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# Standing Committee on International Trade

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 106**

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

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Chair: The Honourable Judy A. Sgro





## Standing Committee on International Trade

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order. There are six of us here, so we can get the meeting going and hear the witnesses.

Welcome to meeting number 106 of the Standing Committee on International Trade.

Before we begin, I'd like to ask all members and remind other in-person participants to consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents.

Please take note of the following preventative measures in place to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters.

Use only an approved black earpiece; the former grey earpieces must no longer be used. Keep your earpiece away from all microphones at all times. When you are not using your earpiece, place it face down on the sticker placed on the table for this purpose.

Thank you all for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

For members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function.

As a reminder, all comments should go through the chair.

If any technical issues arise, please inform me immediately. We will suspend to ensure interpretation is available for everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, October 17, 2023, the committee is beginning its study of the effects of American and European seafood import policies on the fishing industry in Canada.

You should have all received a copy of a draft budget of approximately \$20,000 for this study.

Does anyone have any concerns with that budget?

I move for approval.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

We have with us today for our first panel, from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Sylvain Vézina, regional director general, Quebec region, by video conference; Adwaite Tiwary, director,

trade and market policy; and Todd Williams, acting director general, fisheries resource management.

Following that, we will have, from the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Michelle Cooper, director general, market access secretariat.

Welcome to you all. You understand how these processes work, so we've started our meeting so that we can hear from all of you. We will, at the appropriate time, suspend for the vote and then resume again following the vote, with approval from the committee members.

Mr. Tiwary, I invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary (Director, Trade and Market Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Good afternoon, Madam Chair and committee members.

My name is Adwaite Tiwary. I'm the director of trade and market policy at Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

• (1535)

[English]

I'm joined here today by my colleagues Todd Williams, acting director general, fisheries resource management; and Sylvain Vézina, regional director general for the Quebec region.

[Translation]

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee on behalf of the department to discuss Canada's international trade in sustainably harvested and responsibly sourced fish and seafood products.

[English]

My team's role within the department is to support the sector's economic growth by helping it access markets and identify opportunities to diversify. My team also contributes towards DFO's mandate to ensure that trade in fish and seafood is supported by ambitious bilateral and multilateral trade agreement provisions geared towards sustainability and conservation of marine resources. As part of this work, my team works closely with Global Affairs Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

[Translation]

Canada's reputation for high-quality and sustainably harvested fish and seafood is well established. We're well positioned to meet certain market access requirements.

The numbers speak for themselves. For example, last year, Canada exported \$7.6 billion worth of fish and seafood to 115 countries. Of this figure, \$4.9 billion went to the United States, our largest export market, and \$421 million to the European Union, our third-largest export market.

[English]

As we are here today to talk about trade with the United States and the European Union, it is important to note that Canada has trade agreements with both the U.S. and the EU. The Canada-U.S.-Mexico agreement, or CUSMA, and the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, or CETA, support consistent and stable market access for our fish and seafood products.

[Translation]

That said, market access requirements and policies can evolve over time. I acknowledge that some measures proposed by the United States and the European Union may have implications for Canada.

[English]

Concerning the United States, this market has distinct requirements, including those related to the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act, or MMPA. The MMPA provisions seek to protect marine mammals from being harmed during fishing and aquaculture operations.

Starting in 2026, to maintain access to the U.S., harvesting nations that export fish or fish products must have measures in place that are comparable to U.S. standards to reduce the bycatch of marine mammals during commercial fishing and aquaculture operations.

Turning now to the EU, a few market access requirements are noteworthy.

For instance, in 2009, the European Union introduced a new regulation to ensure that products derived from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing do not enter that jurisdiction. The EU IUU regulation requires all countries that export fish and seafood to provide a catch certificate for each shipment exported.

In response, Canada developed a catch certification program. The program supports Canada's role more broadly in preventing, deterring and eliminating IUU fishing.

[Translation]

I want to focus now on seal products. The European Union was once Canada's largest market for seal products, with sales reaching \$5.4 million in 2006. In 2009, the European Union introduced regulations that banned the import and sale of all seal products. Since then, sales have been close to zero. Some exceptions were introduced in 2015 for indigenous certified products and goods pur-

chased by travellers for personal use. Despite these exceptions, Canada's market for seal products never recovered.

[English]

On May 15, 2024, the European Commission launched an evaluation of the effectiveness of the seal ban. DFO is working closely with stakeholders and federal departments on this process. We want to ensure that the EU takes into consideration the sustainable and humane nature of Canada's seal hunt, that the voices of Canada's sealing sector are heard, and that the EU understands the impact of the ban on our coastal and indigenous communities.

[Translation]

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to answering your questions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Tiwary. Now we will open the floor for questions.

Mr. Martel, go ahead for six minutes, please.

● (1540)

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

My first question is for Mr. Vézina.

I'll start by talking about the new requirements imposed by the United States in the Marine Mammal Protection Act, or MMPA.

I would like you to elaborate on this topic, especially when it comes to the restrictions and their implications for Canada.

**Mr. Sylvain Vézina (Regional Director General, Quebec Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Thank you for your question.

My colleagues at headquarters would be in a better position to respond.

[English]

**Mr. Todd Williams (Acting Director General, Fisheries Resource Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** First, I'll speak in relation to the Marine Mammal Protection Act, or MMPA. In terms of context, this act was introduced during the Nixon era in the United States. Only more recently was it enforced in particular provisions around the protection of marine mammals as they relate to the importation of fish and seafood products to the United States. The act requires that those importing fish and seafood to the United States have a regime comparable, in terms of the efficacy of measures, to the United States regime. This means, for example, that when we export snow crab to the United States, we have measures in place to protect North Atlantic right whales, which are endangered. The measures we have may not be identical to those in the United States but are seen, in their eyes, as equally as effective.

