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

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, September 19, 2017**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Scott Simms**



## Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Tuesday, September 19, 2017

• (0920)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)):** Folks, we're back and now being publicly recorded. I'm going to turn this over to our brand new clerk, who is going to put all this together for us. It's day one, and we put her on the spot.

Ms. Vohl, go ahead.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl):** Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition. I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC):** Chair, it gives me great pleasure to nominate Todd Doherty as the first vice-chair of the fisheries committee.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Mr. Arnold that Mr. Doherty be elected as first vice-chair of the committee. Are there any further motions?

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Clerk:** Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

**Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.):** What happens if everybody on this side votes no?

**The Chair:** Mr. McDonald, I appreciate your enthusiasm at every election that's on the go, including this one; however, we have to follow the format here. We can wait for a comment when this is done.

**The Clerk:** Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** I wonder if, for Mr. McDonald, there's a “Yes, with reluctance”. I don't know.

**Mr. Ken McDonald:** It was close, though; it was a squeaker.

**The Chair:** I can well imagine. May I remind everyone that we're in public?

Yes, it was a hard-fought campaign.

On a more serious note, to Mr. Doherty, Mr. Arnold, and Mr. Donnelly, our colleagues from British Columbia, all the best in the situation that you faced this summer and continue to face at this

point. It is absolutely devastating. I only saw the smoke first-hand; I didn't see the fire.

Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the fisheries committee we may want to take a look at some of the potential downstream effects of this fire situation. It's actually been so dry that, where the fires have burnt, there has been no rain to re-establish any vegetation. We're going to see snowfall on top of ash basically, and possibly extreme run-off conditions. We may need to look at some emergency situations. The potential effects of these fires are much further reaching than the current situation.

**The Chair:** Mr. Doherty.

**Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):** Just to echo Mr. Arnold's comment, we are going to start to see our rivers and lakes filled with sediment from the areas that have been scorched. We are going to see more slide issues because the root structures have been devastated. The rivers in British Columbia and indeed the lakes in our interior—our inland fisheries and our salmon fisheries—are going to be deeply impacted by this. When you have an area that is three times the size of Prince Edward Island and one and a half times the size of the GTA that has been scorched and absolutely devastated, there's no disputing that this is going to have an immeasurable negative impact on our fish, lakes, and streams. It would be prudent for our committee to start looking at opportunities to engage our government with respect to emergency services, in terms of what we are looking at to assist us in British Columbia.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Doherty. Would you be interested in preparing something for committee, something to bring back to us to consider? I assume there's something you'd like to do more about this, obviously from your speech, but is there anything specific or generalities you'd like to bring in?

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** I would love to bring something back. As we talk about piecing our lives back together in my riding and in other areas of our province, we need to look at the immediate needs, and then we need to look at the long-term impacts on our forests, our rivers, and our streams. For those who haven't seen it, it is absolutely devastating. You have millions of acres that are scorched earth now, and that is going to impact our rivers, lakes, and streams.

• (0925)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Donnelly.

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

To add to that, I completely agree with both members' comments, my colleagues from B.C. I had the opportunity to be out on the Fraser. Combined with the fires in the interior that were devastating to communities and to the area—I believe it was in addition to 5% of the annual allowable cut that we lost—that was a huge loss.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Mr. Chair, what we've lost to date—and it's still burning, and there are areas we can't get into yet—is 53 million cubic metres of forest. It would be a one-year annual allowable cut for our province and it's a 10-year allowable cut for my region, which is forestry dependent.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** This is going to impact a significant number of jobs and families. On top of that, we had an incredibly low run return of Fraser River and Skeena River sockeye. We had a very small opening of the commercial fishery, and it was a first nations opening; it was tiny.

I paddle on the river every summer. Normally, it's packed with boats and recreational fishers line the shore. There was nobody the week we went through. The devastation was not only because of the fires but the low salmon return. The economies in those communities are impacted by this.

I concur and look forward to the suggestion of how this committee might play a role, not only in emergency services, but also in restructuring and restoring the fishery and those communities that are impacted. I hope there is some time within our fall schedule that we can look at this incredible devastation that's going to play out for years to come, as my colleague mentioned. The challenges that are faced by a low return, by the forest fires, by a changing climate, and by a number of other impacts can't be underscored. I think this committee would be well suited to taking a look at what we or the government can do to assist those communities in moving their renewal forward.

**The Chair:** This sounds quite interesting.

I look forward to our colleagues in B.C. and not necessarily just B.C. Obviously, you can bring something to the committee that we can discuss. As I mentioned earlier, the MPA is not determined to end at the end of 2017. We can put it into 2018.

I see our other B.C. colleague, Mr. Hardie, wants to speak.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** I think one of the things that we need to consider is the longer-term science about what happens after you have an event like this. Wildfires have been happening in B.C. for millennia. In one respect it's part of a natural cycle that happens there—

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Not to this extent.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** No, not to this extent. I understand that. This is unusual.

Nonetheless, usually post-wildfire takes a while but things come back and they come back in different ways. It really alters the landscape. Looking forward, it would be helpful to get some of the necessary science so we're out in front of what the future looks like.

**The Chair:** Mr. Finnigan.

**Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.):** I know we've had some experience in our province but not to that scale.

Right after the fire, some wood can still be salvaged but it has to be done very fast because obviously it's going to deteriorate. Would that be on top of this?

I know the market is not the best right now; other disasters are creating a demand. That would be one of the first things to look at.

• (0930)

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** I had a meeting with our forest companies, and our industry will be meeting with them again tonight in Ottawa. I'm heading home tomorrow night to have a round table meeting with them. We're in an unprecedented emergency situation.

