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# Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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Wednesday, June 10, 2020

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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald





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• (1505)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number nine of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on May 26, 2020, Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on June 1, 2020, the committee is proceeding to a briefing from the minister and the officials on the government's response to COVID-19.

Today's meeting is taking place by video conference, of course, and the proceedings are public and are made available via the House of Commons website. So you are aware, the webcast will show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

For the benefit of all members and also our minister and witnesses, I should remind all of you of a few rules to follow. However, since everyone here was here yesterday, except for Mr. d'Entremont, shall I skip over that part? If everybody's been on other committees, they've probably heard them many times.

Should any technical challenges arise, for example, in relation to interpretation or a problem with your audio, please advise the chair immediately, and the technical team will work to resolve them. Please note that we may need to suspend during these times as we need to ensure all members are able to participate fully.

Before we get started, can everyone click on their screen, in the top right-hand corner, and ensure they are on gallery view? With this view, you should be able to see all the participants in a grid view. It will ensure that all video participants can see one another.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses who are with us again today and, of course, the Honourable Bernadette Jordan, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. We have the same list of participants as yesterday, so can I have unanimous consent not to read out everybody's name and their position so we can get down to business?

Okay. I'll let the minister know that it's her turn for opening remarks for six minutes or less.

Go ahead when you're ready, Minister Jordan.

**Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I believe the minister's speaking notes were circulated to all of us yesterday. We've all had a chance to go over them. If the minister would indulge us and allow us to simply go straight to questions, we may be able to get more question time in today.

**The Chair:** Okay. I leave that up to the minister.

They're your six minutes if you so want to use them, or if you want us to advance to questioning, we can do that.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** I would like to hear from the minister.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard):** I would like to make my statement, please.

Thanks again for the opportunity to speak to the members of this committee.

Today I am again accompanied by many officials, including my deputy minister, Tim Sargent, and Canadian Coast Guard Commissioner Mario Pelletier.

I appreciate the invitation to discuss our government's commitment to help Canada's fish and seafood sector get through these unprecedented and very challenging times. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, we're working hard to protect Canadians, support the harvesters and businesses and ensure families have what they need.

I would like to begin by assuring members that my department remains very much at the forefront of managing Canada's fisheries and protecting the marine environment. As this crisis unfolded, our fishery officers kept up the patrols, surveillance of the North Atlantic right whales continues and, as I indicated in my testimony before you yesterday, the remediation work at Big Bar continues to move without stopping.

Our officials have worked overtime to make sure that stakeholders across the country were being heard. We continue to navigate this crisis together, listening to advice from those who work in the fishery about when to open the various fishing seasons and how to adjust our ways of working to make sure that we continue to support commercial and recreational fishing. DFO officials and harbour authority volunteers have worked hard with provincial and territorial counterparts and other partners to ensure the health and safety of essential workers, fish harvesters and, indeed, all Canadians who use our harbours.

The Coast Guard continues its essential operations and remains hard at work every day, delivering much-needed search and rescue, ice-breaking, maritime security and environmental response.

[Translation]

Today I want to reassure committee members that we continue to provide essential services in our fisheries sector so that those working in our fisheries can expect to receive the support they need to safely continue feeding Canadians.

[English]

Back in January, we started to see the kind of impact COVID-19 was having on the global economy, particularly in the seafood sector, with the decline of overseas export markets. Since then, my officials and I have been talking to and working with harvesters, aquaculture producers, processors, indigenous partners, and the provinces and territories about some of the unique pressures that the sector has been facing.

As spring approached, we started to plan amidst an uncertain global market. We knew that in order to stabilize the industry as a whole, we would need to develop programs that would provide financial support to both harvesters and processors.

As you well know, the window of harvesting certain stocks is limited, so products needed to be stored longer and new markets needed to be found.

With export markets declining and domestic food supply becoming more important than ever, the industry will need to respond more to Canadian domestic consumption. With the closure of restaurants across the country, Canadians are instead looking to purchase seafood at the store and from local harvesters.

As you know, our government has delivered economic measures to help individual Canadians and businesses get through the pandemic, through the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency business account and a number of other tax credit measures.

We have also been working around the clock to support the Canadian fish and seafood industry adapt to a new reality, as it is the backbone of many of our coastal communities.

This has ultimately led to a significant \$500-million investment to support the hard-working women and men in our fisheries. To deliver these funds, we've created the fish harvester benefit, the fish harvester grant and the Canadian seafood stabilization fund.

The fish harvester benefit will provide self-employed commercial harvesters and sharesperson crew members who cannot access the Canadian wage subsidy with up to \$847.00 a week. This includes those in inshore and freshwater fisheries and fishing under indigenous commercial communal licences.

The fish harvester grant will provide a non-repayable grant of up to \$10,000 to self-employed commercial harvesters who cannot access the Canada emergency business account. Along with the benefit, these funds can be used to cover the costs of running a fishing business, including increasing costs due to health and safety requirements. We're working to ensure that harvesters can receive these supports this summer.

The \$62.5-million Canadian seafood stabilization fund is invested directly into the marine processing sector to help tackle a number of challenges and to help plants adapt to market changes and

the new ways of working. Processors on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts can tap into the funds to increase their storage capacity, allowing them to buy more from harvesters and aquaculture operators. The funding can also be used to help with rebranding and marketing efforts, to make changes to manufacturing and automated technologies and to offset the cost of implementing health and safety measures.

While these new programs take into account the unique operational structures of the industry, we know that this season will definitely be a challenge. That's why we're proposing changes to the fish harvester employment insurance system, which will allow harvesters and sharespeople to file EI claims based on previous seasons' earnings. The industry went into this pandemic strong, but we know this year is going to be like unlike anything we've ever seen before.

Tens of thousands of Canadians were counting on this fishing season for employment, revenue and food. By investing over half a billion dollars in the seafood sector, our goal is not only to ensure that workers get the financial support they need right now, but that the industry as a whole is placed in a strong position for recovery.

● (1510)

As we continue to move forward in the face of so much global uncertainty, I am confident that we will continue to serve Canadians under these very difficult circumstances. I am now happy to take your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Before we begin questions, I want to welcome Mr. d'Entremont to the committee today. He's replacing his colleague Mr. Calkins, from the riding of West Nova, in Nova Scotia.

Welcome to the committee, sir.

Now to Mr. Arnold, for six minutes or less, when you're ready, sir.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Early in the process, fish harvesters and processors and provincial governments repeatedly asked for guidance from the federal government in their efforts to make their workplaces safe for Canadians. Time and again, these requests for guidance were ignored and the federal government didn't provide any guidance. This created uncertainty and delays across our fish and seafood sectors.

Yes, the provinces have a responsibility for workplace safety, but they wanted federal guidance with regard to the unprecedented threats of COVID-19.

Last week, the committee heard that the Coast Guard started developing onboard safety protocols for all vessels and bases in February, as soon as they heard that the COVID-19 crisis was coming.

Minister, why did you refuse to provide workplace safety guidance such as the protocols that the Coast Guard has in hand for vessels of all sizes, or the protocols that the CFIA has provided for meat-processing plants?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** With regard to making sure safety protocols were put in place for processors, as you know, this is provincial jurisdiction. However, having said that, I met regularly with my provincial counterparts on the east and the west coasts to talk to them about measures, and we had regular weekly meetings to discuss what needed to be done in processing facilities.

We recognized that the CFIA had a role to play, as did the provincial government. We were there for them to make sure that the processing facilities were able to put protocols in place. We actually had to delay some seasons to make sure they could meet the protocols that were required.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Mr. Chair, I neglected to recognize that I will be splitting my six minutes equally with Madam Gill, as per a previous agreement.

Minister, why have you repeatedly placed the needs of the processors, by providing programs and protocols to them, ahead of the needs of harvesters and the Canadians they employ?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I very strongly disagree with that statement. Since the very beginning, we have been working with processors and harvesters to make sure they have what they need to be safe on the water and have what they need to have a successful season.

We worked with processors to develop the programs they needed through the Canadian seafood stabilization fund, and we worked with harvesters and a number of different organizations on the fish harvester benefit and the fish harvester grant.

We're continuing to work with stakeholders across the industry to make sure we're addressing the needs of the seafood sector this year.

• (1515)

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll pass the remaining time to Madam Gill.

**The Chair:** When you're ready, Madam Gill, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank everyone here, including Minister Jordan.

Thank you for being with us and for agreeing to answer our questions.

People are worried—

[*English*]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but I'm not getting interpretation.

**The Chair:** Madam Gill, there is no interpretation. Are you on the French channel?

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I wanted to thank you, Ms. Jordan, and all those from the department who are here today to answer our questions.

First of all, I would like to talk about the benefits and grants available to the fishing industry. People are worried right now because fishing seasons are ending as we speak. They would like to know when they will have access to the fish harvester benefit and the fish harvester grant. Could we have a more exact date?

[*English*]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** We have worked very hard to make sure that we have the benefits in place that harvesters require. For the fish harvester benefit, we recognized right from the start that many fishing enterprises did not qualify for the measures we had already put in place. There was a gap, and that is why we introduced the fish harvester benefit and the fish harvester grant.

We are now working to get those programs out the door, recognizing the urgency of this, because the seasons are ending in some areas. I think harvesters have the security of knowing that those benefits are coming.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** As I understand it, Minister, no date has been set. I hope that your department will be able to move very quickly, because some have already received the CERB and other sectors are receiving support. In the meantime, various people in the fishing industry are telling me that they are being left out.

In fact, they often ask me why the decision was made to develop the programs you worked on to fill gaps in the government's offering when the fisheries sector could simply have been included in the various subsidy programs, such as the Canada emergency wage subsidy or the Canada emergency business account.