In terms of what DFO is doing, the United States has requested information from us to ensure it is comparable with the measures they have. We've provided them with all of that information and replied to various inquiries. They have, however, delayed the implementation of this for another year. The deadline was supposed to be in November of last year, and they have extended that. However, we remain, as far as we know, in compliance. We're working with our U.S. counterparts in that regard, to ensure that our products can continue to be exported to the United States.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Do you think that these requirements harm Quebec's fish and seafood industry?

If so, how could this impact be minimized?

[English]

**Mr. Todd Williams:** I think, on the contrary, that as long as we remain in compliance.... In fact, the Quebec and Canadian industries as a whole will benefit. The measures we put in place to protect the North Atlantic right whale, as an example, are designed to protect while at the same time remain flexible for industry. We have worked with the various impacted fleets to maintain a level of flexibility in that, whether it's adjusting the season date or looking at and investing in new gear, which can be deployed using less rope and less risk of entanglements.

The work we have been doing helps ensure we maintain access to this very important market.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Is Canada imposing stricter rules on imports from the United States?

[English]

**Mr. Todd Williams:** I can't speak about the importation of fish products. That would not fall within the mandate of DFO, or at least fisheries management.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Okay.

Does the blue economy take into account the economic benefits of the recreational fishery?

• (1545)

[English]

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary:** Just to clarify, is the question whether blue economy policy has anything to do with the recreational fishery?

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Yes.

[English]

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary:** Our team at trade and market policy does not work on the issue of recreational fisheries.

I work in blue economy policy. Our focus has been on supporting our sustainably harvested fish products through commercially managed fisheries.

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

Mr. Miao, please, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the officials for being here today for this important study.

Of course, Canada produces some of the highest-quality seafood. Where I am from, British Columbia, geoduck and spot prawns are in season right now. To ensure quality control for all our seafood exports, our country relies on the CFIA, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, for regulating and labelling.

How does the CFIA—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. The bells are ringing. There's a call for a vote, but it's in 14 minutes.

Would the committee want to continue on and stop two minutes before the vote, or do you want longer than that?

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Madam Chair, I believe that there are two more votes. There will be three votes in total. You're proposing that... I forgot that there won't be any bells for the other votes. We can continue the meeting for 15 minutes, but we'll still need to vote.

[English]

**The Chair:** I think it's a more efficient way if we can stop, vote and then go back to our work.

Yes, Mr. Cannings.

**Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP):** I'm guessing that although these are to be very short bells, they won't be. They say the bells right after QP are 15-minute bells, but they never are.

**The Chair:** They have called it, so it's 13 minutes and 48 seconds now.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Okay, so let's keep going, and then there will be three in a row without bells.

**The Chair:** If everybody's in agreement, we will stop two minutes before this vote. We'll vote and then go back to our work, and then we'll do the next vote.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** There are three votes in a row. We can't come back to our work. We have to do the votes.

**The Chair:** We will stop in two minutes to vote, and we will resume following the third vote.

I'm sorry, Mr. Miao.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** It's not a problem. Let me start the question again.

To ensure quality control for our seafood exports, Canada relies on the CFIA's labelling and regulations. How does the CFIA's regulatory framework compare with those of our American and European counterparts in this case?

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary:** To support our sector in terms of their exports around the world, we do work closely with the CFIA, but I cannot speak to their regulations. That's probably best directed to the CFIA.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** Can you share with us what the difference is in the regulatory frameworks between Canada and other countries?

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary:** This is from a CFIA perspective about their regulations. I would suggest that be redirected to the CFIA. I'm not familiar with those regulations. Those are not for DFO.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** Okay. I will move on to the next question.

The seafood industry is valued at over \$4 billion in Atlantic Canada right now. The industry is vital to the economies of coastal and indigenous communities, but the processing of seafood is regulated by the province. Are there variations in regulation between the Atlantic provinces when it comes to seafood processing?

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary:** That is something that would not be within the purview of our team. We work on trade and market policy issues, but if there's interest, we can respond to any questions and follow up.

• (1550)

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** If you could, please share some insights on how much seafood is being traded right now between Canada and the Americans and also the European countries.

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary:** In terms of trade statistics, that information is something we do have, and that is also publicly available.

The U.S. remains our biggest market. For example, to give you a figure, in 2023 the total exports to the U.S. were about \$4.9 billion. Exports to the European Union in 2023 were \$421 million. Total seafood exports from Canada in 2023 were \$7.6 billion.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** If there's more data that you can share, share it with the committee, please.

Let's get into how we are protecting our seafood sector right now. What things can Canada do to ensure that our waters are able to literally support marine life so that we don't see any loss of the ecosystem due to climate change or other effects on the important aquatic species?

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary:** That is not something our team is directly implicated in in terms of exports. Our focus is really helping the sector when it is selling its products to other countries or other markets.

If there's a general question about climate change, for example, or ocean science or marine protection, that will be for other parts of DFO. We could respond in a follow-up answer if there's interest.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** What is—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Miao. Your time is up at this point.

We'll go to Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses.

My question is for the department officials. First, I'll give you some background.

Last November, we learned that the United States would wait until late 2025 to assess the practices of its trading partners before de-

terminating whether the marine mammal protection measures are sufficient, meaning whether they meet the American standards.

