. John's. My apologies, Mr. Bouzan, that we never had a chance to talk to you there, but nevertheless we feel your input is going to be quite valid and we thank you for joining us here today.

That being said, we usually have 10 minutes for opening statements from each of you. If you could take 10 minutes or less, that would help us out greatly.

Ms. Fuller, you're first.

Ms. Susanna Fuller (Senior Marine Conservation Coordinator, Ecology Action Centre): First, thanks for inviting me to present to you today, and apologies for not being there in person. I was unable to fly to Ottawa today, but I think that in light of the recent carbon tax announcement, flying less is likely a good idea.

I know we presented to you on your study on Atlantic salmon, but I'll introduce you to the Ecology Action Centre. It is Atlantic Canada's oldest environmental organization, founded in 1971, and the largest, with 35 staff and 4,700 members.

We're based in Halifax in one of the greenest office buildings in Canada, and we work at the scale where we can make a positive change to the environment for fisheries and marine conservation. This means we work regionally, nationally, and internationally.

We've been active on fisheries issues since the early 1990s. We're currently the only civil society organization from Canada that attends international fisheries meetings like NAFO and ICCAT, as well as related United Nations meetings. This gives us a unique perspective on how Canada manages its marine resources here at home.

Our marine work began immediately following the groundfish moratorium, when we realized that there needed to be an environmental voice for Atlantic Canadian fisheries. Perhaps we should have started about 20 years earlier, but hindsight is 20/20.

We work on fisheries policy, research, and advocacy. We work together with fishermen to increase the value of their catch, promote low-impact gear types, and ensure that these types of fisheries are rewarded in the marketplace. Our vision is a healthy ocean and vibrant coastal communities. We have published numerous reports over the past years, for example, guidance on how to fix the crisis in the groundfish fishery, a national review of fishing gear impacts, and how to create a seafood value chain.

Last year we published a paper in the *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, together with scientists from the University of Victoria, entitled “Missing the Safety Net”, which outlined the relative lack of protections under the Fisheries Act for at-risk marine fish in Canada that either have been listed under the Species at Risk Act or where a decision for their protection has not been made. Cod falls under this set of species.

On a personal note—and I think this is relevant—I've been working for the Ecology Action Centre full time since 2006 and on and off before that since 1995. I completed my Ph.D. with the late Ransom Myers, who some of you might remember. He died about nine years ago. He left DFO after the cod collapse, partly out of frustration that science was not being followed, but largely because he had violated a gag order put on him by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which did not allow him to speak publicly as a scientist. Luckily, we no longer muzzle our scientists.

I recently co-authored a report with my colleague Julia Baum, entitled “Canada's Marine Fisheries: Status, Recovery Potential and Pathways to Success”, which I believe you heard about earlier this week during a presentation from Oceana Canada.

Finally, I was born in Newfoundland. My father fished on the last two years of the Portuguese white fleet in the early 1970s. These are the last sailing vessels that fished on the Grand Banks for cod.

I want to outline a few gaps in the conservation for northern cod. It's rare, with a natural resource that we have so badly mismanaged, that we get a second chance.

We have a second chance with northern cod, but it will require a full admission of the mistakes we have made in the past and a commitment to not repeating them. Notably, cod recovery—and I'm sure you heard this in Newfoundland—is mired in the complexities of a much more valuable invertebrate-based fishery over the last three decades, as well as the ecosystem conundrum that we cannot recover shrimp and cod at the same time.

While fisheries science and management tools in Canada have arguably improved considerably since the cod collapse, the release yesterday of the Auditor General's report on sustaining Canada's fisheries makes it very clear that we have a way to go in implementing scientific knowledge and modern fisheries management tools.

Canada was instrumental in the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, which includes, among other provisions, an obligation of compatibility in management of fisheries in state waters. We are not currently living up to the ambitions of this international agreement. I'd like to give a few specific examples, some of which you've likely heard already, but northern cod does not yet have a rebuilding plan, 25 years after its collapse.

First, despite the development of the sustainable fisheries framework and its suite of policies that cover the application of the precautionary approach, rebuilding plans, bycatch, and the protection of sensitive benthic areas, to name a few, we don't have a rebuilding cod. Indeed, it has taken the efforts of an environmental group, WWF-Canada, to start fisheries improvement projects for both 3Ps cod and 2J3KL cod.

Second, there's not a complete set of reference points. While efforts have been made to establish science-based reference points, there is no upper stock reference point, and increasingly, the limit reference point is seen as a target. While the stock is slowly increasing toward the limit reference point, it is nowhere near what is required to sustain a fishery. There is no harvest control rule in place. This is a continued example of shifting baselines.

Northern cod stock was reduced by 99%. Recovering, as an example, to 10% of that former biomass is not a responsible management target. As of the latest assessment, of which I'm sure you are all aware, northern cod is only at 35% of its limit reference point. It is considered to be in the critical zone of Canada's precautionary approach framework.

Third, as an example, in 2011 the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, COSEWIC, which comprises government-appointed scientists, many of them on the marine fishes specialist subcommittee or DFO or former DFO scientists, assessed northern cod as endangered. If cod were listed under the Species at Risk Act, there would be a prohibition on catch, no fishery allowed under its current status. Yet we rarely make the decision to list commercially targeted fisheries under the Species at Risk Act because of socio-economic concerns. We have some sympathy for that, but a do-not-list decision has become an excuse to do nothing.

Northern cod collapsed 25 years ago, and it's astounding in my view that this is the first time that members of Parliament are conducting a holistic review. I urge you to do what you can through this process to ensure that Canadians can be proud of the recovery of northern cod in the years to come, rather than feel ashamed of our systemic failure.

Additionally, I understand you're beginning your study of the Fisheries Act at the end of the month and I look forward to speaking to you at that time, but I encourage you to think broadly about the scope of that review and how it might be applicable to the northern cod. Our fisheries deserve better protection than they are receiving under the current act.

Moving on to the economic benefits of a recovered cod fishery, as you know the collapse of the northern cod was devastating for Newfoundland and its coastal communities. It required huge amounts of investment by the federal government in the TAGS program, social assistance, and retraining. Had we managed the cod fishery properly, we could have spent that money elsewhere. It's also very difficult to market an endangered species, and for now that is what the northern cod is. To maximize socio-economic benefit for coastal communities, this needs to be rectified.