[*English*]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** The challenge with including the fish and seafood sectors in the programs that were already existing was that they did not qualify, based on the way their systems are set up. Based on the way their enterprises were set up as businesses, they did not include family members, although now they do. They are seasonal, so they make all of their money in a very short period of time. They do not have the same ability to look back on previous months, because their season hasn't even opened. There were specific challenges for owner-operators as well.

We wanted to make sure that we dealt directly with the industry and met its needs directly, because it was falling through the cracks. That is exactly what we did.

We are now working diligently with ESDC to make sure these programs are being put in place as quickly as possible. We know that the industry requires them.

Harvesters are having a very difficult year this year, and we know there are significant challenges in export markets, but we know the measures we are putting in place are going to benefit the entire industry, because they will continue to allow fish harvesters to survive this season.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go on to Mr. Cormier, please, for six minutes or less.

[Translation]

**Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.):** Good afternoon, Madam Minister. Thank you and the officials with you for being with us today.

First, I would like to commend you for your work, but also for your efforts to speak in French. It is worth mentioning. Your French is very good. I hope that our upcoming discussions will be held in that language.

My questions are about the new \$470-million program. It is one of the largest investments in the fishing industry in the past 20 years.

Fishers are worried about this season, so I would like you to tell us more about the programs announced and the threshold of a 75% loss in revenue. Could you also tell us about employment insurance? It has been said that fishers could be eligible for it and that it could be based on the employment insurance benefits they received in previous years.

Can you explain these programs in more detail to reassure our fishers and show them that we are thinking of them and that we will help them through the difficult times they are experiencing right now?

• (1520)

[English]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Mr. Cormier. Also, thank you for all of the work you've done in your riding to make sure your harvesters' and processors' voices are heard.

We have put three specific programs in place: the fish harvester benefit, the fish harvester grant and the Canadian seafood stabilization fund.

The fish harvester benefit is going to provide up to \$847 per week for owner-operators as well as share crew. Recognizing that they did not qualify for the wage subsidy and they treat their crews differently with regard to a share as opposed to a wage, we wanted to make sure that these people were captured.

The grant is for up to \$10,000. That is a non-repayable amount of money that can be given to harvesters to help with their overhead costs this year for things like bait, insurance and licence fees. These are all things that we know have costs. They are not not going to

have quite as lucrative a season this year, based on what we're seeing with our export markets.

Finally, there is the seafood stabilization fund. That was a \$62.5-million fund that we put in place for processors to put safety protocols in place. Of course, it's backdated to March, so for anything that they have done they will be able to qualify. It's to put safety measures in place, as well as retool their facilities and do value added to make sure they have the capacity to store. Right now, as you know, we're primarily a fresh market exporter. Having an ability to have fridges and freezers was something we heard a lot about, and we wanted to make sure that we were there for them.

These measures are going to be put through the regional development agencies, but I will say that this would not have been possible without all the input we got from so many great people across the industry, such as people in your riding, for example, and the Maritime Fishermen's Union, the crabbers associations, the harvesters and the processors. We've worked very diligently with all of them to make sure we have the measures in place that they require to get through this very difficult season.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Minister, for those comments. Yes, fishing associations, fishermen and all in the industry of course play a key role in these measures. I know that you consult with them. We consult with them. I thank you for that.

There is one other thing I want you to comment on, maybe just to clarify. As you know, my father was a fisherman all his life, and now my cousin is taking part in this business. A lot of comments I have received are from new entrants in the fishing business. For example, because they don't have any revenue to compare to last year, they are scared that they may not be able to qualify for the 75% wage subsidy. Could you talk about this a bit?

I know that you've received a lot of asks from different associations. Will they be able to qualify under this program or maybe other programs that they are not aware of? I know that the CBDCs and ACOA, for example, can help them, but are you able to say "we listened to this and we're going to provide some help for them"?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** This is something that I have heard from a number of people and from new entrants into the fishing sector. We know that this is an expensive venture to get into. Right now, they do not qualify for the fish harvester benefit or the fish harvester grant, based on the fact that it's based on previous seasons' earnings specifically.

As the Prime Minister has said many times, nobody will be left behind. We'll continue to look at ways that we can support all people right across the country.

[Translation]

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

I would like to talk about something else.

As I told your officials last week, fishing fleets head out to sea right outside my home. They include lobster and crab fishers. Unfortunately, the shrimper fleet has not yet gone out to sea this year. I know that you had a telephone conversation with them last week.

Today, agreements have been reached in Quebec. The shrimpers may be able to go out to sea, but if fishing does not go ahead in our area, I hope specific programs will be in place for our shrimpers.

Could you tell us about the shrimp issue in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, but also in other parts of the Atlantic provinces?

• (1525)

[English]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** We know that pretty much everybody in the fish and seafood sector is having a difficult season this year, and the shrimpers are no exception. There have been some challenges there for them with coming to an agreement on a price with processors, as well as, of course, a glut on the market left over from last year.

There are a number of programs that the shrimp industry already does qualify for. They will qualify for the fish harvester benefit or the wage subsidy, depending on how their business is structured. They will qualify for the CEBA or for the fish harvesters grant—once again, depending on how their business is structured.

One of the things I also wanted to mention is that we're going to be instituting changes to fishers EI, and that's going to be something that's going to help carry a number of harvesters through the next year until we get through COVID-19. As most of you would know, fishers EI is structured differently from regular EI. It's based on your catch, as opposed to the amount of hours you work. What we have said—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. That's all the time that's permitted.

We'll now go to Madam Gill, please, for six minutes or less.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to come back to families.

The minister said that family businesses were not excluded from the various types of government assistance. However, I have confirmation in my constituency that, given certain rules, some people are.

Could you tell me more about it and perhaps confirm that information about the March 15 date? For seasonal businesses, it is difficult to say who is coming back to work before they go fishing. So people are not hired at that time.

Can these individuals not slip through the net, as you so aptly put it?

[English]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** We structured the fish harvester benefit and the fish harvester grant because we recognize that many fishing enterprises are family businesses and we wanted to make sure that they were captured within those grants, whereas they would not have been under the wage subsidy or the business ac-

count. We wanted to make sure because many fishing vessels are generational. We wanted to make sure they were captured, so they are, within the harvester benefit and the harvester grant.

On the other thing you mentioned with regard to the seasons, what's really important here, as I started to mention to Mr. Cormier, is that we will be structuring EI so that fishers EI benefits will be based on previous seasons, not on this year's catch. We want to make sure that we're looking after people. I know that people were very concerned because of the shorter seasons in some cases and because of the delay in seasons in some cases, and because of the poor markets. The EI benefit is going to help a lot of people make sure that they're covered for the coming year.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** So at the moment, there are people in family businesses or worker cooperatives who are not covered for the dates we talked about.

You brought up employment insurance. It is also very important to people in eastern Quebec, since separate changes are being announced for fish helpers, a certain category of workers in the fishing industry.

However, there are also seasonal workers in the processing industry. There are also people who do not have access to employment insurance, people who do not know if they will be able to accumulate enough hours to qualify and receive benefits, people who believe that their year will be a complete black hole, that they will have absolutely nothing to survive on, except perhaps with an extension of the CERB. However, that would not put food on their tables for the whole year.

Have you made plans to do anything for these individuals faced with having absolutely nothing, either now, or as soon as their CERB ends?

[English]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** This is a conversation that we continue to have right across the country, because although it affects processors and seasonal workers in the fish and seafood sector, it's affecting seasonal workers right across in the country, in the tourism sector, in the agriculture sector.

I have had many conversations with my counterpart at ESDC, Minister Qualtrough. We are working to address the gaps we're seeing for seasonal workers and making sure that the ones who do not have access to EI have some coverage.

We'll continue to work on that program with her. I know that seasonal workers are very concerned about making sure they have enough hours to qualify to make sure they have an EI cheque at the end of the season.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I hope that, despite the seasonal nature of their work, these individuals will not be penalized, that is to say they will be able to receive these benefits. I really hope that the changes to the program will make it possible. These individuals do not have an employment relationship for a certain period of the year. That is kind of what I was talking about earlier when I mentioned family businesses where that employment relationship is not there.

Can you confirm that those who have not been employed for a certain period of the year will be able to receive support? Ultimately, it is they who return year after year to work in these companies.

[*English*]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** We're continuing to work to make sure we're addressing the gaps we're seeing in the system. We have already made sure that the emergency response benefit is available now to seasonal workers, where it wasn't initially. We're continuing to assess programs as we go forward to make sure that anyone falling through the cracks is covered.

We will continue to work with our stakeholder groups and with industry, making sure we're hearing from a number of different people to address their concerns and that people are looked after in this very, very difficult time.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Thank you.

Whether it is here, in Quebec, or in eastern Canada, it is a sensitive subject. We are talking about workers and businesses, but we should also talk about entire communities that rely on these industries. We are also talking about land use, and I hope that these individuals will be supported so that the communities can survive here at home.

I do not have a lot of time, but I would like to talk about something else. Maybe we will have time to do it later. I would have liked to talk about the health issue.

I would like to know why the at-sea observer program was not automatically suspended at the beginning of the crisis.

[*English*]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** We initially suspended the at-sea observer program for 45 days, until people were able to get safety protocols in place.

This program is extremely important. We make our decisions based on science, and that science is critical. We absolutely have to collect it. It's part of a number of agreements that we have. We have to have the at-sea observer program.

We are working with communities. We are trying to be flexible to make sure that safety measures are in place, both for the har-

vesters and the observers. They both have to be happy with the situation before they will get on vessels.