The United States is currently banning the import of seafood products whose fishing could cause accidental death or serious injury to marine mammals, such as the endangered right whale found in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. This fishing zone is used by Quebec and Maritime fishers. We know that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the American equivalent of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, could simply decide to deny Quebec and Canada access to the American market as of January 1, 2026, if it finds the Canadian measures insufficient. There may be a trade dispute.

You provided some statistics on exports. Can you give us some statistics on the number of jobs in this field in Canada? How many fishers do we have here?

[English]

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary:** It's about data on fishing jobs. We can check within DFO whether we have that data available.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** So you don't know the number of fishers in Quebec and Canada at this time.

[English]

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary:** I don't have the data in front of me right now. We can ask the economic shop within DFO whether it has that information.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** This would be useful. If we sense a looming trade war with the Americans, which could escalate, we should at least know how many jobs are at risk. This doesn't reassure me. I don't get the impression that Canada is preparing properly.

Are there any discussions with the Americans on this topic?

[English]

**Mr. Todd Williams:** It's important to note that we have very good relations with the U.S. government, both at the working level and at more senior levels, regarding the implementation and compliance under their Marine Mammal Protection Act. Certainly, we have received no indication to date that we are not in compliance with the provisions of their legislation, and DFO is doing everything in its power to ensure that the United States has all of the information it needs to make those determinations.

We can certainly follow up on the statistics. It is sometimes challenging even to classify those numbers exactly in terms of who is dependent on the fishery and who is a licence-holder, and then more broadly in the processing sector, but we have that information and we can follow up in writing with the committee.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** I want to believe that discussions are taking place and that relations are good. However, in many cases, such as the softwood lumber dispute, the news and courts have proven us right. A trade war could still happen, and protectionist measures could be introduced fairly soon. January 1, 2026 is just around the corner. We can already see it coming. I want to make sure that we're well prepared for it.

Aside from discussions and information sharing, what's happening right now? What steps are being taken?

[*English*]

**Mr. Todd Williams:** We are in regular contact with our counterparts, again, at a variety of levels within the United States. We know, from conversations with other countries, that we're receiving the same information they are in terms of the U.S. government's ongoing work to implement the MMPA.

I can't speak to the broader trade issues the honourable member mentioned, but certainly, on this particular file, I can say the relationship is very good.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** We also know that lobster fishers use some seal parts as bait. Is that right? Could you tell us about the American policies in this area?

[*English*]

**Mr. Todd Williams:** I'd like to provide a few points for context. One, DFO does not regulate bait and what's used as bait. That is really a decision by fish harvesters. Two, there was a company, and perhaps others, who were exploring the use of seal and seal parts as bait, and it was seeing some success in regard to that.

DFO was asked whether or not those who fished using seal as bait would be in compliance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act. We asked the United States government, and, unfortunately, they informed us that those harvesters who fished using seal as bait would not be in compliance with the MMPA and would further risk, more broadly, all exports of that species to the United States.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Cannings, would you like one minute to get a question in for any of these witnesses?

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Will I have an opportunity later?

**The Chair:** By the time we finish, we'll be into the next round of witnesses, I'm afraid.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Perhaps we should have shortened the rounds, because I'd like at least a minute.

**The Chair:** Go right ahead.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I don't know what to do now. Maybe I'll go to the....

**The Chair:** Keep going, Mr. Cannings. We'll give you as much as we can.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I'll start with seals and see how far I get.

I'm interested in the comment you made about how the EU is reconsidering or reanalyzing the sealing ban. I'm just wondering what that ban was based on. Was it sustainability, or was about the fact that seals are mammals and the method of the hunt? Which was it, and why are they reconsidering that?

**Mr. Adwaite Tiwary:** The EU said they were concerned about the way the seals were being hunted.

Just last week, they announced that they would be seeking feedback on the EU regulations about the ban. The consultation was launched on May 15 and will go on until August 7, so for another couple of months.

There are a couple of exceptions to the current ban. One is the indigenous exception for products that are certified as having been harvested by those who are indigenous.

We are working with stakeholders, with indigenous communities and with the governments of Northwest Territories and Nunavut to provide our perspective.

• (1600)

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Okay. Just quickly, with respect to the other issues with the MMPA, how are the American methods different from ours? Why do they even have to consider what we're doing? It seems as though we're doing a lot.

**Mr. Todd Williams:** It's important to understand that the regulatory environment and context within the United States are different from those in Canada. In many respects, the regulatory system within DFO is, in some cases, superior. We have the flexibility to dynamically open and close certain fishing areas in which marine mammals, such as the North Atlantic right whale, may be present, and they can't easily do that, so they use other measures as a way to mitigate risk, including looking at the type of gear that is used, how much gear, in what capacity—

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

I apologize to our witnesses, but the time is short. We will suspend until we've completed the three votes.

Thank you.

• (1600)

(Pause)

• (1640)

**The Chair:** I'm calling the meeting back to order. Thank you very much, everybody.

We have with us by video conference, from the Bay of Fundy Inshore Fisherman's Association, Colin Sproul, president.

From the Canadian Whale Institute, we have Moira Brown, senior scientist, who is also here by video conference.

Welcome. We will start with opening remarks from both of you.

Mr. Sproul, I invite you to give opening remarks for up to five minutes, please.

**Mr. Colin Sproul (President, Bay of Fundy Inshore Fishermen's Association):** Madam Chair, thank you very much for this opportunity to share our views.

I appear before you today on behalf of the Bay of Fundy Inshore Fishermen's Association, where I serve as president. For 28 years we have represented owner-operator fishing families on the shores of the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia. Our group has a distinguished history of advocating for sustainable fishing practices and community-based fisheries management.