Small-scale and low-impact gear types should be used and marketed as such. There's a growing demand for place-based traceable seafood, and northern cod can potentially benefit from this if it's managed properly. If cod's recovering, let's ensure the maximum benefit to the Canadian public and those communities with adjacency to the fishery.

To conclude on a very practical note, I have several recommendations that we hope will influence not only your process, but also the ultimate recovery of northern cod, as well as the other 15 marine fish populations identified by the Auditor General as in the critical zone, 12 of which have no rebuilding plan.

Our recommendations in order of immediacy are as follows. First, complete a rebuilding plan. A robust peer-reviewed rebuilding plan for northern cod should be a government priority. Consideration should be given to the lowest impact gear type. We know what high-efficiency bottom trawlers can do to the most abundant fish population on earth.

Second, request a reassessment by COSEWIC. It should be tasked with reassessing northern cod so we are not in the position of increasing quota, marketing, etc., for an endangered species. This puts DFO in a direct conflict of interest with itself, which it is in currently with 3Ps cod, which is considered endangered, but is also certified by the Marine Stewardship Council.

● (1550)

Third, modernize the Fisheries Act. Our Fisheries Act must be modernized to include, at a minimum, the following concepts.

First is key principles of modern fisheries management, including the precautionary approach and ecosystem approach, which are critical in terms of ensuring protection of key species and the ecosystems upon which they depend, including foreign species. I'm sure you have heard much about the capelin in Newfoundland.

Second is legal obligations for rebuilding depleted fish populations with targets and timelines. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act in the United States does a good job of this and could be a model. Third is a legal obligation to report on the status of our fish population to Parliament and the Canadian public. It might strike you as odd that the only public reporting on sustainability of our fish stocks is being done by Environment and Climate Change Canada and not by DFO.

Fourth is adequately resourced fisheries management with a more of a view towards long-term sustainability and less towards short-term economic gains. Fifth is support and direction for the good people who work for the department to rebuild our fish populations. Proper resourcing would mean that the next Auditor General's report would be much more promising in terms of how DFO is achieving its mandate.

Finally, we need to rebuild public trust. The cod collapse, the recent Auditor General's report, the general sense that DFO is not doing its job, and the lack of transparency in decision-making data availability and management plans have all led to a significant erosion of public trust. Our fisheries are a public resource in Canada. They contribute to biodiversity, ecosystem function, economies, and our cultures. A commitment to doing things right with northern cod would go a long way to rebuilding the public trust of Canadians in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and in the Government of Canada in general.

Thank you.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Andrew Bouzan, go ahead for 10 minutes or less, please.

Mr. Andrew Bouzan (President, Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation): Oh, I thought you were going to go to a question period first, but okay.

The Chair: No, we'd like you to give just a brief statement if you wish. Tell us who you are and talk about whatever you'd like for a little while. Then we'll get into the questions.

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: I am Andrew Bouzan. I am the president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation, the largest and the oldest conservation group in Newfoundland and Labrador, founded in 1962. We have a wide range of groups and affiliated organizations, not only across this province but across the country as well.

I want to talk about some key points here today, a number of which were just discussed. Not to give too much of a history lesson, we all know what happened in the 1992 cod moratorium and the devastating impact that it had on this province—the largest Canadian layoff in history—due to clear mismanagement and governance of this resource.

First of all, I'd like to thank the committee for pulling this off here and inviting me to speak on behalf of the wildlife federation.

The main issue that I want to talk about is the cod food fishery in the province, one which many people near and far feel is not fair or equal, not nearly to any other fishery in any other province in this country. We get less time allowed on the water than any other province. We get less allowable catch than any other person in any other province, stretching all the way across the country.

Up to date this year, we have exactly 46 days on the water, up two whole weeks from what it used to be previously. Thankfully, there was some sign of good faith on behalf of the new federal government to allow us extra time on the water. At the first meeting with the new government I had, with Hunter Tootoo back in January, I had a good sense that there might be a better relationship built between this province and the federal government, in particular the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Of the key issues that I want to highlight here today, the first would be the issue of food security and food sovereignty in Newfoundland and Labrador.

First of all, the vast majority of food that we get in this province, over 90%, is either flown in here, shipped over here, and trucked across the province. On this island, which is the 15th biggest island in the world, we have less than 5% of agriculturally viable land. Getting access to food or fresh produce here can be very difficult at times, and even during certain times of the year there are communities that can be completely cut off from boats and deliveries into certain rural communities.

The second issue I want to talk about is safety, safety on the water on the north Atlantic Ocean. Unfortunately, even this year past, we lost lives at sea. During this limited time that we're allocated for the fisheries, there could be high winds or there could be high tides. The northwest Atlantic Ocean is unforgiving. We all know this here over the years of tragic incidents.

But the main issue, which I highlighted earlier, is the fact of equality. We are the youngest member of the Canadian family, and at least the bottom line is that we deserve to be treated equally, with fairness and understanding on the issues we face in this province.

Now, from what I've read on DFO, and in the last meeting I had back in June, Department of Fisheries and Oceans is looking to implement a tagging system and a licensing system for the cod food fishery. This is highly disliked across this province. If you are aware of the current economic situation we are facing, we have an over $2-billion deficit, with increasing taxes on just about everything here. Nothing in this province is getting cheaper, I can assure you of that.

This activity dates back over 500 years of our ancestors here. It is a part of our culture, it is a part of a traditional activity, and the single most important thing I have to highlight is the fact that this is a heritage activity. There are people growing up today in this province who have never been on a boat, who have never had a rod in their hand to go fishing, because they were deterred from getting involved in this activity by what happened in the early nineties. The management of our fisheries, even still to this day, is not what we deem fair for the vast majority of people in the province.

● (1600)

People are looking to go fishing to put food on the table. They're not looking to go fishing to put a picture on the wall of themselves holding a fish. Fish is food here, in this province, and that's the bottom line. That is pretty much the highlight, here, for me today.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bouzan. I appreciate it.