However, we definitely need to have this program in place in order to maintain the science that drives our decision-making process.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns, for six minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here again today.

First I want to thank you for the important relief benefits that you've announced for fishers and fish harvesters.

When can fishers and fish harvesters expect money to start flowing through the harvester benefit and the harvester grant?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Mr. Johns.

We recognized right from the start that this was going to be a critical piece for harvesters: making sure they have what they need. We are working diligently around the clock to get this out as quickly as possible, recognizing how important it is to harvesters.

It is a brand new program, so it has to be built from the ground up. As you can imagine, it's not just a matter of writing a cheque to everybody.

We're continuing to work with ESDC and Finance to make sure we can get this out as quickly as we can.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm just relaying concerns about how quickly they need that. As you can imagine, everybody is under so much pressure.

Can you talk about new entrants and young fishers? What are you doing for them? Do you have any programs that you're going to announce to support them? Right now, they don't qualify for almost any of these programs.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** As I said to Mr. Cormier earlier, I have heard that concern from a number of new entrants.

There are a number of programs available to people who need help. We are continuing to look at how we can address issues. The Prime Minister has said on many occasions that nobody is going to be left behind.

Right now, they do not qualify for the fish harvester benefit or grant because they are based on previous seasons' earnings. We will continue to look at ways that they can be supported.

• (1535)

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm going to circle back to something. Yesterday we were talking about restoration and habitat protection and how important they are. I'll give you an example.



There's a project in my riding, and I've talked to you about it, called Kus-kus-sum. It's a project with the City of Courtenay and the K'ómoks First Nation. Local community groups have raised \$1 million in the community and the province has put forward \$1 million. They need \$3 million to buy this brown field, a former mill site, to restore the area to its natural habitat for salmon protection.

This is one of the most important projects on Vancouver Island, but this group is being told there is no program at the DFO to help them and that they should go to ISC, and then ISC is telling them to go to ECCC. They're getting bounced around, yet the government can find an extra \$35 million for the Big Bar landslide, which we support and has to happen.

What we don't support is that the Liberals can find \$17 billion for a pipeline but can't find a million dollars to save this project. The deadline to buy this property was supposed to be the end of the month, but instead it's been moved to the end of August. We're looking at losing a really important project, not just for salmon but for reconciliation.

Minister, what are you going to do to fix the gaps in your programs so that we don't let projects like this fall apart? The province is going to end up getting its million dollars back. It has vetted it. It knows it's a good project.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Mr. Johns, we've had this discussion before. It's important to recognize that the DFO does have a suite of programs, but this does not fall into them. We have had a conversation with regard to being involved with Environment and Climate Change Canada on this.

We are looking at ways to support it, but the DFO does not have the ability to buy a piece of land. We've had a conversation about this. This is something that we can continue to look at, but at this point there are no programs available for this specific project.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'd say that's extremely disappointing, because the salmon are going to lose and reconciliation is going to lose. That property will end up being put on the market instead of saving salmon. Right now we're in a salmon crisis. That's the most important restoration project on Vancouver Island.

We talked about the salmon conservation stamp. We've asked the government to look at it. Right now it costs \$6 and generates a million and a half dollars a year. There has been an ask to raise the salmon stamp fee. Certainly the NDP doesn't typically support user fees, but in light of the situation with our salmon, they would go straight to projects to help with restoration.

Will the minister consider raising the salmon stamp fee so that community organizations can get the support they need to continue to do the great work that they're doing?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** We continue to work with a number of organizations through a variety of means to make sure that we're addressing the concerns they have with regard to habitat restoration of the wild Pacific salmon stock.

I will take this on to see if there is anything we can do. I'll turn to my deputy to see if there's anything he can add here.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. It may only be a question of clarification.

I would like to know if this meeting with the minister was supposed to have been exclusively about COVID-19. That is what I assumed, at least. I have the impression that we are discussing other issues unrelated to the COVID-19 crisis.

[English]

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I hope I don't lose time for that. I'm happy to clarify that, because it is directly related to COVID.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I do not think it is a waste of time. I just want to know. If we make rules together, I would like them to be followed.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'll refer to the clerk, just to see if it's relevant or if we're supposed to be strictly on COVID-19.

Nancy.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl):** The minister was invited for COVID. Normally the members ask questions related to the study. However, if the members ask questions outside the scope of the study and the minister wants to answer them, she can.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Thank you.

● (1540)

[English]

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left, since we've stopped?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Can we go back? I had asked my deputy to comment on the stamp.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** I'm more than happy to do that.

Certainly, the Pacific Salmon Foundation does very good work with the money that's currently coming from the stamp. We are looking at how to increase that. This will, however, require a regulatory change, so it's not something we can do straight away. Obviously, we also have to consult with others before doing that.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay, great.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay.

The way this relates to COVID is that a ton of people are out of work right now; there's a salmon crisis happening right now, and we need to get people back to work and get people on the ground doing the important work of restoration. Also, the government did make a promise to move to closed containment. This is an opportunity for the government to create a new normal, to start with that transition to closed containment, to move the open-net fish farms to closed containment and to get people working.

Will the government look at following through on their promise to move to closed containment? This will give certainty to those people who are employed in that sector and to the sector itself. This is an opportunity to create a new normal for aquaculture and for coastal British Columbia.

**The Chair:** Sorry, Minister, all the time was used up in the question. You could provide an answer in writing if it doesn't get asked further down the road during this meeting.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** That would be great.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Bragdon for five minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us again today.

Minister, we just want to know if the seafood stabilization fund, the fish harvester benefit and the fish harvester grant are now all open for applications as of today.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** No, they are not. The seafood stabilization fund is about to be rolled out, probably within the next few days to a couple of weeks. The fish harvester benefit and the fish harvester grant, as I said, involve actually building a whole new program, and that's going to take a little bit of time. However, recognizing that, we have been working extremely hard to get it out the door as quickly as possible. We're working with ESDC.

I want to give a big shout-out to our public servants. These are extremely trying times, and they have been working around the clock to make sure we get this benefit out as quickly as possible because they know how important it is to our harvesters.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Thank you.

When will the details of the proposed EI changes for the fishers be announced? Do you have a time frame on that?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** With regard to the EI changes, those are actually being worked on as well right now. They will be coming as soon as we have them available. We recognize that people need to know these things. That's why we're working as hard as we can to get that done as quickly as we can.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Will the changes require legislation?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** No, they will not.

Actually, I know the fish harvester benefit and the fish harvester grant did not require legislation. I am not 100% sure on the EI changes. I don't know if the deputy has any information that he may

be able to share. I'm not sure whether EI requires a legislative change or not.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** We would have to check with ESDC on that. We can certainly get back to the committee with that information.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** I would appreciate that. If it does require a change in legislation, we'll need Parliament to be in session for sure to be able to bring about that change. Obviously it's urgent at this point that we get the help in place that needs to be there for our seafood workers and harvesters.

What are you doing to ensure that the EI changes actually fit the needs of the fish and the seafood workers?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** The EI changes are actually going to be based on the previous season's earnings, so what they would have received up until now will be basically the same again. They will be able to qualify based on previous seasons instead of this year. That's actually a really good thing. We know that last season was a very good season for most harvesters.

With regard to British Columbia, where last season was not great, we're making sure they can look at seasons previous to that so they're better able to qualify for the EI benefits and get the biggest amount they can for it.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, the minister and her office have repeatedly given and issued assurances to the fishers and their employees that relief programs like the wage subsidy and the business account announced by the Trudeau government were available to them. We, as Conservatives, have heard from harvesters from the east coast to the west coast who cannot access these benefits. The testimony from fisheries representatives provided to the finance committee on April 8 stated that federal relief programs were not accessible by most fish and seafood sector operators and workers. Finally, on May 14, the government announced the harvester benefit and grant and admitted that these supports were necessary because harvesters had not been able to access the wage subsidy and business account that the minister had told harvesters they could access.

Minister, were the harvesters misled when you and your staff repeatedly told them they could access the emergency wage subsidy and business account?

● (1545)

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** What we did from the start was we looked at what was necessary for the fish and seafood sector. We started out with the seafood stabilization fund.

Once the wage subsidy and the business account were announced and we had a chance to look at what the qualifications were, and recognizing that harvesters' businesses were set up differently, we moved very quickly to make sure they were not lost in a gap. We saw a whole sector that was going to be impacted, and we worked really hard and very quickly to make sure that we addressed the concerns we heard from harvesters with regard to that. This is all because their enterprises are set up very differently than most businesses are. People who live in fishing communities recognize that. People in the fish and seafood sector are the only ones who have a totally different program based on the fact that they were not able to qualify for the other benefits.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Minister, I—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bragdon. Your time is up.

We'll now go to Mr. Battiste, please, for five minutes or less.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Thank you, Minister, for joining us today and for all of your advocacy for our fishermen and fisherwomen.

Our Prime Minister announced that the government is introducing the fish harvester benefit, as our fish harvesters have unique needs. It's an industry of seasons and catches and good years and bad years, but this year it's been challenging, to say the least.

In my riding, one of the biggest issues facing our fishermen and harvesters is the lack of demand, and prices are really low. It's changed the dynamic of the local economy. It has been said that there may need to be a pivot to increased processing and a need for greater storage for longer periods of time. Can you give us an indication of what our government is doing to ensure we have the ability to store more of our catch?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Mr. Battiste.

I will say that this was one of the first things we heard about when we saw the export markets collapsing back in January or February. We knew there could be a problem, because we generally have a fresh market product. The fish and seafood sector is live lobster, and it's mussels and oysters. Making sure that the fish is fresh is what has been really important to our exports.