Over this time, our commitment to responsible use of resources has led us to partnerships with many groups in academia and the conservation community. We have a history of co-operation with governments and regulators at all levels, which has earned us a reputation as a valuable ally on ocean issues. Our members are proud of this legacy and are committed to preserving our way of life for future generations of Nova Scotians.

Today more than ever, international regulatory developments are having a direct effect on harvesters. In the past, these issues were more the concern of the export side of the industry, but today fishermen face direct calls for action on our part.

The most prominent of these today is the United States Marine Mammal Protection Act and the need for Canadian fishermen to comply with similar standards to retain market access in the U.S. for Canadian seafood products.

To facilitate this, a massive effort is taking place and continues to evolve, as conservation groups and fishing organizations work co-operatively with regulators to assure our American friends that we can and will do our part to conserve and protect marine mammals on our fishing grounds. We believe this co-operative approach is the correct one, and it has been guided by organizations like the Canadian Whale Institute and the Canadian Wildlife Federation.

These groups in particular understand the needs and priorities of the fishing industry and make great efforts to seek our [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] work collaboratively with harvesters.

The Government of Canada can assist in these important developments by continuing to create room for industry perspectives when considering the funding of NGO projects in this sphere.

It's a fact that our industry can co-operate with these organizations and achieve better outcomes for all stakeholders when our views are respected and included in decision-making. It's incumbent on government to support their important work, not groups that only seek to obstruct an industry so important to our economy.

It's imperative that the government strive to communicate our successes to American regulators and consumers. Many inaccuracies reported in the U.S. go unchallenged by DFO.

Most recently, American regulators have mandated an increase to the minimum-size lobster that can be harvested in U.S. waters in an effort to boost the numbers of juvenile lobster in the Gulf of Maine. This has presented Canadian harvesters with a dilemma. Do we follow suit and increase our minimum size?

This would result in lower initial landings, due to a size class of lobster that was previously harvestable being thrown back. On the other hand, not taking any action could result in the loss of U.S. market access, which is something our industry cannot afford, as America represents a significant share of the marketplace.

There are still areas where more work must be done. One is connecting inshore independent harvesters directly to international marketplaces. This valuable idea has seen little effort by government.

Perhaps most important to note is the failure of this government to appoint a fisheries conservation ambassador of Canada to represent our industry on behalf of all Canadians. This negligence sometimes leaves the industry voiceless at international tables or sees our voice replaced by transnational ENGOs with their own self-serving agendas and foreign funding.

The truth is that we have a story that deserves to be told abroad. It's a positive one of respect for the waters we rely on, of a commitment to science-based fisheries management and of the will to work co-operatively with our domestic and international partners in an effort to build value and sustainability in Atlantic Canada's most important industry.

Thank you, committee members. I invite your questions.

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

Ms. Brown, the floor is yours, please, for up to five minutes.

**Dr. Moira Brown (Senior Scientist, Canadian Whale Institute):** Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members.

My name is Dr. Moira Brown. I'm a senior scientist with the Canadian Whale Institute located on Campobello Island, New Brunswick, off the shores of the Bay of Fundy. I'm also a scientist emerita at the New England Aquarium in Boston, Massachusetts. My research career has spanned 39 years and has been focused on the science and conservation of the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale throughout its range in Canada and the United States.



Some of the results of this research have been used to develop right whale recovery and action plans in Canada under the Species at Risk Act. Early on, my conservation work focused on working with the shipping industry to reduce the risk of vessel-whale collisions in the Maritimes. I led a working group of industry stakeholders, scientists, Canadian government regulators and many mariners to gain the adoption of two measures that have reduced the risk of vessel strikes in the Bay of Fundy and south of Nova Scotia in Roseway Basin—the two critical habitats for North Atlantic right whales. Starting in about 2010, right whales demonstrated a shift in their habitat, and many have moved from the Gulf of Maine and the Bay of Fundy to areas in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. However, they still continue to come to the two critical habitat areas, just not for as long or in anywhere near as many numbers.

More recently, I've been working on Canada's response to entangled whales in partnership with the DFO marine mammal response program. The Campobello whale rescue team is part of the Canadian Whale Institute and the primary responder for entangled whales in the waters of the maritime provinces and Quebec. That includes the Bay of Fundy around Nova Scotia, the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence estuary. We've also started working with fish harvesters over the last few years in these waters to try to reduce entanglement through various means, including trials with rope-on-demand technology, also called, by some, "whalesafe gear".

I continue to participate in several government-led advisory groups to reduce large vessel strikes throughout Canadian waters on the east coast and entanglement in commercial fishing gear. We've had terrific success working with fishers on these issues. Most of the responders on our whale rescue team are actually fish harvesters themselves who started as volunteers in this work and are now on standby to respond about eight months of the year.

I hope I can help you with your questions, and I look forward to it.

Thank you.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Brown.

It's over to Mr. Baldinelli for six minutes.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC):** Thank you, Chair. I'd like to thank our witnesses for being here this afternoon.

I'm going to start with Mr. Sproul.

Thank you for your testimony. I can readily see, thanks to having the officials here earlier, the importance of the fishery sector. I mean, it's \$7.6 billion in exports to 115 countries. Of course, our number one market, the U.S., alone is at \$4.9 billion.

Mr. Sproul, you talked about a couple of things, not only your association, its membership and the concept of responsible actions you're taking. You talked about some of the concerns you have. One of them.... You referenced a fisheries ambassador and the notion that there's been no fisheries ambassador, leaving Canada kind of voiceless at international conferences and so on, and with no true champion.

Now, has that position been vacant for a while? Did Canada have previous ambassadors appointed?