Colleagues, because of the time shortage, it looks like we may have time for three seven-minute questions in this round. If there is any clarification at the end, I can come in with a short question, if that's agreeable to everybody.

That being said, you may want to split your time, except for Fin. No, I shouldn't say that, because you may want to split it with Fin.

First up is Mr. McDonald, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First off, I thank the two witnesses for appearing today. It certainly adds to everything we've heard over the past week or so as we've undertaken to meet with witnesses and groups involved in the northern cod fishery, or the fishery in general.

The first couple of questions will be to Mr. Bouzan.

You mentioned the time frame for the food fishery or the recreational fishery, whatever you want to call it, not being long enough this year. How long do you think the season should be for the food fishery in Newfoundland?

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: If I could think of a fair number of days allocated to this province on the water, I would say 72 days.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Do you think the limit staying at five fish per day for each of three people in a boat is reasonable as well? At 72 days, five fish a day is roughly 360 fish.

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: If that extra time was allocated to this province, I, as well as the people I represent, would be absolutely fine with keeping the current DFO limit on the number of fish per person at 15 maximum per boat.

Mr. Ken McDonald: That translates to five per person.

You mentioned, as well, the notion of a tags and licence system coming in, because it has been talked about. All I will say is that what I'm hearing is that the food or recreational fishery we have now has no way of actually tracking what fish come out of the water. You have people on one side saying that we haven't gone to a full commercial fishery, yet we don't control the amount of fish that comes out in our so-called food fishery. The tags and licensing system would probably allow for a better best guess of how many fish are going to be taken.

Why would a conservation group be against that type of system?

● (1605)

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: We are against that type of system for a couple of reasons.

First of all, there is an economic reason. This province is having some pretty harsh times. I'm sure everyone knows that near and far. The prices of food and anything else here.... People want to put food on the table, as I highlighted earlier.

On top of that is the fact that there are fewer and fewer people involved in the food fishery every single year. In the last report I read, a 2010 Department of Fisheries and Oceans report on recreational fishing, there was a decline of almost half. If I recall correctly, in 2005 there were about 130,000 rec fishers on the water, and in 2010, it was estimated to be around 70,000.

We have an aging population in this province. The average age of a hunter or angler in this province is about 50. It is even above 60 to 70. Getting younger people involved in this is a priority for us. If we lose part of this heritage, we won't get it back. That's one of the main issues here.

If DFO is looking to put in cod licensing and cod tags, I would highly recommend that it not put it on the residents of this province. I would not say that we are against non-residents being allocated fish through a tag and licensing system. That's understandable.

With regard to the price, if DFO wanted to continue with the charge or fee, the money they would gain would go strictly into a non-governmental, with the government being neutral, conservation efforts in this province.

Mr. Ken McDonald: When you talk, Mr. Bouzan, about the heritage, I grew up close to the water and at a time when you could go out and catch a fish any evening at all on a boat. There were no regulations, no nothing. Is keeping our heritage more important than making sure the stock reaches a point of sustainability? Should we allow this to be a more open fishery, food and recreation-wise, broadly, or should we first make sure that the stock has reached a point that it could actually sustain a wide open fishery?

What are your feelings on that?

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: If you are looking to ensure the future of the fisheries in this province, and any NAFO zones that you want to look at from their jurisdictions and all the different sections that they have, I suggest you put an end to off-shore trawling, which pretty much devastated the entire coast of the Atlantic with 50 years of industrial-scale trawling. The inshore, small vessels, commercial fishermen, that we have here support entire communities in certain circumstances. But I don't think you can put a price on heritage, sir.

I would say that would pretty much be my answer.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Ms. Fuller, with regard to the Fisheries Act and the study that is currently on the go with the northern cod stock, what are your reasons for why the Fisheries Act part should probably be done first before we make concrete recommendations on the actual northern cod study?

Could you give your reasons for that, please?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: I'm not necessarily saying that it should be done first but I think they need to go hand in hand. From my perspective I have a lot of sympathy for how the fishing industry and even the food fishery feels. If you're fishing an endangered species and we don't make a decision to list it under the Species at Risk Act, then we do nothing essentially. If there was a stronger Fisheries Act that required rebuilding, it would allow us to say, look, we actually have the legal tools under the Fisheries Act to do this. It's going to take us a while to get cod right. It's also probably going to take a little while to get the Fisheries Act right. I think the problems with cod, and the fact that, again, we have 15 species in the critical zone with no rebuilding plans is because there's no legal requirement to do so. This is a real sense of conflict for the department in terms of the only legal way we can recover marine species is by listing them under the Species at Risk Act. We've listed wolffish but then we gave out 9,600 permits for allowable harm. I don't think we want to be doing that with cod or many other marine fish.

I really encourage you to think about how the Fisheries Act can fix the problems that have existed with northern cod. We need to ask why we don't have a rebuilding plan 25 years after the collapse, and what kind of legal structure would make it so that this no longer happens.

I know your scope is fairly narrow on the Fisheries Act, but I don't think you can sort out the northern cod and the other species in the critical zone without really taking a look at the Fisheries Act and making sure there is a precautionary, ecosystem approach for those things that are in the UN fish stocks agreement with a commitment to rebuilding and reporting back. I encourage you to look at what the U.S. government has to do to report to Congress. It's quite good. We need some sense of accountability. Why is it we've gotten this far with no rebuilding plan? Who's accountable? Without a strong Fisheries Act to actually require this things slip through the cracks.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Fuller.

I appreciate that.

We're going to go to Mr. Sopuck now.

You're splitting your time. Is that correct?

I'll let you know when you're about three and a half minutes in.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Bouzan, I very strongly agree with you that the issuance of tags for a recreational or food fishery is highly unusual.

I come from Manitoba where the walleye is the main species. People are allowed a limit of six per day and they fish all year round. Of course, there are indirect ways to determine the health of a stock such as the age structure, growth rates, and so on.

Does DFO do any creel census work on the food fishery?

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: From what I know it's very limited dealing with the food fisheries in general. At the time of year when people go out, in the limited times that they can go out, you have to keep in mind as well that we do have other things to do in this province besides go fishing every day while the food fishery is open. We have jobs. We have families. We have other things to press our time.