Recognizing that, we put into place the Canadian seafood stabilization fund, at \$62.5 million. That's going to give processors the ability to increase capacity and to put in freezers and fridges so that they have storage for longer periods of time. This is going to also help the harvesters, of course, because now that things don't have to move as quickly, they're able to continue to sell their product.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Thank you for that, Minister.

Can you give me a sense of what has been our total new investment in dollars that our government has put forward to address the challenges of COVID-19?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** With regard to just the fish harvester benefit, the fish harvester grant and the seafood stabilization fund, it's over half a billion dollars. That is not including what we will have to do to make the changes to EI, the people who are now collecting CERB.... That's just the fish and seafood sector. I know that this is the largest infusion of cash into the sector since the cod moratorium.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** In many cases in the Mi'kmaq communities in my riding, the community holds a communal licence rather than the more commercial licence. Are there any differences in eligibility for the fish harvester benefit between a Mi'kmaq communal licence-holder versus a commercial licence-holder? I just want to make sure that the Mi'kmaq harvesters are also included in this. Can you answer that?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** They are absolutely included. It was something that we wanted to make sure of, that there were no gaps when it came to indigenous communities. I met recently with Chief Perry Bellegarde, as well as the AFN, to explain this to them. There was a lot of concern that the indigenous communities felt that they would maybe be left out. Absolutely not—they very much qualify for these supports.

● (1550)

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Has the department done any internal estimates on how many individuals they expect will apply for the fish harvester benefit? To me, that would be an important data point as we assess the overall impact of COVID-19 on the fishing industry. I'd be interested in hearing what other data points DFO is monitoring as they assess the overall impact of COVID-19.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I will say that anyone who holds an independent owner-operator licence is eligible for the benefit, but perhaps I could turn to Deputy Sargent and see if he has any other data he can share with us.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** Yes. I'll pass this over to Jean-Guy Forgeron.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** You can give me a written response. I know time is limited.

Ken, you can turn to the next speaker.

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

We'll now go to Mr. Fast, for five minutes or less please.

**Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister.

In the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, one group has slipped through the cracks. That's the sport fishery, especially our recreational fishing industry on the west coast. Other than general support programs, there's no specifically targeted support like the ones you created for commercial harvesters and processors.

The salmon fishing closures that DFO imposed last year had a devastating impact on the 9,000 jobs the industry supports in B.C., and of course the \$1.1 billion of economic activity it sustains. That was before the COVID pandemic hit. The impact will be even worse this year due to the restrictions the guiding and outfitting industry must comply with due to the virus. Quite frankly, the industry just wants to go back to work.

Minister, it's my understanding that some time ago, the sport fishing industry placed before you a proposal to allow a minimum catch and retention chinook fishery. At most, such a proposal will intercept less than 1% of any endangered chinook run. Yet to date, the Sport Fishing Advisory Board has received no response to their proposal. Meanwhile, the guides and outfitters can't book trips since they can't, with certainty, promise their clients the opportunity to actually fish.

Minister, this industry doesn't want handouts. They want to deliver a world-class sport fishing experience to their clients. Why the delay in responding? Can the industry expect a response to their proposal this year?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** We recognize a number of challenges facing the sport fishery this year, everything from low salmon returns to COVID and how it has impacted the communities that support the sport fishery. We have made a number of benefits available to those businesses specifically.

The chinook management decisions have not been made yet. We are working on them as we speak. They will be out in the near future.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Minister, what is "the near future"? This industry has to plan ahead. The season should have started by now. They have no certainty at all. All they're asking for is a date on which you will provide them with a response to their proposal, an eminently sensible proposal.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I'm checking my notes. We did put interim fisheries management measures in place for the chinook fishery on April 1 to allow time for a technical review of the 2019 measures, to make sure what we had done in 2019 and how it was going to impact. We're also looking at consulting with a variety of groups. The decisions are going to be based on what we hear from our evaluations. They will be coming, as I've said, very soon.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** What does "very soon" mean? We do need certainty on this.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** They will be coming as soon as we have all the information we need to make that decision.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** They're not going to be very happy with that answer, Minister.

As you know, Minister, one way to address the protection of endangered salmon is to increase the marking of hatchery fish to ensure sport fishers have plenty of fish to keep and take home without endangering the recovery of the wild salmon. Yet in B.C. only a very small number of hatchery fish are marked, even though many times more are released into the wild. This makes it difficult for anglers to determine if the fish they've caught are of hatchery origin.

Your department's policy has been either to shut down the fishery or allow for a very limited catch and release opportunity. I believe

we can do better. Washington state marks 100% of its hatchery fish, which allows its industry to compete unfairly with our recreational fishing industry here.

How is that fair? How does that promote Canada's economy or our national interests? A very small investment in marking fish would go miles in providing our industry with the boost it needs. When will you increase the number of hatchery fish that are marked for catch and retention? When will you begin to listen to the concerns of this struggling industry?

• (1555)

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Mr. Fast, I have been listening to the industry since I was first appointed to this ministry.

I am not opposed to a hatchery fishery. However, a number of challenges have to be addressed first. As I said yesterday, there are concerns. There's a concern around data collection. There's a concern around consultations with first nations. There's a concern around the genetics and releasing of hatchery fish and how it will impact the wild pacific salmon stock.

These are all things we have to do. We have started pilot programs on a marked fishery. We will continue to do the work that is needed to be done. It's not a silver bullet. It's not going to solve all the problems of the wild pacific salmon. We're making sure we're taking these measures very seriously.

I want to thank the sport fishery association for the great work they do. We will continue to work with them to find solutions as we go forward. A lot of questions need to be answered before that fishery can take place.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Minister, these fish are being released into the wild—

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Mr. Fast.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** All that needs to be done is that they need to be marked.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fast, your time is up. You've gone well over, actually.

Mr. Morrissey, go ahead for five minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Madam Minister, while you're being questioned here today before the committee on how to get the financial assistance out the door faster, it's interesting for the committee to note that the Conservative opposition in the House of Commons denied consent to move a very important bill that would expedite the process and allow many more people to be included in the financial assistance that's needed.

Madam Minister, your riding, like mine, has extensive coastal communities that depend very heavily on the fishery for their economic well-being, so I have two questions. I want to know about the impact, if it is a negative impact, on the ability to provide enforcement and protection of the valued fisheries as well as the ability of your department to process small craft harbour capital projects. Is COVID-19 having an impact on these two areas? At the same time, could you also comment on how your department is positioned today versus years ago in its ability to provide protection for these fisheries as well as the importance of small craft harbours? Without these two we would not have a successful fishery in our small rural coastal communities.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Mr. Morrissey, and you are correct. I come from a small rural coastal community. It's something that has driven my passion for this industry from day one. I grew up in it.

With regard to small craft harbours specifically, we know that these are the economic drivers of our rural coastal communities. They are a necessary part of who we are and what we do. The fishery relies on them. They're our highways. As a government, we have invested significantly in small craft harbours. We will continue to look at the best ways going forward to address the long-term needs.

There had not been an increase in small craft harbour funding for over 20 years until we formed the government, and in that time, of course, small craft harbours continued to deteriorate.

With regard to fisheries officers, because of the work that we as a government have done on the Fisheries Act, we are going to be able to increase the important role that fisheries officers play. We've increased the staff at DFO by 300 for the science. This is all funding that has come because of our government.

We will not leave our fishing communities behind. We know how important they are to our way of life. Previous governments have done that, but we will not do that.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Minister, I'd like to go back and focus again on your department. Are you confident that as we go through the COVID-19 pandemic, your department still has the ability to ensure that adequate protection and enforcement are taking place, especially in those areas that demand high levels of enforcement and protection in the fishery?

• (1600)

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** The health and safety of fisheries officers has been a priority in the industry. We've continued to make sure that they are able to work in the fields, on the water, and wherever they're needed during this crisis. The standard operating procedures have been put in place for all types of operations such as vessel patrols and air patrols. We're making sure that the fisheries officers have what they need in terms of protection and protocols in place, and we'll continue to do that as well with small craft harbours.

I want to thank the harbour authorities who have also put protocols in place to make sure that the people who are working on the wharves are the people who need to be there. We'll continue to monitor those situations and make sure that the employees of DFO

have what they need to stay protected and to continue to do the extremely vital work that they've always done.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Madam Minister, in my elected career, I depend heavily on empirical data and science-related information to make decisions. If our fisheries are going to be successful in the future, which again goes back to the success of our coastal communities, then we must ensure that we have a federal department that has the resources to ensure that we have adequate science data to make those decisions.

Could you comment briefly on how even though we're focused on delivering in a pandemic, through COVID-19, your department will not lose focus on ensuring that we have those resources going forward?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** We continue to make all our decisions based on science. The previous Conservative government cut the science out of DFO. We've rehired almost 300 scientists to make sure we have that information available to us. Fisheries management decisions have to be made on the best science available to us, and we're going to continue to do that.

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Madam Gill for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to come back to what we discussed earlier. The minister and I talked about at-sea observers. Of course, during the pandemic and now, the two issues that have been the focus of our attention are the economy and the health issue.

My constituency includes isolated and fragile communities, either because of age, health conditions or the fact that they are Indigenous and Innu communities living along the St. Lawrence River. Many difficulties have arisen in terms of communications and health conditions. In fact, there was no communication. I would like to know why no instructions or directives were given to all the communities. As a result, they asked that the fishing season be delayed.

[English]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Madam Gill.

We have been working very hard with harvesters as well as with processors to make sure they have had the necessary time to put the health and safety protocols in place. It has been very difficult. We worked with the province, and we made sure we worked with the stakeholders. We know there are communities that were a bit more vulnerable. We were very flexible in season opening dates so they could get the protocols they needed to have in place.