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** Yes, the position has existed in the past. It was terminated by the federal government in 1996. In 2007, the Harper government appointed Canada's last fisheries ambassador for conservation. Since the current government's tenure, there has been no ambassador appointed.

I truly feel this is a big loss for the industry, in that the ambassador would have the best interests of all Canadian fishery stakeholders in mind. They would be a champion for the Canadian industry and help tell a good story abroad that really deserves to be told about the high levels of protection that all of Canada sees and enjoys, and about the collaborative efforts that have taken place through groups like the Canadian Whale Institute.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** I think you've answered my question on how the ambassador can help advance Canada's fishing interests, so thank you for that in your comments. You also referenced foreign interests obstructing Canadian fisheries.

Can you expand on that?

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** I was recently alarmed to see the Department of Fisheries and Oceans collaborating with some American ENGOs, like IFAW. I don't feel they have been conducive to solving the right whale issue here.

On one hand, we really hope for the minister and representatives of the government to change the dialogue of the conversation with America about what Canada's efforts are and aren't regarding whales.

On the other hand, we see the department supporting initiatives outside of Canada, which we think are counterproductive to that. Certainly, there are environmental non-government organizations within Canada that receive funding from outside of Canada, and we also have a big, serious issue with that.

• (1650)

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** I think you raised it in some of your comments when you talked about three areas. Your first point was about establishing more of a collaborative relationship with the government and having it look towards organizations such as yours when looking at funding opportunities. You talked about examples of how some ENGOs are receiving funding from outside of Canada but not taking into consideration the viewpoints of Canadians and Canadian actions, such as the efforts your association is putting in.

Could you elaborate on that a little?

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** First, to be clear, my belief is that not all ENGOs are created equal. I want to be clear that I and my membership have the highest respect for the Canadian Whale Institute and the Canadian Wildlife Federation. They are two groups that I believe have really moved the dial on the conservation of whales in Canadian waters. They've made it possible for people like me to take that message to fish harvesters. They know that their views are respected. They know that groups like these care about the interests of fishermen.

It's important to note that I'm not meaning to disparage environmental non-government organizations. The successes we've enjoyed in conservation in Canada are largely thanks to them. I want to point out that they come in different forms, and some of them are more interested in their own operations and self-preservation than better outcomes for whales.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** A more fulsome dialogue and comments from all groups would be more than helpful.

Quickly, there's the Marine Mammal Protection Act in the United States, but there are other rules and regulations that Canadian fishermen and exporters have to follow, for example, on the health side of fish exports.

When we look at other sectors in the Canadian economy with regard to food exports, you have issues such as sanitary and phytosanitary measures that are used almost as non-tariff barriers.

Are you finding, on the health side, that there are rules and regulations, for example, in the United States, that are not helpful or that kind of preclude Canadian fish products from getting into the United States?

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** I would be speaking out of turn to comment on that question, given that my perspectives are largely limited to the harvesting side of the industry. It's a question that will be best posed at the next committee meeting, where I know that representatives of the export sector and lobster processing sector will be present. They will include the Lobster Council of Canada, which represents the Bay of Fundy Inshore Fishermen's Association and a myriad of other inshore fishing groups across Canada. I think it's a question best answered by them.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I'm sorry, but you're over time.

Next, we have Ms. Fortier, please.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank both witnesses for joining us this afternoon.

One of my concerns is the impact of climate change. When we talk about the fishery, the Canadian fish and seafood industry, we must really take time to look at the impact of climate change in this area. We've seen the temperature in the Gulf of St. Lawrence rise by 2°C. This has significantly affected certain fisheries.

In terms of protecting Canada's fish and seafood industry, how can Canada ensure that its waters truly sustain marine life in order to avoid losing valuable aquatic ecosystems and species?

I'll ask Ms. Brown to answer my question first. I'll then put the question to Mr. Sproul.

[*English*]

**Dr. Moira Brown:** My comments will be restricted to whales, as I'm a whale biologist, not a fisheries biologist.

What we have noticed since 2010 is a change in the habitat of North Atlantic right whales. Right whales typically came up into the Bay of Fundy and could be found there between June and De-

ember, but primarily in August, September and October each year. Those studies were begun by colleagues at the New England Aquarium in 1980. We saw a pretty persistent distribution of those whales seasonally and in numbers for about 30 years. Then 2010 came along and we started to see fewer right whales and greater variability in numbers each year. Then 2016 was more of a normal year, but since then, we've literally had just a handful of right whales seen in the Bay of Fundy, five to six a year.

These animals can be individually identified. They are photographed elsewhere. We know they're still alive. They're seen in their southern habitats and along the U.S. coast. Some are also seen in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The areas off Roseway Basin are not surveyed as often as they used to be by grant funders like you to actually find right whales when you go out for surveys, but the Canadian government does continue to do aerial surveys out there, and there are some acoustic listening devices.

At this point, with an estimated population of about 360 right whales—that's the whole species—about 140 of them are returning to the Gulf of St. Lawrence each summer. As for the remaining ones, their location in the summertime is actually not known.

• (1655)

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Wow. This is problematic, as you have shared at this time.

I might ask Mr. Sproul the same question that I asked earlier.

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** In my view, the best way the government can support a changing environment and its effect on fisheries is to support fishery science at a large scale within the department, but also at a smaller scale in industry-led science and partnerships that lobster and other harvesters are involved in all across the Atlantic provinces.