You're absolutely right. We have about a one- to two-year window where we can salvage the wood that's out there and there is still a marketable component to it or we can use it.

I want to go back to a comment we had when we were in the Miramichi. We had comments at our committee about the clear-cutting and logging practices that were going on and how that was having a devastating impact on the fishing in those areas, and indeed the rivers in the Miramichi.

This is no different. This is absolute devastation, without a doubt. There is no root structure to hold the water. We will see more landslides, more instability of our grounds.

The other thing is that the fires were so hot and so deep, they were burning a crust. There would be a crust of about six to eight inches, and underneath about four to five feet of embers, rock, empty space that had burnt. You have that instability of the land there.

I would appreciate it if the committee would be willing to consider this. This is something that we need to do. It's something that I'll be challenging our ministerial colleagues on as well, to look at immediate action and ways that we can move things forward. I think our committee can take a leadership role on this.

**The Chair:** I look forward to what you bring.

Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** As an example of what happened, we went from a flood situation in the early to late spring to extreme drought. I had water coming in my basement for two months this spring. I had to tear up the yard and put topsoil down. That topsoil has been there for a month and not even a dandelion has come through, it has been so dry.

That's why I say there has been absolutely no moisture for any regrowth to start. In the extreme swing from those flood situations to extreme drought, now all that ash and burnt soil has basically burned so hot it has sterilized it. I think it will be a very interesting component for us to study.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

Ms. Jordan.

**Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, to my colleagues from the west coast, my heart goes out to you.

I spent a couple of days in Penticton and saw mostly the smoke at that point, but it was devastating. I think one of the things we have to keep in mind here is that the MPA study is not on a timeline. Although we would like to see it finished before the Christmas break, if our colleagues bring something forward that they feel needs immediate action, the MPA study can be moved if necessary. It's not that we're on a timeline for that.

If something requires immediate attention, I think it's something we should look at.

**The Chair:** Folks, before I go to Mr. McDonald, it's not written in stone, but we were not going to meet on Thursday. Do you want me to carve out some time on Tuesday of next week, say 15 minutes? Is that enough to talk about this? Can we do that, or do you want 30 minutes?

I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll see how the witness situation is going, and if we need extended time, we'll get unanimous consent. I think what you bring up is very important and we should spend the time to do it, even if more time is required.

Mr. McDonald.

**Mr. Ken McDonald:** As everybody knows, of course, we were in Kelowna, but I went up a couple of days early. I have a brother who lives in 108 Mile Ranch, and one afternoon we went out and drove around. He was one of the families that had to move out for nine days, and when they came back the house was still there and fine.

When you drive around and look at it, you're right, the ash is really deep. You can see that they had dug down to try to get to the hot spots and how deep they had to go. It is going to have a big downstream effect, for the sake of a better word. If we get heavy rains behind what is happening, it is going to be devastating.

Whether it's this committee or another committee, somebody has to look at this fairly quickly to see what can be done to mitigate some of those effects that we could be looking at.

• (0935)

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Doherty.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** I appreciate the comments from our colleagues. I would suggest that if there is an opportunity for us to be part of the ministerial committee, or... You have to see it first-hand—the families that have been evacuated. In my own family, my mother was evacuated with only minutes to spare, through flames. My in-laws, friends, and family—it's unbelievable. The devastation is... It's going to take a long time.

The support of our parliamentary colleagues, whether it's this committee or other committees... This is something we need to take leadership on. The environment committee should be thinking of this. Other committees should be taking a look at it, because what happens in B.C.—our fire season that happened here—could happen anywhere. We need to be looking at how we can try to piece people's

lives back together today, but also how we can mitigate these incredible events for communities as we move forward.

We had Fort McMurray the year before, and we had B.C. this year. It's unbelievable. Whether it's the flooding that took place in Quebec or the wildfires in B.C., this is not a good year. As leaders and parliamentarians, we should be doing whatever we can to study these impacts and try to find ways to save or protect our communities and families.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that, Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** I just thought, during this discussion, there's no doubt it's something this and other committees need to look at. This is hard to do. There's nothing like first-hand experience that you see with your own eyes. Mr. McDonald has already seen some of it and, of course, Mr. Doherty and Mr. Arnold. The rest of us... I don't know how we'd do it, but if there was any way that a number of us could see that devastation, then when we're talking about dealing with it at committee, we could say we've seen that and know what it's like.

I'm just throwing that out. I know how valuable and short our time is, but it would be important for all of us to do if there was any way we could arrange it.

**The Chair:** Mr. Doherty.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** There's nothing like seeing it first-hand, but in the absence of that I have video of my friends and family fighting the wildfires, and footage of flying over it as well—the devastation. It's not sensationalizing it at all. It is devastating. When you see it first-hand it is unbelievable.

Going back to our original comment, it's going to have a devastating impact on this committee's purview, on our fisheries. There are no two ways about it: not only our fisheries, but our displaced wildlife. You're seeing more and more incursions of wildlife in the communities.

When I was managing the airport in Prince George, I used to joke that you're just as likely to have a delay on a flight because of a moose or bear on the runway as you are for weather. We're seeing more and more wildlife come into the communities because they're being forced out by the fires. It's unbelievable. It's going to be really tough.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that, Mr. Doherty.

To our colleagues from British Columbia, I look forward to discussing this on Tuesday. I'll put some time aside at the end of the meeting. If we have to extend, we'll do that to come up with an idea of how we're going to handle this in the near future. And it's noted that we can put the MPA study forward into 2018 if need be.

Are there any other topics to discuss? Seeing none, I will see you next week, on Tuesday, 26 September. Thanks, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.





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