I met regularly with Minister Lamontagne from Quebec with regard to what Quebec was doing in putting those protocols in place. Of course, the province is responsible for the processing facilities and making sure they have what they need, but Quebec was very good at setting a standard for having good safety protocols in their facilities.

We continue to meet with him every week to find out what was necessary, and we continue to work with CFIA as well.

• (1605)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Gill.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Minister, the funds you've committed to the relief supporting fishers and the fishing industry during COVID-19 will certainly provide help to indigenous communities and to fishers. There's an opportunity to make a bigger impact, a longer impact, by ensuring that the funds remaining in the Pacific salmon treaty mitigation fund are directed to the people and communities who are most impacted by the reductions in the chinook harvest on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Nuu-chah-nulth Nations and the area G harvesters have been working through the West Coast Aquatic Governance Board to develop a proposal of how to spend roughly \$8 million to \$10 million that we're told is left in the fund. It could definitely benefit the fishing industry right now in those communities on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

The department could take significant steps toward reconciliation with the Nuuchah-nulth if they were to recognize the importance of these mitigation funds for rebuilding the fishing economy on the west coast of Vancouver Island, including restoration.

Will you do everything you can to get that money to those fishers and those communities in need?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** First of all, Mr. Johns, I need to clarify that there isn't money left in there. The money is earmarked for programs that were committed to. The money is there, but it has not been spent because the programs have not rolled out yet. There is no pot of money left over.

I will say that we are continuing to work with our coastal communities, through B.C. SRIF, through the coastal restoration fund, to put programs in place, as well as the programs I have already talked about today with regard to the fish harvester benefit and the fish harvester grant.

Deputy Minister Sargent, I'm not sure whether you have anything to add.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I really want to emphasize that those harvesters were the ones who were impacted by taking a reduction, so I hope the government, as it is spending that money through those programs, is going to target those fishers most impacted, and those communities.

My last question, Minister, is around licensing. A lot of fishers have asked for relief on licensing. They can't fish either because of the price or because of COVID. Can you talk about what you are going to do? Are you going to honour their request for relief on licensing?

**The Chair:** A quick answer, please.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Relief on licensing was something that we heard about a great deal. We went with the fish harvester grant that could be used for a number of different things, and that money can be used for licensing fees.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. d'Entremont, for five minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the basement chez d'Entremont. It's great to see all of you.

Minister, it's always good to see you, as well.

I'm not going to go without saying a few quick words about Mr. Morrissey's little comment earlier.

What I saw in the House earlier today was that the government House leader was unable to deliver a consensus. I guess it's either the Liberal way or the highway, but it's unfortunate to see that happen in our House when bills are important to us. I'll move on.

When it comes to the Canadian SSF, seafood stabilization fund, I know a number of companies that have tons of surplus space. Has DFO done a survey of existing capacity, especially in southwest, south shore, Nova Scotia?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I'm going to turn that question over to my deputy, please.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** The seafood stabilization fund is a program that we're delivering in partnership with the regional agencies. When we put this together, we worked very closely with them, and in particular in your part of the world, of course, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. They were the ones who assessed the storage capacity issues in that part of the world.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Okay.

From what I've seen, I have two large areas that can be used, can be turned on. They just need to know how they can access that fund. They are existing facilities in southwest Nova Scotia. One is up in Digby County and the other one is in the Pubnico. There is existing capacity within our system. I'm just wondering how individual businesses would be able to access that fund, or at least say that they have space available.

• (1610)

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thanks, Chris—sorry, Mr. d'Entremont. I've known you for a long time.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** It's okay.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I would say that they reach out to ACOA directly.

As we've said, these programs are being developed and delivered through the regional development agencies because they work with these organizations all the time and they know them. They may be able to help them very quickly.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Okay.

As I said, it's existing capacity, so they don't need ACOA's money necessarily. They just need operating...so they can hold on to some of that frozen product.

On the issue of live capacity, especially in southwest Nova Scotia, how much live capacity do we actually have? I know it's in the multi-millions of pounds. I am just wondering if the department has a feel for how much that is.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Deputy, do you have an answer to that question?

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** No, we don't, but we'd be happy to get back to you after I've asked a few questions.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** All right.

To maybe add to that one as well, there are a number of facilities that have been built within the last 12 months, probably prior to COVID, expecting, of course, a different season than the one they've experienced. Would they be able to access some of the funding as well?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** The funding, of course, is to build capacity in places. I'm not sure.... Those are questions that ACOA could probably answer.

Deputy, I don't know if there is anything else you can add.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** No, except to say that storage capacity varies quite a bit across the region. For instance, in New Brunswick, there is more of a shortage.

As the minister said, the funds are to build new capacity if necessary, but the funds can also be used for a variety of other things. It's not just for storage capacity at all. There's new equipment, for instance, inventory costs, that kind of thing.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** You can understand that for a new entrant or someone who has just expanded their system, who has put in new grading systems or has put in new water treatment systems in order to hold lobsters longer, this program comes along after they've done all that construction. I'm just wondering if there's a way for them to go back and say that they don't want all the money, but maybe just a bit of help to keep them alive for the next six months to a year.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Mr. d'Entremont, with regard to that, the whole point of the programs we've put in place is to get people through this very difficult time. There are unprecedented challenges within this sector. We're seeing fishers who have not seen this kind of market in years and years, as you know, as someone who comes from an area that relies heavily on this sector. We want to make sure that what we're putting in place is able to get us through this very difficult time so that the industry not only can come back after COVID-19 but can come back strong.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** I don't want to create two playing fields, where you have the group that got money through COVID and the group that spent all of its money to get things set up in the meantime.

I have a quick point, if I can make one. LFAs 33 and 34 have the highest lobster licensing fee, at \$1,900. It would go a long way if the department were to waive or substantially waive that fee. Has that been in any discussions with DFO?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** We have discussed the waiving of licence fees. What we came up with was the fish harvester grant,

which they can use for a multitude of reasons. One of them would be to use the \$10,000 to pay their licence fees.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Hardie, please, for five minutes or less.

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here.

I wanted to get back to the issue that arose in the House of Commons today. Bill C-17 was due to come forward. It was due to handle the legislation necessary to get the support out to disabled people, but as well, there were going to be some changes to the Canada emergency wage subsidy program, especially to deal with irregularly employed people. Would that have reflected on the benefits and the support that would have been available to fishers or to the industry, the sector?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** They would not have impacted the fish harvester benefit or the fish harvester grant, but it is unfortunate, because one of the things we've heard a great deal about is that seasonal industries need support, and this bill would have given it to them. It is unfortunate that the Conservatives have stopped us from making sure that seasonal workers are getting the support they need through the wage subsidy.

• (1615)

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Okay. We certainly have heard from everybody, and I think everybody agrees, that there's a sense of urgency to deliver supports to people who need them.

There was an offer today to split out the disabled and the other work from some of the things that the opposition found problematic, but again, that didn't receive the support in Parliament that it needed to move forward in an expeditious manner today. Are there workarounds necessary, then, for the absence of this legislation?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** The fish harvester benefit and the fish harvester grant were not part of this legislation. That did not require legislation on its own, so they will still go ahead. It is unfortunate, though, because many seasonal workers will be caught up in this legislation not going forward, and that will include people who did not qualify for the fish harvester benefit or the fish harvester grant.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Let's look to a brighter future, hopefully. The fishery on the east coast has been a bright spot in Canada, certainly compared with ours on the west coast, but everybody is now suffering again from the collapse of the local market and the fresh market, etc. What plans will be in place to try to restore these markets, particularly in international trade, which has also taken a real hit because of the pandemic?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I think there are a number of things there, Mr. Hardie.

First of all, we have seen the collapse of the export market since early in January. The fish and seafood sector was one of the first sectors impacted by COVID-19. We have been working to try to develop new ways of asking people to support their local industry and to make sure that people eat Canadian seafood. We Canadians don't eat enough seafood. I think everyone should be promoting that as much as possible to support our local industry. We continue to explore where markets could be developed, but of course, as you know, that's a different department.

We are looking to make sure that we have the capacity in the processing facilities to store and hold product longer. We are looking at value added. That's another big thing that's necessary. One of the industries in B.C., for example, is the oyster industry. We've spoken to one oyster producer who wants to go from a fresh product to a smoked product, because he knows that will have a longer shelf life and he'll have more of an ability to sell domestically if he does.

Those are the kinds of innovative ideas that we're supporting and looking for to make sure we can get through this very difficult time.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** We certainly have taken some steps to improve the storage capacity, but what happens to, if you like, the quality and the value of the product? Obviously, even in your fridge at home, there will be an end date on that potato salad at the back there. Beyond what point, if this pandemic continues, is even storage not really going to be helpful in maintaining incomes?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** What we've done this year is this: With the availability of the fish harvester benefit and the fish harvester grant, we have given enterprises the ability to make a business decision based on the fact that they will still have some income. Whether they choose not to fish, whether they choose to fish less or whether they continue to fish now, at least they know they will have some income.

With regard to markets, we are seeing a bit of an increase in some of the export markets. The Asian markets are starting to open up. Some of the restaurants in the U.S. are starting to open up.

I think one of the things we also have to do is work together with the provinces and territories through the Canadian fish and seafood opportunities fund as a way of marketing fresh seafood within Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Bragdon, for five minutes or less.

I understand that you may be sharing your time, and that will be up to you.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to go back to our talking about the various programs that have been announced and are starting to be put in place, but that are yet to be fully accessible to the harvesters.