I can tell you from DFO's own statistics that there are fewer and fewer people on the water every single year and that we have an aging demographic in this province. More and more people who I grew up with, family friends of mine over the years, near and far across this province, can't even go out anymore due to their age.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: To clarify, are there ever any DFO staff at the dock when people are bringing in fish from the food fishery, so that those fish can be weighed, measured, aged, and so on? Does that ever happen?

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: There is DFO present in various places.

To what extent...? I would not say on every harbour, port, or dock in this province. Certainly not.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: No, I'm sure.

What trends have you and the other people involved in the food fisheries seen in the cod stocks, in terms of size, catch rates, and so on? What have you seen over the last few years?

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: I can tell you that this year they've seen some of the biggest cods returned since the moratorium went into effect. A full-grown cod ages, most likely up to about 25 years. That's a pretty good estimate. With regard to their migration periods —and the ocean is getting warmer—they are heading up to more northern parts, even outside of the natural zone.

From what I've heard over the last couple of years, it has been a pretty sizeable increase for catch.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay.

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: For size at least, as well as numbers.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Great, thanks.

Can I have a very quick answer from you, Ms. Fuller, if possible?

Do you support this food fishery?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: Yes, we do.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay, great. I really appreciate that.

My time is up.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for being available today for the video conference.

I have a quick question for Mr. Bouzan, and then I'll pass it on to Mr. Doherty for any questions.

Could you give us any idea of the economic value of the food fishery? We heard earlier testimony from the commercial sector that the only portion they knew of was from the value of the food on the plate. What is spent on gear, on boats, on vehicles? Is there a significant impact or economic benefit from that, and where is that benefit seen? Is it in the small communities or in the bigger centres?

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: The economic input into the food fisheries is tremendous.

The amount of money goes into fishing gears.... I think it's mainly for boats—of course, fibreglass boats—rods and reels from local shops, near and far across the province. Then you have all of the different types of smaller communities, and ports and docks, that people are involved in. Restaurants get involved with that as well.

To put a price on the food itself.... It's a necessity, Mr. Arnold. In this province, to have money generated back into the local economy, into these activities, is paramount. I mean, I'm sure it stretches near and far all across the entire country. The benefits that come with activities such as this are in the billions all across the country.

● (1615)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Fuller, you mentioned recovery rates and so on.

I believe you said you felt we're not at the stage yet where the fishery could be fully re-established. What science would you recommend using? What level would you say we need to get to before we can reinstate this fishery?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: I think first we have to establish an upper stock reference point. That would be very helpful.

I think right now that the target has been to get to the limit reference point, which is usually the lowest reference point for the stock. We're about 35% of that now. I would say we should be at least two times the limit reference point, or 50% of the way towards the upper stock reference point, with an idea of what the stock recovery trajectory is, before we consider any full-blown commercial fishery.

Mr. Mel Arnold: You're recommending a target range.

I'm familiar with some of the wildlife management in British Columbia, and it's possibly been overcautious, to the detriment of opportunity and species imbalance.

Would you recommend a target range that we could aim at, and not a minimum or maximum strict level?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: Yes.

I mean, that's what the precautionary approach framework does. It provides a target range. That's exactly how it rises: critical zone, cautious zone, and healthy zone. Again, I think we need to get to the cautious zone, which is a range. That's the risk-based approach of precautionary framework. This is different than just wildlife management. This is fisheries.

Again, I think we have the opportunity to get it right. I think how we open up that commercial fishery is very important. Who does it? What gear type? What size of boats? How we're monitoring it is important as well. It's thinking about, then, what the predator-prey reactions are, and what the forage fisheries management is. I'm sure you have probably heard a fair amount about the concerns with the capelin stocks and the link to cod recovery.

Fisheries is a wicked problem. We already have a target range, and that's the basis of the precautionary framework.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

Go ahead.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): I have a question for Ms. Fuller.

We talked a lot, and heard passionate testimony in all of our meetings, about folks who make their life in fishing. They depend on fishing to feed their families and feed their communities. We heard testimony yesterday that science, and science alone, should make the determination of whether or not we open up the fishery.

Do you think there should be a hybrid where we're actually talking with our fishers and harvesters, having them at the table, and working with the scientists in making these decisions?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: I do. I think our failure to include fishermen was part of the failure of northern cod in the first place. I think we need to look at adaptive management. I do think science is absolutely a big input. We have to consider socio-economics. Typically we've considered socio-economics in a way that doesn't necessarily benefit the communities. We haven't included the benefit of the food fishery. We haven't looked at livelihood. We've looked at net revenue. We've made this mistake by allowing, by paying for, giant trawlers, called “banker boats”, off Newfoundland that have destroyed this fishery.

You know, we don't have to do that again. I think that's a huge consideration. Who fishes matters, how we fish matters, and how much we fish matters. I think you should take those into consideration.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Fuller. I appreciate that. I have to move on from there. My apologies.

Mr. Donnelly, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of our witnesses for talking to the committee about this important subject.

Mr. Bouzan, perhaps I could start with you. Does your organization support a legislated rebuilding plan for northern cod?

● (1620)

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: We'd have to see the fine print for that, of course, from a legal point of view and a definition point of view with regard to the fine wording of it. I'm pretty sure a lot of people in the legal world know that what's on paper can be interpreted in many different ways by many different people. It would have to be very concise and it would have to be exactly as is, with no misinterpretation of what the reading of it would be. We'd certainly be open to looking into it, but....

Mr. Fin Donnelly: In terms of the level of cod right now, do you feel it's at a point where a commercial fishery makes sense?

Mr. Andrew Bouzan: With regard to a commercial fishery, that's a hard question to answer. No one truly governs the ocean, Mr. Donnelly. I'm sure we all know that. The state of the oceans today, near and far across the world, is that 95% of our big fish of the sea are gone. Stocks of all sorts, near and far in the world, are declining.

In terms of the scale of a commercial fishery in this day and age, I don't foresee it opening any time soon on any big scale. We do have a small-scale commercial fishery, of course, in this province, but I don't foresee the board members of my federation voting to open that up for a wide range of extra fishing any time soon. We represent the people of the province, and especially the food fishers of the province. We're not looking to make money off this. We're looking to put food on the table.