I'm actually the president of the Southwest Lobster Science Society. A lot of our members and a lot of fishermen in southwest Nova Scotia are very focused on lobster science, but we find that funding for that can be very hard to come by. We'd love to be able to collaborate with our international partners. Just this past fall, we weren't able to attend what is the pre-eminent lobster management science convention in the world, because the department refused to fund it.

A focus on science and a better understanding of fishery resources and how they're changing is how the government should be helping the industry directly.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Thank you.

Mr. Sproul, in the last minute that I have, do you have any other suggestions? You understand there is a need for this sector of the economy to continue to flourish. Are there any other recommendations you would have for our committee?

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** In terms of the subject of the committee, international trade, one of the most important actions that the government can take right now is for government representatives from the Ministry of Fisheries and others to tell the good news story of Canadian fisheries. From my view, I've never seen a government so ready to disparage itself, its own fishermen and its own industry. I know that Canada's fisheries are incredibly well managed overall and that our oceans are subject to some of the most stringent protections in the world, so I think it's really incumbent on the government at this point to let everybody else in the world know that too, especially in our consumer markets in Europe and America.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, please, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses.

Ms. Brown, you're the senior scientist at the Canadian Whale Institute. The representative of the Bay of Fundy Inshore Fishermen's Association told us earlier that we should question the science behind the Americans' decisions. He told us that these decisions are basically political.

Could you share your scientific opinion?

[English]

**Dr. Moira Brown:** There have always been a lot of politics around right whales on both sides of the border. However, I will say that in Canada the measures that the Canadian government is taking to reduce the risk of entanglement and of vessel strikes are unprecedented anywhere in the world and exceed what is being done in the U.S.

• (1700)

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** According to your scientific opinion, I gather that the Americans' fears are unfounded.

[English]

**Dr. Moira Brown:** The Americans are trying to level the playing field for protective measures against human-related mortality among right whales from both vessel strikes and entanglements. Perhaps there was a time when some of their measures exceeded ours, but since 2017 Canada has really increased its level of protection for right whales. We're not there yet. We still have human-related mortality and serious injury affecting reproduction in this population, but we've really come a long way since 2017, and I believe our measures exceed those used in the U.S. right now.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** We'll keep that in mind. Thank you.

Mr. Sproul, do you have anything to add about the unscientific nature of the Americans' decisions?

[English]

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** It's important for the committee to understand that there's a fundamental difference in the relationship between Canadian fishermen and Canadian conservation groups compared with the relationship between American fishermen and American conservation groups in that there has been a much more oppositional approach. Some people in the U.S. would like to attribute that to fishermen, but I think it needs to be attributed to groups like the International Fund for Animal Welfare, which has taken an incredibly aggressive approach towards fishermen, including suing individual American fishermen who are attempting to collaborate on conservation.

I think that's what has led to some of that animosity, and there are misrepresentations about what's taking place in Canada by all the stakeholders in the U.S. I wouldn't just attribute it to the veracity of science; I think it's more related to politics.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** I want to draw a few parallels. In Quebec, lobster fishing is extremely important. Is there some lobster fishing in the Bay of Fundy as well?

[English]

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** The Bay of Fundy is the most diverse marine ecosystem on the face of the earth, and fishing is foundationally important to the communities that line the Bay of Fundy. Fishery products are our largest export in Nova Scotia, so I can't overemphasize how important they are to our communities. They are the only bulwark between the economic renaissance we've seen in coastal communities in Atlantic Canada and the economic downturn that's so prevalent everywhere else.

I can't stress enough what a diffuse economic benefit it has delivered to—

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Sproul. I'm sure that the fishing industry plays an important role in the communities.

Let me clarify my question. Is there any lobster fishing in your area?

[English]

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** Yes, there certainly is. Lobster is really king in the Bay of Fundy. I think we calculated nearly a billion dollars' worth from the Bay of Fundy alone last year.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** You must know that some American policies prohibit the use of seals as bait for lobster fishing. This protectionist measure could have serious implications.

[English]

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** Yes, there are certainly a lot of concerns in the lobster industry right now about access to bait, especially considering the moratorium on fishing pelagic species like mackerel and what that has meant.

Bait is a chief concern. I'm sure there are lots of fishermen who would like to see the development of seal products for bait, and hopefully not at the expense of market access.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Have you seen any real and tangible consequences yet? If not, is it more a matter of fears and threats at this stage?

[English]

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** I think they are largely imagined consequences at this point. There is not widespread use of seal products as lobster bait.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Have you been in contact with Canadian leaders to try to overcome this obstacle?

[English]

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** The dialogue between Canadian officials and the industry certainly leaves room for improvement. There's an international dialogue as well, which is great, and there are things like the U.S.-Canada Lobster Town Meeting, which really helps to improve the dialogue between the industries. However, there's certainly room for the government to improve on its consultation with the fishing industry on all of these issues, and it would be dishonest for me to say that we ever had good consultations on the issues we're discussing today.

• (1705)

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

Mr. Cannings, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Thank you both for being here.

I'm going to start with Dr. Brown, just to get an idea of the difference, if any, between the Canadian and American situations with right whales in terms of their distribution and behaviour, when they are there and how many are there. I assume they have their calves further south and move up into the northern New England waters and the Bay of Fundy and the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the summer.

Are most of them in Canadian waters in the summer?