We've noticed that other governments, like in Australia and Britain, were able to announce and deliver support for their fish and seafood sectors as early as April 1. Why did it take so long to provide relief for the Canadian fish harvesters?

• (1620)

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Actually, I would disagree with that statement, Mr. Bragdon. We listened very diligently. We made the announcement as quickly as possible, and now we're working to get those measures out the door.

This is building a brand new program. It's not something that you can turn around on overnight. We are working with ESDC, which is responsible for the delivery of the program, to make sure that we have everything that is needed in place.

Harvesters can rest assured that the money is there and that it's coming. Yes, they need it, and we are working to make sure that they get it as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Again, and not to belabour the point, it's just that, obviously, comparable nations around the world were all faced with unprecedented circumstances and unbelievable situations arising from COVID-19, and were able to deliver that support, it seems to be, in a more efficient and timely manner.

We're hearing from the fishermen and from the harvesters that this aid is needed sooner rather than later, for sure.

Minister, as a result of the weak demands in the market right now, and as much as we need to be doing what we can on the storage side, when it comes to the need for increasing or helping demand and helping mitigate some of the damages being caused by the lessened demand as a result of COVID, does the government have any plan to promote the recovery of the fish and seafood sectors by promoting trade and increased domestic consumption?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Yes. That is what I was just talking to Mr. Hardie about.

I've been working with my provincial counterparts on the east coast, as well as on the west coast, talking about ways that we can work together to market fresh seafood within Canada and to make sure that people recognize that it is an extremely vital part of our food chain and that it is an excellent source of protein. As I said, we're working together with our provincial counterparts to do some marketing.

With regard to the international side, we are also looking at ways that we can continue to build on our export markets, knowing that right now they are not very good, but at some point they have to come back, and we'll continue to look at ways that we can market our seafood overseas as well.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Minister, on April 3, you stated that basically it was going to be up to individual areas to determine if the fishermen wanted to delay their season openings or stay on the shore. While this commitment held true for harvesters in certain areas—maybe not in other areas where they were delayed—these decisions added to some uncertainty that was faced by the sectors and the Canadians they employ.

I heard from one harvester in Tignish, Prince Edward Island, who said, "Losing our first two weeks is a massive blow. This is the period where we catch our biggest landings." Fisheries representatives also warned that the season delays could create a surge of the harvest, causing the additional challenges for harvesters and processors that we see today.

Why was the commitment that was made to fishermen, that they would determine if there would be delays in season openings, that they would kind of lead that, broken? It got moved away from them.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Actually, Mr. Bragdon, it was not broken.



We took a number of things into consideration when it came to the delays. With regard to the gulf specifically, the four areas in the gulf, we had various requests for opening dates. The one request that was consistent though was that they all open on the same day.

Recognizing that processors were not ready because of health protocols that had to be put in place, the delay had to remain until May 15, because that was when the processors would be ready and when the majority of the harvesters wanted to go. The harvesters in those areas all said that no matter what the date was, they had to go on the same date.

It was a decision made in consultation with harvesters, the industry, stakeholders, processors and buyers. These are all things that are taken into consideration when we make these decisions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bragdon. Your time is up.

We'll now go to Mr. Cormier, for five minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to follow on Mr. Bragdon's comments. That is exactly what happened.

As the minister said, the plants were not ready. Plants had to put in place safety protocols for employees, and even fishers realized that the plants were not ready. There have been cases of COVID-19, for example, in Quebec. So safety protocols had to be implemented for plant employees so that they could work in a safe environment. Several associations asked that the fishing season be delayed.

In this regard, Madam Minister, for the past four years, the presence of right whales in the Gulf of St. Lawrence has had a significant impact on the industry and our communities, as you know. This year has not been easy so far, but I would like to thank you. Indeed, measures were relaxed again this year.

We have removed the static zone and set up dynamic zones. These measures were proposed to us by industry, by associations. We also brought in Canadian Coast Guard icebreakers. The hovercraft came into the area much earlier than usual. We also have a contract with an icebreaker that came in to open up the seaports in the region so that the season could start earlier. I thank you for that.

Nevertheless, it is not easy this year, as you know. Whales are in the Gulf. Several fishing areas are closed. In the past four years, we have always been able to adapt. We have also listened to the industry to ensure that the measures concerning right whales are adjusted from year to year, but also so that we do not lose the market in the United States, for example, and elsewhere in the world.

Madam Minister, as you know, fishers are a little frustrated with the situation at the moment. The community is suffering as well, and I would like to ask you this.

Are you prepared, as we have been doing for the past four years, to once again consider improvements to right whale protection measures so that fishers can bring their quotas ashore, but also so that the employees and communities depending on the fishery can make a living from this industry? The region is in great need of it.

• (1625)

[*English*]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

The harvesters in your area have faced a number of challenges this year with regard to not only COVID-19 but also weather delays, ice and, of course, now the whales returning to the area.

One of the things we have done as a government and as a department over the past number of years is to address the whale measures. Every season we look at what works, what doesn't and how we can make it better. We know we need to protect the whales for a number of reasons, not only because they are an endangered species but also because doing that is extremely important for us in our agreements with the United States for export markets. We'll continue to do that.

We want to work with the industry. Its members were the ones who worked so hard with us to come up with the measures we put in place this year to protect the whales. We'll continue to do that. It's extremely important that we continue to have those conversations.

I understand there are challenges this year. I also understand they have caught close to 80% of their quota, so it is good, but I know it's challenging with the closures because of the whales.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Minister. Again, thank you for all the work you did this year with getting the coast guard here AS-AP and also the third party agreement with our icebreaker ship.

Another thing I want to go back to is EI payments. I heard a Conservative member on a committee speaking about EI. All of a sudden Conservatives all want fishermen and seasonal workers to have EI, when in 2013, something I don't know if everyone remembers, the Harper government put the worst EI reform in place, and it hurt our region and our seasonal industry.

In the program we just announced, we said that we will look at EI for fishermen based on their previous year. As you know, there are deck men who also come into play, as well as other seasonal workers in the industry.

You said that EI will be based on the previous year. Also, the Prime Minister said that nobody will be left behind. My father was a deck man, and I hope we will think of those people also.

Can you please comment on that and where we are in the discussions regarding EI payments?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Sure, and I would like to make a correction. The EI for fish harvesters will be based on previous seasons, not necessarily the previous year. That is going to be beneficial to the people on the west coast, who did not have a great season last year. We want to make sure they're well covered.

The other thing is with regard to seasonal workers. As I said earlier, this is a much bigger conversation that we're having with ES-DC. We need to make sure seasonal workers are covered as well, and that goes for the agriculture sector, the hospitality industry and, of course, it impacts the fish and seafood sector.

I have been in conversation with Minister Qualtrough. I know she is working very hard to address these challenges because, as I said, no one will be left behind.

• (1630)

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 16 seconds. You probably don't have time to ask another question or get an answer. I apologize for that.

We'll move on, and we may get another round yet.

Madame Gill, go ahead for two and half minutes or less, please.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the minister and her team for being available during the crisis. We have had some good discussions.

However, the communication with fishers and those on the ground has been more difficult. I will use the example of a request to delay the fishing season. The fishers first received a communiqué from the department indicating that the request had been denied. The fishers therefore rushed to get ready, because the fishing season was due to start shortly thereafter. However, just as they were supposed to leave, they received a new communiqué indicating that the request had been accepted. They therefore put everything on hold.

A situation like that is very difficult for the communities. I talked about the health and economic challenges, but communication with fishers and elected officials is also an issue. Have the department and the minister looked into this issue to prepare for another crisis or emergency situation?

[English]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Madame Gill.

We have worked diligently with harvesters, processors and communities, recognizing they're the people on the ground who know what they need.

I'm a little confused, though, because you said that someone requested a delay and did not get it. Most of the delays that were requested were granted, so I would like to follow up with you on that one, unless that delay was a second delay. I don't know if Deputy Sargent would know of something specific there.

Madame Gill, could you clarify that?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Actually, people received two different communiqués. The first, in English, was received on the Lower North Shore, indicating that the request to delay the fishing season had been denied. The second indicated that the beginning of the fishing season was delayed. People therefore received two different pieces of information at approximately the same time. This caused confusion and fear in the various communities affected, that is, in fishing zone 15 in Quebec.

[English]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I'm sorry. I'm not familiar with that specific problem. I will look into it, find out and get back to you.

We work very hard to make sure that the communications we put out are correct, that the communities are listened to, that the harvesters are well consulted on what they want. We try to do everything we can to work with industry to make sure their needs are addressed.

Deputy Sargent, I don't know if you have anything you want to add or if it's something we can follow up on.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** We'd be very happy to follow up. We want to make sure our communications are clear.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for two and half minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you again, Minister, for being here today.

Minister, yesterday we talked about the Cohen commission, and you said your government is moving on all its recommendations.

Recommendation 19 falls within this COVID window. It says:

On September 30, 2020, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans should prohibit net-pen salmon farming in the Discovery Islands (fish health sub-zone 3-2) unless he or she is satisfied that such farms pose at most a minimal risk of serious harm to the health of migrating Fraser River sockeye salmon. The Minister's decision should summarize the information relied on and include detailed reasons. The decision should be published on the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' website.

There are parasitic sea lice on the average migrating salmon right now. I'm concerned, Minister. What decision are you going to be making? Will you be following through with this recommendation on September 30?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Can I turn that one over to the deputy, please?

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** We're busy compiling the risk assessments right now in order to support that particular announcement. We're not ready to make it yet, but that's certainly the date we're working toward.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay. It's three and half months out, so it's concerning, of course, for the people with the problem.