That's pretty much the bottom line of who we represent and who we are with regard to the cod food fishery.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

Ms. Fuller, you gave us four recommendations, I think.

Ms. Susanna Fuller: There are five, but the Fisheries Act one has three parts to it.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay.

Have you submitted those in writing to the committee?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: I will do that as soon as I'm finished.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: If you could do that, I think it would be very helpful.

Ms. Susanna Fuller: I will email them as soon as I'm finished.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Monday we had a submission containing recommendations as well. I think if this committee has recommendations in writing as submitted testimony, we can certainly work with that when we're looking at producing a report and talking about those recommendations, so that would be helpful.

You talked about increasing the seafood value chain. Could you talk a little bit more about how you would do that in the northern cod instance?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: There's a good example of that with the Fogo Island fishers. They are working on fishing a small amount of fish in a quite sustainable gear-type of cod trap and working on marketing that. I think they're doing a good job. There's a huge demand for it, mostly because most retailers across North America have signed up to sustainable seafood commitments, and it's actually hard to meet their demands and supply. I think there's a good opportunity for more of that to happen. It's very place-based marketing, and Fogo is the queen of that in Newfoundland, I'd say.

It's complicated from our perspective because it's still an endangered species, so that's what we kind of feel has to be untangled. We need to refer this back to COSEWIC so that the small-scale marketing is not of endangered species. It's just very confusing to the public when you look at something and a sign says “endangered”, but these nice people over here are doing the right thing and are trying to sell it for a higher price. That's where the process within DFO really needs to be sorted out so that we can work towards that.

One of the challenges is that cod is not a very valuable species right now, and shrimp is more valuable, so we need to really work to increase the value of that fishery to the communities and through the value chain.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: You referenced COSEWIC and reassessment. I believe the next planned reassessment, I think the committee heard, was 2018.

Ms. Susanna Fuller: Yes, and it is coming. I think it needs to be a bit urgent. As we are doing a rebuilding plan, we need to get a reassessment done.

An example is tuna and the recommendation to not list bluefin tuna in Atlantic Canada. Well, sending it back to COSEWIC for reassessment kind of undermines existing government processes, which I think is unfortunate. I think that the more we can see COSEWIC as an important part of this process, the more we can untangle the difficulties between the Fisheries Act, SARA, and rebuilding fish stocks.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay, thanks.

You referenced the environment commissioner's report. Would you recommend that this committee take a look at her report, her recommendations, and her findings?

● (1625)

Ms. Susanna Fuller: The Auditor General, yes, absolutely.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: The environment commissioner.

Ms. Susanna Fuller: Yes, absolutely.

It's very interesting that there are things in that report that we know have been happening, and it's very good to get them confirmed. DFO agrees with every recommendation, so I think it's quite important that DFO get the resources to act on fulfilling those recommendations. It will greatly benefit northern cod, among other species.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I'm just saying that this committee hasn't seen or discussed those recommendations. We just had those released yesterday. I was wondering if you think it would be a good idea for the committee to look at those findings.

Ms. Susanna Fuller: Yes, and if you get a presentation by the environment commissioner to this committee on that report, it would be very valuable.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay, thank you.

For the final one minute, you referenced the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act in the United States. Could you explain how that might help Canada inform the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on a rebuilding plan?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: I'm not saying the whole act is perfect, and we don't have nearly as litigious a society, thankfully, in Canada, but there's some specific wording that I submitted on the consultations to the Fisheries Act pre-committee, and I can submit them again.

Very simply, when a stock is overfished or in the critical zone, it requires a rebuilding plan within two years. Then on annual basis the NOAA has to report to Congress on where they are on stopping overfishing and what stocks have been rebuilt. It's very simple, easily publicly accessible, and they do an excellent job of it.

The wording is quite simple. I think it would be very helpful to have that in the act.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I have just a small comment before Mr. Chair cuts me off.

The Chair: You're at the end of the round right now, Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Could you submit that to the committee in writing?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, great.

We have just a quick clarification.

Mr. Arnold, I'm going to have to ask you to be very quick. We're running behind. Go ahead, very quickly.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the leeway.

I think it's really pertinent because of some of the testimony we heard last week from individuals who were claiming that the cod have now recovered and they're impacting other stocks.

Ms. Fuller, what would your response be to those who are claiming that the cod have recovered and are negatively impacting other fish stocks, such as shrimp and crab?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: You know, we did not have a shrimp or crab fishery in Newfoundland before the cod collapsed. I think it would be interesting to look at what's going on in the NAFO area 3M where cod has recovered and there are no shrimp anymore.

It's tricky, because the shellfish fisheries are worth a lot more than cod. Quite frankly, it's a value discussion. Do we want to bring back the cod because they've collapsed—and we didn't have those invertebrate fisheries before—or do we want to keep our invertebrate fisheries?

That's a challenging question from a biodiversity perspective and an ecosystem management perspective. It's hard to answer, but I know we can't have a rebuilding plan for shrimp and a rebuilding plan for cod at the same time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Fuller. Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

We're going to have to close it there folks. We have our next guest coming up.

I want to thank Mr. Bouzan. Thank you very much for joining us today, and Ms. Fuller as well. We appreciate your testimony. Thank you very much.

Let's break for just a few minutes and we'll get back to the salmon study.

● (1625)

(Pause)

● (1630)

The Chair: Okay, folks, welcome back.

We're 15 minutes behind, but we have just one guest with us this time.

By way of background, I want to explain something. Our next guest regarding the salmon study, Mr. Parsons, is from the Environment Resource Management Association, or as we call it, ERMA. He is a general manager there regarding salmon fisheries on the river, primarily the Exploits River.

The reason we did this now is that during our trip, our field study, we had testimony from members of the Miramichi and other rivers there, Restigouche River as well. They talked about how Newfoundland and Labrador rivers were managed differently. On our way back, we thought it would be a good idea to have a submission by Mr. Parsons from Newfoundland and Labrador to talk about management in Newfoundland and Labrador on the salmon rivers. I apologize to him and others for not doing this earlier.