**Dr. Moira Brown:** You have the distribution down pat. The only known calving grounds are down off the coasts of Florida and Georgia. The animals migrate up toward New England and Cape Cod Bay in the spring. They have just departed that region and are now, as usual, heading across the Gulf of Maine and just starting to show up in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Again, because we can identify these whales as individuals, we have a good sense of who is actually in the Gulf of St. Lawrence or elsewhere. It's slightly less than half the population annually. About 140 or so individuals have been returning to the Gulf of St. Lawrence on a pretty regular basis since 2017. That is a direct re-

sult of very thorough surveillance efforts by DFO science and NGO research groups like the Canadian Whale Institute. Also, NOAA in the U.S. has a survey plane that comes up for a few weeks each year to help with the count.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I'm wondering if American fishers face the same restrictions or the same mitigating measures that Canadian fishers have taken with regard to gear to reduce entanglements.

Do American shipping interests have to reduce their speed the same way that Canadians do? Is it an equal thing, or is most of this happening in Canada, and is that part of the problem?

**Dr. Moira Brown:** There are definitely measures in both countries that are different. Some are narrowly tailored to the particular area or the particular habitat where the whale is.

In Canada, we have static measures to reduce vessel strikes that are in place from the end of April until the middle of November. They are mandatory and are monitored and enforced by Transport Canada. The speed limit in the seasonally restricted area is actually 10 knots or less in the other areas. I think the key thing is that these measures are monitored and enforced.

In the U.S., vessel strike measures can be mandatory, but the measures are not enforced the same way. They are not monitored and enforced on a near real-time basis.

With respect to fisheries, when a right whale is encountered on the east coast of Canada, approximately 670 square nautical miles are closed to fishing around that one sighting of one right whale for a minimum of 15 days. If the whales persist, that fishery is closed for the season. That's far stricter than anything that's going on in the U.S., and the U.S. doesn't have a similar dynamic system. It has some static closures, without a doubt, in high-use areas where there's fishing and whale overlap, but it doesn't have a similar dynamic system.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** If I'm correct, we heard from the previous witnesses that the Americans are assessing Canadian conservation measures to see if they're equivalent to the American ones. I don't know, but it seems to me—listening to what you're saying, and you're the real expert—that we, if anything, are ahead of the Americans, and it's fairly obvious. It's not some subtle thing.

I'm wondering if that's how you see the situation.

• (1710)

**Dr. Moira Brown:** Yes, it is. In addition, our measures are adapted each year. There are a number of Fisheries and Oceans and Transport Canada-led advisory groups and technical working groups that look at the data each year, and they assess the protective measures that are in place. They have evolved quite a bit over the last six or seven years.

In the U.S., some of the measures were put in place in excess of 10 or 12 years ago and are just now being considered for adaptation in response to the shifting habitat of the whales.

I'm actually really proud of what Canada has done and the protective measures that have been put in place. As I said earlier, we're not there yet. We haven't eliminated the human-caused mortality and serious injury for this species, but the measures that are in place are widespread, monitored and enforced.

I will also add that it is the fish harvesters who are out there, complying with these measures—the captains of the ships as well—and working really hard to recover this species.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I want to quickly go to Mr. Sproul.

If this is the case, is there some pressure from American fishers, or is it the American government? What's causing this difference, and how do you feel about that?

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** I think it's best to understand where the pressure on the American government is coming from. The pressure on the American government is coming from ENGOs like IFAW and the Pew trust. They're also engaging in punitive lawsuits against fishermen and state regulators in America. They're certainly under political pressure, and they're also under political pressure from American fishermen themselves, who are rebelling against some of the measures we've co-operated on here in Canada.

Yes, it is concerning to us. I think it comes back to the fact that it's incumbent on the Minister of Fisheries to be advocating for Canadian fishermen and Canadian conservationists in America with their counterparts and to make sure that the good news story that Dr. Brown has related to you gets told in America to conservationists, to governments and regulators and, most importantly, to consumers.

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

We go now to Mr. Seeback for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Sproul, I'm trying to go back to what you were talking about. What are the ENGOs in the United States trying to push for that can cause or are causing the challenges for Canadian fishers?

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** Namely, it's parity with the Marine Mammal Protection Act, or the appearance of it, but, as Dr. Brown has said, there's a lot of feeling that we're on parity with it now. Essentially what they're pushing for is, in a sense, to transfer the blame entirely to Canadian fishermen for the sorry state of right whales. Canadian fishermen accept that entanglements are certainly a chief contributing factor to the demise of the whales, but we also recognize that they don't all take place in Canadian waters, and we recognize the extreme impact of ship strikes on the whales, too.

We're not looking for the government to paint a picture that isn't true, but we would just like to see credit given where credit is due and blame given where blame is due.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Am I correct in saying that this is...I'm going to call it the “enforcement” of the Marine Mammal Protection Act? I don't know if that's the right word. This seems to be a new development in the United States. Am I correct about that? This is sort of an older statute that has suddenly been revived and seems to again be putting pressure on Canadian fishers.

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** Yes, I would say that's correct. Under the Biden administration, I think there's been more focus on the conservation of whales. It's also due to the fact that there have been a significant number of ship strikes and entanglements as well. The emergence of it as an issue is also due to the fragile nature of the right whale population.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** What you seem to be saying, though, because it seems like I'm hearing from both witnesses that we are doing enough here to protect the right whales, is that the issue seems to be making sure that the message is heard in Washington. What would your advice be if either the Prime Minister or the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans were here today for you to ask, “We would like you to do X, Y and Z with the United States, because we're doing the right thing”?

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** I think first I would pose a question: Why is the Government of Canada working collaboratively with groups in the U.S. to fund what we feel are misinformation campaigns that entirely level the blame on entanglements and on Canadian fishermen?

• (1715)

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** How exactly are they doing that?

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** They do it through documentaries that we don't feel are very accurate. They seem to be proud to put the DFO byline in the funding announcements with groups like IFAW, the Pew trust and Oceans North here in Canada, who fishermen don't feel have the best interests of the fishing industry at heart.