Also, in terms of the dual role, in a campaign promise in 2015, the government said it would restore its role to protect wild salmon and no longer be the agent for the aquaculture industry. Can the minister comment on where the government is at on this promise, which is five years old?

• (1635)

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Mr. Johns. As I said yesterday, I'm committed to working with the provinces and with indigenous communities to move forward responsibly to transition from open net-pen farming in coastal British Columbia. A change like this requires co-operation. It requires consultation.

Those are all things that we are working to do right now. It's not something that's just going to happen overnight, but we are working—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** It's been five years. That's longer than overnight.

Minister, to go back to Mr. Fast's question about sport fishers and recreation, they are waiting for some additional help. The current government rollout is not enough. They've asked for support, whether it be marking fish or having some support on the salmon stamp. Will you honour any of the requests from the sport sector and make sure they can get through the winter so that next year they can fish—i.e., maybe with EI, like you are giving the commercial fleet? Can you make sure that you're following through with them to support them in this difficult time?

**The Chair:** Make it a quick answer, please.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I'm sorry, but recreational fishers would not qualify for EI. EI is for commercial enterprises, not recreational. However, the people who support the industry—the guides, for example, and the people who work within the industry—are eligible for things like the CERB. They are all eligible for the business account.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** They need more. They need extra help.

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Arnold, you have five minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here for questions.

To quote from some of your own words today, the programs are here to help “through this...difficult time”. Unfortunately, time is marching on, from March, April, May and now into June. Early on you indicated that the fisheries sector would be eligible for the CEWS program and the business account program. That turned out not to be the case.

Now you've announced the seafood stabilization fund and the fish harvesters grant. Both of those announcements have been out, but not a penny has flowed. That's not helping harvesters and processors through these difficult times. When can fish harvesters and processors expect to see those applications open online and see dollars flowing after those applications are open?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Mr. Arnold. As I have said on a number of occasions today, this is a brand new program. It's something that has to be built from the ground up. We are work-

ing with ESDC, which is responsible for the program, to make sure that it's rolled out as quickly as possible. We are doing everything we have to do to make sure it gets rolled out quickly.

The thing that harvesters can be assured of is that the money is coming. It is there. It's almost half a billion dollars—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you, Minister. That is not helping the harvesters and processors through these difficult times; it will be after difficult times.

Minister, during the study of regulations of B.C. fisheries, there were indications of foreign entities being able to buy up licences out there. Are you at all concerned that these problems may grow during this unprecedented time in Canada, when fishery and fish processing businesses are finding themselves in difficult times, and that foreign ownership by state-owned entities may become a problem? What is your department doing to prevent it?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Mr. Arnold. That is something we're very much apprised of. It's something we are monitoring. We will make sure that we're taking everything that is... A company has to be 51% Canadian-owned. We work with people at ISED to make sure that anything that is transferred is actually within the regulations.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you, Minister.

You've been questioned a number of times about the west coast fisheries, particularly the sport fishery. I refer to it as the “public food fishery”, because many on the west coast actually harvest those fish for their dinner table. All that's really needed there is a decision by you to enable those fisheries to take place.

The sport fishing advisory board, which has been in place for years, has agreed on the recommendation to open those mark-selective fisheries. It really is an enabling factor that you yourself could make a difference on, if you chose to. The delay, through the explanation that you need the data and the science, is hurting people on the ground—the fishing guides and fishermen and families who simply want to go out and put food on their table. Why has there been such a delay in making a decision?

• (1640)

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** As I have said, I am not averse to a mark-selective fishery. I think there is a great opportunity there. However, there are a number of concerns that we have with regard to this, which we want to make sure we address before that becomes a reality.

We are doing some pilot projects now in specific areas with hatchery fish. There are concerns within first nations communities. There are concerns within environmental groups about the impacts that hatchery fish would have on wild Pacific salmon stocks. These are all things that have to be taken into consideration. It's not as cut and dry as you seem to think, and it's also not a silver bullet, with all of the challenges the wild Pacific salmon are facing right now.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** No, but it certainly could be a big help, Minister, if you would move that priority up. I spoke with you directly on that, I believe in late March or early April. I hope you realize the importance of that to the west coast fisheries.

Minister, would you provide clarification, either today or in writing, about the EI changes that will need to be made so that fish harvesters and their crews are eligible for EI and whether that is going to require legislation. If so, with the House of Commons and Parliament basically being shut down by our Prime Minister, how is that going to take place if it requires legislation?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** As I said earlier, I'm not sure that it does require legislation. We will definitely look into that and follow up.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go on to Mr. Hardie for five minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you again for being here, Minister.

Parliament took a shot at it this afternoon and it didn't work so well, so we're going to need to do a little bit more consensus building, I think, among our opposition colleagues to get some of these things done.

I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Cormier. He'll want to get a question in.

We really have to focus on the east coast, where there are some major processing plants, as we don't have major processing plants so much on the west coast anymore. In the work that's been done, have you noticed, Minister, whether those plants are going to have to, in the longer run, make some significant changes to their physical plant in order to maintain social distancing, to operate safely so that workers, unlike in the beef and pork sector, don't get sick?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you, Mr. Hardie. That's a really important question.

I will say that processors have been working very diligently to put measures in place to make sure that their workers are protected. Some of them have been very innovative in some of the things they've been doing. They've been bringing in trailers so that people can socially distance at break times. They're putting in Plexiglas between workers. These things are all going to be ongoing.

Of course, we don't know how long COVID-19 challenges will last until we have a vaccine. These are all measures that are being put in place now, but they are definitely going to be beneficial to the processing sector for the long run.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Have the processors been made aware that there's always a risk of another wave? As well, what have we heard from the provincial health authorities about the safeguards being put in place? Have there been any reported cases of COVID-19 among workers and processors?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** With regard to the provinces, I was meeting weekly with my provincial counterparts on the east coast for about the first three months. It's recently moved to biweekly. We've had a lot of good discussions about the processing sector—of

course the province is responsible for that sector—and making sure they have the protocols in place.

They have been very diligently working within the industry themselves. They recognize the importance of the fish and seafood sector to our coastal communities, so they want to make sure they're doing everything they can to support them.

With regard to cases, I'm going to turn it over to the deputy here. I'm not sure if there have been any reported cases of COVID. I believe there was one in Quebec, but I might be wrong on that.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** We don't have confirmation. I know there were suspected cases, one instance in Quebec, but I don't know if that case was actually confirmed.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** All right. Thank you for that.

We haven't talked a lot about the far north or the freshwater fisheries in the Great Lakes and Lake Winnipeg. What oversight have you had on those areas? What issues have you heard come up, and what has been your response?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** With regard to the freshwater inland fisheries, first of all the Canadian seafood stabilization fund is available to the Prairies as well, for inland processors. The fish harvester benefit is available to all harvesters in the country who have a valid licence, so also in Ontario. Of course, in Ontario, processors have the ability to access the RDAs, which will have programs similar to the seafood stabilization fund.

We're making sure we're addressing all of the concerns we're hearing about right across the country.

• (1645)

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Thank you.

I'm going to turn the last minute over to Mr. Cormier, as promised.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, you said we need to work together. The provinces and the territories are included too. The fisheries are not only a federal jurisdiction, because the provinces have a role to play as well.

Since the beginning of this pandemic in New Brunswick, Premier Higgs, a Conservative, has been the last premier in Canada to help his fellow citizens.

When I hear the Conservative committee members also asking for employment insurance flexibility, I wonder what country they live in. We must remember that in 2013, they went ahead with the worst reform of employment insurance ever. It hurt our economy and our fishers very badly. Premier Higgs said that people in New Brunswick were living on an employment insurance system that no longer exists, one of 10 weeks' work for 42 weeks of benefits.

My question is this, Minister. Have you had discussions with the provincial fisheries minister? Did he tell you whether New Brunswick is going to put money on the table to help New Brunswick fishers at this time?

[English]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I will say that the conversations I've had with the provincial ministers have been very beneficial. They are people I've done a lot of work with to come up with the benefits. They've been very supportive of the harvester benefits, as well as the grant and the EI changes. They recognize how important that is. I will also say, though, that it's critical that we get this out the door as quickly as possible. We know that the harvesters are in need of this money.

With regard to the provinces, one thing that was a bit of a challenge with New Brunswick was that they were not allowing temporary workers in when our processing facilities desperately needed them. That also set us back a bit. We know they made those decisions based on what they needed, but our processors desperately needed temporary foreign workers, and they were not able to get them at the very start of the pandemic.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go to Mr. Bragdon for five minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Mr. Chair, I'm relinquishing my time to Mr. d'Entremont.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. d'Entremont.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Thank you so much.

Mr. Hardie, thank you for the comment that we all need to find consensus, and it does take work with all members of the House of Commons to make that happen. I do want to thank you for that comment.

Scallop fishermen are going fishing soon. Since we're all talking about our own pedigree, my father was a scallop fisherman for many years. We know that's a larger vessel, with 19 people going out fishing all at the same time.

Have any of those organizations grabbed onto some of this funding to help them physically distance on board some of these boats, which is almost impossible to do?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I'm not sure about who has reached out specifically with regard to that.

We've put in place a number of suggestions to the provinces on how to work socially distant on a boat, because we recognize it is a challenge. There are challenges like making sure you have the same crew all the time; making sure that, if you can't physically distance, you wear a mask; and making sure that when you are on land, you're home, as opposed to being out in the community, before you go back out. These are all things that we've asked to be put in place and the province has been working on that.

I'm not sure if the deputy has any comments about the scallop fleets specifically. I'll see if he has anything to add there.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** I have nothing to add to that, Minister.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Let me expand that just a little bit from a scallop fleet to the groundfish fleet.