Mr. Parsons, we're going to get you to do 10 minutes or fewer, just briefly outline where you're from and any comments you'd like to throw in. Then we're going to open up the questions. We're going to have one question from the government side, one from the opposition side, and Mr. Donnelly from the NDP, so three questions of seven minutes each.

Whenever you're ready, Mr. Parsons, go ahead.

Mr. Fred Parsons (General Manager, Environment Resources Management Association): Thank you very much for the opportunity to address such a privileged bunch of gentlemen. I'm not sure if there is a lady present, but thanks again.

You have been going around and you've been hearing a lot of things about salmon management, how things are working, and how it would work in Newfoundland and Labrador as opposed to other regions. I guess one of those big things is that in Newfoundland and Labrador we tend to have probably 50% of all the North American Atlantic salmon. I know you've been hearing about the effects it's having on our stocks. I'm sure you've heard our concerns about aquaculture and how that's interfacing with some of the wild fish. I'm sure you've heard environment enforcement concerns. Over the last number of years there has been what we would refer to as a lack of science that's going on with the species. Of course we do have some issues dealing with foreign fishing, overfishing, and the big one that's on the block these days and that does particularly concern me, climate change.

To give you a bit of a background, Mr. Simms did say that we do most of our work on the Exploits River. As a bit of a background to that, we used to be a bit of a one-horse town. We were a pulp and paper town for about 100 years. Back in the early 1980s someone said, “You know, there's been a cutback at the mill. What would ever happen to our towns here if this mill should, God forbid, ever close?” Well, the mill is closed.

Back in those days there was a bunch of volunteer gentlemen in town who said, “We're sitting on the largest river in Newfoundland. It's the largest watershed, and the salmon only have access to about the first 15 miles. What can we do with this river? We could make this into a world-class Atlantic salmon river and bring some economic benefit to the whole region and all along the way.” You're looking at a river that's about 150 miles long. These gentlemen weren't pushed off their task easily. Just to summarize that, if you go back into the late 1970s, this river then contained about 1,700 adult Atlantic salmon. I'm glad to say that a couple of years ago we just about hit 50,000 Atlantic salmon coming back to the river. This wasn't easy and it wasn't cheap. In partnership with DFO and our association, we set upon a plan to put in fishways over natural obstructions like the Grand Falls and the Bishop's Falls, and to build more fishways around the power dams.

There are six different hydro production stations on our system here. We did a massive stocking program with over 50 million little fish fry that were incubated and then taken and spread all over the watershed. All these fish came from a river that basically was used for hydro production and for making paper. A lot of people would tell you that you can't have fish and have hydro. We were probably a little stubborn on that, and we've created this resource that's sitting here throughout the Exploits Valley.

What I want to touch on more today is the importance of this fishery and of the Atlantic salmon recreational fishery to all of Atlantic Canada. I want to also zoom in on the Exploits River. It's been a few years since we've had a full economic impact study done, but my estimate right now is that it's worth anywhere from $8 million to $10 million a year strictly on the Exploits River, and this revenue is shared throughout four or five different towns.

● (1635)

Atlantic salmon usually don't hang around big cities; it's usually found in rural areas all over Atlantic Canada. In Newfoundland, we have well over 200 lakes and rivers. This is an economic driver in some cases, for the outfitters, the hotels, the campgrounds, and pretty well all of the service industry. That's a very large impact, when you consider it's all rural dollars that are being spent. Some of this is out of province, out of country, but even within our province itself, you have people that will take their two-week or three-week vacation and visit a lot of these different rivers.

If you look at Newfoundland, we don't have many operas, there aren't many major sporting events, although some people did have to stay up a little late last night to take in the Toronto activities. What we're getting into now is quality of life and what will keep people here. To come for a job is one thing, but to keep these people here with things they can do is certainly a concern of ours.

One big thing that the resource does have, when we're looking at the Atlantic salmon, is that it has more friends than probably any other species that's out there. There are that many conservation groups located in Newfoundland and Labrador, and right throughout Atlantic Canada, that are not only lobbying to do something for the resource but are willing to help. There have been many partnerships over the years between not-for-profits, conservation groups, and DFO, to increase the numbers, so it's not the point of telling government that we want you to do this. Basically, what we're saying is that there are concerns, we have certain issues, but we're all in this together and we're willing to help out just as much as we're asking government to.

I'll take a little break here to see if there are any questions on that. I do have some issues I'd like to talk about around habitat, but I'll just give it a little break.

● (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Parsons, we'll go to the questions. If something comes to mind you can work that in.

Again, we'll go to the government side. Mr. Finnigan, the MP for Miramichi, has some questions for you.

He has seven minutes, so I'll give him the floor.

Go ahead, Mr. Finnigan.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Parsons, for taking the time to come and talk to us this afternoon.

I live right next to the Miramichi River. I know it's not the only river with salmon, but it is an important economic driver in our area. You were mentioning $10 million. I think the figure on our river is somewhere closer to $20 million, so it's absolutely very important.

You mentioned that on some of your rivers, or at least one river, there was a mill. I'm not sure if it's still there or not. Interestingly enough, we had quite a few mills on the river that are no longer there, pulp and other mills.

We met with the Miramichi Watershed Management Committee last week in Miramichi. They have been monitoring the river for a long time and looking into the chemicals, everything that would affect the water quality. It has been over 10 years since those mills have been closed, and they were quite surprised that instead of the population... At the time, a lot of people were blaming the activity of those industries on the diminishing population. Since then, the population has decreased substantially.

I'd like your comments on that, whether you think there are other factors, and how much industrial or people's actions on the river has an effect on the population in your area.

Mr. Fred Parsons: It's been about six years now since the mill closed there, and as we speak, it's in the background. It's gradually being knocked down and totally disposed of.

If we go back 30 years, a lot of the effluent from the mill was going directly into the river. Since it was a pulp and paper mill, a lot of it was loose fibre that found its way to the bottom of the river and choked off spawning areas and things like that. With the hydro, there wasn't really much concern back in those days for exclusion, to keep the fish from going into the generators and the like. Years ago, the easiest and the most common way to get your fibre, your logs, to the mill was to throw them in the river and let them float down.