We're talking about smaller vessels with three people fishing on board, and now we have observers having to come on board. I know that three people who are normally from the same communi-

ty, fishing on the same boat, can socially distance or at least trust one another, but they don't know where those observers are coming from.

Can you comment a little bit on that one?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** The at-sea observer program is critical in order to have the science so that we can make the right management decisions. It's also part of an agreement we have with the United States that they are part of our processes.

We recognize that it's going to be challenging for people. We're trying to be flexible. The thing is that the harvesters, as well as the observers, have to feel that they're safe on the boat. It's a two-way street. It's not just one or the other; it's both of them. This is definitely something we'll be working on, but we recognize that we need to have those observers on the boats. It's a critical piece of science for the industry.

• (1650)

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** I know five minutes goes by quickly here. On the elvers issue, I brought this up a couple of times in the House of Commons during question period, and I have brought this to your attention a couple of times.

The elvers restriction has been extended for another 45 days as of June 11. Can you give us a quick rundown of why it was extended again? We have some organizations that really want to get fishing.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** With regard to the elver fishery, we have to make this decision based on conservation. We were very concerned about the stocks this year. Initially, a 45-day restriction was put in place, and now it's extended because we still have concerns around the stock. We are now consulting with the industry and with indigenous communities to figure out the best way forward. We want to make sure that we do everything we can to conserve this species so that it can be fished for generations to come.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Way back in March, I brought up the issue of marketing. As the markets collapsed, some of our products weren't able to get to where they normally go. How have these programs been able to help organizations market their product worldwide to try to get some of those markets back to normal?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** We're working on a number of different initiatives with regard to marketing, of course with provinces and territories, and we are also looking at the Canadian seafood stabilization fund. It's able to provide funding for processors who may need to remarket their products. For example, if their packaging was translated for an Asian market, they can now use this funding to rebrand their product for the French and English markets. There are funds available to help with those types of things as well.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** I have lobster tonight, so I will be eating lobster and some fresh seafood.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Good for you.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** You could pop by, but I'm socially distancing right now.

Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. d'Entremont. You're a little ahead of time and saved a few seconds.

Mr. Morrissey, you have five minutes or less, please, and I'd prefer a little less.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Thank you, Chair. You're so generous.

Minister, I want to take you back to a question you answered. Maybe you could clarify, because this is something I'm hearing from some fishers. You referred to how fishers could also participate in the fishery financial package and in EI as well if they chose not to fish. Did I hear you correctly? Could you expand on that? There is a bit of uncertainty out there.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Yes. The fishers' EI is going to be available based on the previous seasons—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Whether they fish this year or not....

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** That is correct, I believe.

Deputy Sargent, is that correct?

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** What about the other two parts of the program? If they choose not to participate because it's not financially viable for them, are they able to participate in those as well?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Yes, they are.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Okay. Thank you, Minister. That will ease a lot of minds in the fishery.

Comments were made earlier, and I agree. We all braced ourselves this year for a problematic fishery, which we had little control over as politicians and government, given the quick state of the world economy shutting down, but I must say that it is unfolding better than I expected.

One of the areas I would ask you to keep a close eye on, Minister, is this. Because of the lack of markets in some areas, there is lobster product that may make its way into the marketplace and does not come through regulated, registered processors. This is something we have to be diligent about, to make sure that it does not find its way into the market. That could be negatively received if anything happened. Are you aware of that?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Yes, I am. It is something we are very aware of. It is a concern. You're right. Of course, I would suggest that people who see that should be reporting it.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** I'm glad that the department is aware of this, because we will emerge from this situation and the fishery will continue to be very strong in the future.

Briefly, I would like to go back again to the need to market this better in Canada. Could you expand on that or comment a bit more? It's amazing that right across the country we're not fully familiar with the quality of seafood from the east coast here and with the importance of being able to get product....

We now have the capacity and the capability to get product in a high-quality state right across this country. How are you looking at that this year, when we need to expand that market right here in our own country?

• (1655)

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** This is one of the things we've seen. It's interesting that it took a pandemic for us to see that Canadians don't buy enough seafood. This is something we've been talking about since the start of the pandemic. People need to be aware that not only is this supporting our rural coastal communities, but it's good for you. It's part of the food chain and an excellent source of protein, and it's delicious. You can't go wrong with Canadian seafood.

We are working with our provincial counterparts to come up with ideas for marketing. We're hoping that we'll have something to announce very soon on that. Hopefully, within the next week or so, we'll be able to make some announcements with regard to some marketing plans that we're going to be putting in place.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Minister, going back to a question that was raised with you by my colleague Mr. Cormier, have the provinces been at the table financially to assist on this troubling year within the fishery? We know there are issues of young fishers entering the fishery with high debt loads, but for most of the past, financing of the fishery was a responsibility of provincial administration, governments and their agencies.

Could you comment on your discussions in that area? Are the provinces prepared to act in an area they have control over, which is debt relief on financing?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I do meet with my provincial counterparts. I know that some of them have stepped up with some aid. It's not nearly as much as what is needed, obviously, but we're still working with them.

I don't know, Deputy Sargent, if you have anything you can add there.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** I know that Nova Scotia, for instance, is looking at its loan program, but of course the provinces are in a much more difficult fiscal position than the federal government and have been very much looking to the federal government. We do have a series of programs already with the provinces, such as the B.C. salmon restoration fund and the Atlantic fish funds, and of course we've been working with the provinces to make sure we get that money out the door as quickly as possible.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Gill, go ahead for two and a half minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I am going to give my time to my colleague Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** I would like to thank the Minister and those with her for being here.

Madam Minister, I ask myself this question: if the global health crisis had occurred at a different time of year, would the impact on the fishing industry have been any less catastrophic? In any event, there is nothing we can do to change things.

Has your department assessed the impact of the pandemic on the fishing industry in general, but particularly on the sharp decline in fishing income?

[*English*]

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you for the very, very good question. Of course, since the onset of the pandemic, we have been working to address the issues immediately because we know that's what we need to do. This is an immediate concern. One of the things we have seen, of course, is where there are gaps within the sector, within the industry, and how we can best fill those as we go forward. I have said from the start that there has to be an immediate response, then a mid-term response, and then a long-term response to the industry and what it needs.

We're going to continue to work with the industry to fill the gaps and to find where the challenges are. We have seen things like the programs that are in place in agriculture; we don't have an equivalent in fisheries. These are all questions we're asking ourselves now, and how we can best go forward to continue to grow our industry.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Madam Minister, from a scientific standpoint, has your department taken steps or will it take steps to quantify the effects of the almost complete cancellation of the fishing season on stocks of the various species? In other words, could a complete cessation of fishing activity have a significant impact, either positive or negative, on the balance in the various ecosystems?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Give a very quick answer, please.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I'm going to turn this question over to the deputy, please.

• (1700)

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** Sure. It's very much going to vary stock by stock. In some stocks, fishing activity significantly affects the population, and for other stocks the impact is much reduced. Certainly our science activity is continuing. It's been a little slower to get it going this year, obviously, because of the crisis, but we are confident that we'll be able to measure impacts on fish stocks, both of the changes in fishing activity and of all the other things that go on normally in a marine environment.

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

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you again, Minister, for being here and answering a lot of tough questions.

Minister, my concern, which I raised with your department last week, is around foreign licensing. Can you talk about the impact foreign licensing is having right now on our commercial fleet dur-

ing COVID? I know that many of the harvesters are looking for some fairness in terms of a better deal in the breakdown of the leasing of that quota. For example, some harvesters have leased based on last year's market price. They're locked into those deals before they even leave the dock. They're locked into a price that's way above what the market is right now, because those global market channels are shut down or are very slow-moving.

Has the government looked at maybe a fifty-fifty split that it can mandate so that local Canadian fishers and harvesters are able to survive this season?

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I'm going to turn this over to the deputy minister.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** I'm going to turn it over to Jean-Guy Forgeron.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** As I mentioned last week, the department doesn't have a global policy on foreign ownership, one policy across the country. We have no particular foreign ownership rules on the west coast, and we have two sets on the east coast: one for the inshore fishery, which has no foreign ownership, and then one—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm focused on the west coast, sorry. I'd like your response to that.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** As a result of the comments and deliberations of this committee last year on the west coast licensing information, we decided, as a department, to launch a pan-Canadian policy review on the issue of foreign policy ownership to see what the right answer is, not only from a national perspective but also from a regional perspective. We launched that work recently.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Can we get a commitment from the government that it's going to at least start making sure Canadians know who owns those fishing licences and where those people live outside the country? Will it stop the sale of quota outside of Canada so that Canadian fishers get priority in buying licences? This question is for the minister.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** I'm going to turn that over to the deputy minister.

**Mr. Timothy Sargent:** We're well aware that transparency is very much lacking in this area. We do need to do more work to establish the actual beneficial ownership of these licences. As Jean-Guy said, we've launched policy work that will very much focus on that, as well as on other issues of foreign ownership of licences.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'll just say that—

**The Chair:** Thank you, everyone. We've gone a bit over time.

I'll give a big thank you, of course, to the minister for being here for the second day in a row and taking all the questions from the members of the committee. It's not every day that we get to see the minister two days in a row, or any department, for that matter. I thank the officials as well. I know it's not easy to carve out this amount of time with such a large contingent of staff, so a big thank you to all of you.

**Hon. Bernadette Jordan:** Thank you very much, everyone. I want to thank Chris d'Entremont for inviting me to his place for lobster tonight.

**The Chair:** We'd all go, but he's social distancing.

The meeting is adjourned.

Thank you to the committee for your indulgence over the last two days. I look forward to seeing you all again on Tuesday. Have a good weekend.

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