Back 15 or 20 years ago, we saw a lot of these things change. With no production anymore, we're not seeing any going in, but even back in those days, once the fish were in the water, then there was a bit of an onus, a bit of a community spirit, I guess, for the companies that were here to do their part in cleaning up. Some very massive effluent treatment plants were installed. Some of the systems there are unique in the world. We just finished entertaining 15 scientists, biologists, from Sweden, because we have some unique systems here that keep the young fish from entering into the generators. It's a diversion system, I'll say.

All of these things here with industry have certainly helped. What we're finding now is that the river is becoming a lot cleaner. The fibres that would settle on the bottom choking off the spawning areas and all that are not there.

Our numbers have steadily increased. The mill has been closed for six years. We are not seeing any great numbers, so I don't think in recent history that there was much damage being done by the power plants, by the paper mill itself. Right now certainly, it would be very difficult to blame what's happening now on what happened years and years ago.

● (1645)

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you, Mr. Parsons.

We've also heard from scientists that one of the main reasons is that the warming waters, the warming oceans, are having a big effect maybe not on eliminating species but on driving them to colder waters. If we look south of our area, a lot of the rivers no longer have any salmon in them, and we're being told that might be partly the reason we're starting to see low levels in Miramichi. Newfoundland will probably have water that is a bit colder. Would you say that could be one reason there's still some fairly abundant numbers in Labrador and Newfoundland whereas we're losing them in the southern waters? What are your comments on that?

Mr. Fred Parsons: I certainly would agree with that. I did mention in the preamble that one of my biggest concerns these days is climate change. Some days in Newfoundland it's hard to think that we're in a warming situation or the like. Of course, it's not only in the ocean that we're seeing things happening. One of my biggest concerns is climate change in fresh water.

This year, right across the island of Newfoundland, in most places the stocks were down anywhere from 25% to 35% from last year. Now that really wasn't unexpected because back in 2013 and 2014 we had probably two of the hottest summers on record for Newfoundland—not only hot, but very, very dry. My office would be contacted every couple of days to talk about young fish, juvenile fish, that were just in the bottom of a pool in the streams where they were going to spend their first three years, and they were dead. Of course, the thought was that there were some chemicals or something like that, but the truth really was lack of water and the warming of the water. When you get to a certain degree, it's just lethal for the fish.

I remember quite well saying in those years that we will pay for this down the road because if you lose your juvenile fish—your one-, two-, and three-year-olds—in your fresh water, then you certainly don't expect them to come back as adults. That is a very big concern, and it is not one, of course, that we can address just by going out tomorrow and doing something. It's long term. With climate change, is the range of Atlantic salmon starting to creep a little bit towards the north?

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Parsons. I have to go to the next questioner.

We're going to go to Mr. Sopuck who is from Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa in Manitoba.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes, but I happened to fish in Labrador this summer. I've been to your fair province a few times.

Mr. Parsons, what would the harvest be on the Exploits? I'm talking of fish that are actually killed and harvested as opposed to fish that are released. What's the harvest, if any?

Mr. Fred Parsons: It's hard to know. Just as a little preamble to this, I should tell you that in Newfoundland there are no private waters. It's all public waters, so that makes it a little bit harder to extract the stats from it. I would expect that our harvest this year would have been around 4,000 fish.

● (1650)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Four thousand fish, that's truly remarkable. I asked the question because for $8 million to $10 million in economic impact, to harvest that relatively few fish from a population of, I think you said, 50,000 in terms of dollars spent for fish harvested, the Atlantic salmon fishery is the ultimate in sustainability.

You talked about year-class strength in Atlantic salmon. What determines year-class strength in Atlantic salmon, primarily?

Mr. Fred Parsons: This particular river tends to be be more of a grilse-type river from a year-class perspective. We're not getting to 20 and 30 pounds this year because we built this river using the gene pool, I guess, of smaller fish. When I say smaller, I'm talking about an average of four to five to six pounds. People aren't coming here to catch 30 pounders like you've probably seen in Labrador.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Unfortunately, I didn't. That was my fault.

Mr. Fred Parsons: We're going to set you up with a better outfitter next year.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Done. This is one MP who will take a bribe, yes.

Mr. Fred Parsons: There you go.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: But I'll pay, I promise.

Mr. Fred Parsons: It's an outdoor sport that people love and enjoy. We're seeing a very large move these days to release fishing. The culture in Newfoundland is that if you're going to take something, then it has to be fully utilized. If you're going to go out and catch a fish, don't put it in your freezer and throw it away, don't throw it up in the woods. It should be utilized. That's the mentality that's there. That is changing. You will get people now, not necessarily going all the way to release fishing, but they're saying they will take one fish, basically to bring home to the family and pump their chest and say they're a great provider. You'll get some guys who may take a couple, but people are starting to realize now that it's the pure enjoyment of the sport, and they're taking a different view of it.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I couldn't agree more. The catch-and-release ethic has taken hold right across the country.

Do the research and management programs at DFO reflect the importance of the Atlantic salmon resource, in your view?

Mr. Fred Parsons: I would say right now no.

I've had the great privilege of working with this conservation group for 31 years, and that's pretty well from day one in dealing with this river. In 31 years I've seen a lot of changes, and I've pretty well seen science slip a fair bit.

I'm going to say there are two kinds of science. There's one that's studying the species, trying to better understand the species. But there's also.... I'd bring it back to probably more research on the individual river systems. I think that's the big thing we've lost probably in the last 10 or 15 years.

We need to be on the ground looking at particular river systems that are showing problems to better understand that particular system. That's not to take away from the science we're doing on the species itself, but we need to have people on the ground. We need for people to be out in the field doing sampling. That, I think, has certainly shrunk in the last number of years.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I appreciate that.

I'll turn my last time over to Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Fred Parsons: Thank you.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Parsons, basically you're stocking this river from hatchery stock, I take it. I'm just curious where you're getting your hatchery stock from. How are you ensuring that you're not impacting the genetic...if there are any wild stocks left in the river or adjacent rivers where there may happen to be migration?

● (1655)

Mr. Fred Parsons: I'm going to set the record straight. I don't want to leave you with the impression that we're a put-and-take river.

In 1985, with not many fish in the river, we started stocking the river. That stopped in 1992. Since 1992 the river has been completely natural. There is no stocking. Really what we did was we seeded the river—that's the term we use— but that was it. After 1992 there were no more fish from a hatchery put into the system. We gave it this big shot, massive amounts of fish, and then we backed off.

Basically, our point was that we had to make it a wild river as opposed to a hatchery-fed river.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Were there, historically, larger fish there? You've said there are now no larger fish in the river. Were they there historically?

Mr. Fred Parsons: Not in great numbers, no. There are not too many rivers in Newfoundland. As opposed even to Labrador, Newfoundland tends to be more of a grilse, which is your smaller strain of fish, rather than multi-sea-winter fish.

There are areas, like the Humber, that have a realm of large fish, and the Gander. But other than that, most of the rivers tend to be your grilse fishery.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Donnelly, who is from Port Moody—Coquitlam, has seven minutes.

Go ahead.

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

Yes, I am from the other coast, British Columbia, which is home to rivers like the Fraser and the Skeena. There are many others—the Nechako—in other parts of British Columbia. There's Vancouver Island, on the east. We love our salmon on the west coast. It's a huge economic driver commercially, recreationally, and certainly, culturally for the first nations.

Mr. Parsons, I applaud your effort on making the Exploits a world-class salmon river. You've given us an overview. You talked about the value and the returns. You mentioned fish passage and the salmon enhancement program that happened, I guess, historically. You've outlined some historical information or facts, and you talked about the current status and where you're going.

My first question is about the support from the federal government and from this committee. How do you see the federal government playing a role in your efforts moving forward on this issue?

Mr. Fred Parsons: Right off the bat I'll say the government has to get involved, but I'll say involved with us. This is not a point at which you say to government, you know, put all these fish back, but we have to get back to.... We did have a program back in the nineties. It was called CASEC and it was a well-funded program that enabled conservation groups to work in conjunction with government to do stock enhancement, to do river clean-ups and such things. I did mention a while ago that one of my biggest concerns these days is probably the restoration and protection of the habitat. I consider that to be a big priority. You know, I've got my years in and will probably pretty soon retire from the position, though I doubt very much if I'll ever leave the interests of the Atlantic salmon.

In our local area here, I did mention log driving earlier on and things like that. There have been all kinds of old dams built to build up a bit of water, so these logs could be driven to the mill in the springtime. A lot of that stuff is still sitting back in the country, rotting and basically creating more barriers to fish migration, whether it's young fish coming down or adults going up. I think that's an area....

I know that a couple of years ago, all the habitat offices—you're probably aware of this—all the regional offices for habitat protection were closed down, and right now we operate the habitat side strictly from St. John's. You have people who were in the field. You have people who were close to it. You have people who knew the operators, who was good and who was bad, who to keep an eye on, whatever. We're missing that, and I think that's what we really need.

I'm a great believer in things that work, and I would certainly be a hypocrite if I was any other way. If we could take a river like the Exploits from nothing and turn it into a world-class river.... In some years we're the biggest producer of Atlantic salmon in North America and we've taken that from nothing but an industrialized river. If we can do that on a system like this, the ability is there, I think, to be very creative. What works for one river system may not be the requirement and the need for another, but I firmly believe that if we go back and look at the things that work, do the research on individual rivers and systems, we can still turn the future of the Atlantic salmon around.

● (1700)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

I mentioned I was from the west coast, and in B.C. we have a real challenge with wild and farmed salmon. This isn't unusual. Other countries like Norway, Chile, and Scotland have these concerns. You mentioned it in your opening remarks, concerns about aquaculture, and I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about whether that plays a part. I know there are proposals in Newfoundland for aquaculture. Does any of that concern you? Could there be a conflict? How do you see that potentially playing with wild salmon?

Mr. Fred Parsons: It's very timely. There was a report that's not published yet that was released from DFO. Actually, all the aquaculture in Newfoundland, first, is done along the south coast because that's probably ice free. Anywhere else in Newfoundland you'd have to be crazy to try to do any aquaculture with the ice loading that we get in the spring.

There were 18 rivers on the south coast that were studied, and 17 out of those 18 rivers showed evidence—and this is with DNA—of wild fish that were after spawning with aquaculture fish. That's 17 out of 18 rivers that were studied, and 30% of the stock in those rivers were of mixed breeding.

The hardest part about this is that the numbers in all these rivers have gradually been dropping and dropping over the years. What we're getting with this interbreeding is fish that are inferior to the wild species, and they probably don't have the ability to go to the ocean and find a way around. Really what we're doing is weakening that gene pool, and it's showing up already in that the numbers along the south coast of Newfoundland are way down. It's bordering on being threatened there now, so that's direct. The sea lice issue is another one.

What I should say is that we're not opposed to aquaculture, and a lot of the general public think we are against aquaculture. Well, no, we're not against aquaculture; it's the open pens that we have an issue with. The waste food goes to the bottom. You have all kinds of waste going to the bottom, and you have sea lice being passed along. It's very difficult if you have a 1,500-pound bluefin tuna that's swimming by your net looking for lunch. This powerful fish can do some very big damage to your net, and then all of a sudden you have these large escapes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Parsons.

That concludes this round. I want to thank you very much, but before you go, in the spirit of evidence-based policy, Mr. Parsons said that the gene pool in the Exploits River produces a smaller species. For the record, I was born and raised and still live on the Exploits River, so.... I know, I just thought that was coming and I thought I'd put it out there myself. It's something in the water, yes?

Care to comment, Mr. Parsons?

Mr. Fred Parsons: All good things come in small packages, they say.

The Chair: I should hope so.

Anyway, Mr. Parsons, thank you so very much for your time, sir. We appreciate it.

Mr. Fred Parsons: I certainly enjoyed it. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

● (1705)

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): And ladies....

Mr. Fred Parsons: And ladies, okay.

The Chair: Thanks a lot.

Okay, folks, we have to break for a few minutes. We have to go in camera to talk about drafting.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]