I think what I would tell the Prime Minister or the Minister of Fisheries is this: Why would Canadian regulators and Canadian governments disparage Canadians in another country? Why aren't they singing the praises of the efforts that have been made by groups like the Canadian Wildlife Federation, the Canadian Whale Institute and all the fishermen's groups that have worked collaboratively with them instead of continuing to push what we see sometimes as a radical agenda in Canada and the U.S.?

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** We see increasingly radical agendas pushed by this Prime Minister on a number of issues.

Thanks very much. Those are my questions.

**The Chair:** We have Mr. Sidhu, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to our witnesses for taking the time to join us here today.

Dr. Brown, I understand that a big part of the work that your organization does involves education and stewardship. Could you share more information with our committee about each of these programs, their objectives and why they are so important?

**Dr. Moira Brown:** We focus our stewardship activities with the two industries that have had the biggest impact on the North Atlantic right whale—the shipping industry and the fishing industry. We do that right from almost backyard, dockside chats with fishermen, not only where we live and operate, but also where we go to respond to entangled whales.

We go to trade shows, and we've also expanded recently to recreational boating shows. Part of that is to try to encourage reporting of entangled whales, because the sooner we can get to them and try to disentangle them, the better chance for survival those whales have. We're really focused on the two industries where the accidental harm to right whales occurs—and these are accidents.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** You also mentioned some of the research, which goes hand in hand with education.

Could you share with our committee the latest research initiatives that your organization has conducted, and perhaps the findings?

**Dr. Moira Brown:** Yes. We launch teams into the Gulf of St. Lawrence now and have done so every summer since the whales relocated there. We are not doing research as much in the Bay of Fundy as we used to, and not at all south of Nova Scotia, simply because we're going to where we expect to find the whales. We contribute to the photo identification programs that are maintained through the catalogue of individual whales at the New England Aquarium. All organizations that work on right whales contribute to that catalogue so that we can track the population, track scarring, track health assessments, and track reproduction, births, deaths, and all of the different life history parameters for this species.

We also have an extensive genetics program right here in Canada at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, which is tackling the inbreeding problem. I will say very quickly that right whales have a small gene pool. There are only 360 whales, but they are essentially taking care of business themselves through what's called genetic purging, in that inbred calves do not survive, whereas the calves that do survive have fairly high genetic diversity, and it bodes well for the population. We won't have as many calves, but the calves that we do have will have, let's say, the good genes.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Perfect.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** We have Mr. Savard-Tremblay for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Mr. Sproul, approximately how many people do you represent? How many jobs does this entail?

[*English*]

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** We represent nearly 200 fishing families along the Nova Scotia coastline in the Bay of Fundy, and they employ nearly 750 fishermen.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Okay. We can see that this industry plays a key role on a local and regional level. Presumably, important industries are found throughout a number of marine regions. As a result, a crisis in this industry could have a fairly significant impact on many jobs.

Consider again the danger of American protectionism. We know that a decision will likely be handed down concerning the right whale. Another issue is the boycott of seal bait for lobster fishing.

Do we need to keep an eye on anything else, apart from these two factors?

● (1720)

[*English*]

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** I would also note that some of the mitigation measures that are taken within Canada to mitigate right whale entanglements have had, and can have, extreme effects on our industry. All fishing in an area can be prevented. We're right in the middle of a crisis right now in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, due to the presence of a right whale at the start of a very important lobster fishery for the economies on the Acadian Peninsula in New Brunswick.

I think the protection of the whales is certainly a duty of Canada and of the industry. However, because it's a duty of Canada and Canadians, I think the government needs to consider support for industries that are incredibly affected by that. That support can take the form of financial support, but it can also take the form of better science, better observation and better overflights to determine when whales are in an area and importantly, when they've left an area and where exactly they've been sighted, so that fishermen can still retain portions of a closed fishing area to make a living. The loss of an entire season or the loss of the most lucrative part of a season for whale protection is not something that many fishing families can recover from to come back the next year.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'll go to Mr. Cannings for two and a half minutes, please.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Okay, I'm going to turn back to Dr. Brown.

You indicated that perhaps Canada and the United States have similar regulations and measures that they're promoting, but that in the United States there wasn't as much enforcement. Is that correct?

**Dr. Moira Brown:** Yes, I'd say it's correct to say there isn't as much enforcement, but the measures are not exactly the same. For example, in the U.S. they use what they call the sinking groundline rule in pot fisheries, so you have a number of pots on the bottom in a trawl, like charms on a bracelet, and there's groundline that connects all of those pots. They required all of their fishermen to use rope that would sink and sit on the bottom. Many U.S. colleagues are of the opinion we should also use that in Canada.

We use different measures in Canada that are tailored towards the Canadian fisheries, and I would say I think the one thing that's important is there has been some progress made on rope-on-demand technology and other modifications, but this is something that really needs an infusion of money to allow the fishermen to get the gear in their hands and practise with it. We work locally with some rock crab fishermen who get shut down when right whales appear around the Bay of Fundy. They are now in a position where they can actually switch over to some rope-on-demand gear that we loan them and keep fishing when the right whales show up.

Right whales do aggregate in feeding areas, but they also have to migrate through other waters to get there. We have the feeding areas fairly well identified in the gulf. Some of these whale sightings, as Mr. Sproul referred to, are right whales that are seen migrating. We do need a little bit better science and a little bit better surveillance to see if those whales are persisting in that area. If there is a short-term closure, that's one thing, but if that closure goes from 15 days to a seasonal closure, it really wipes out a community's effort to be able to harvest, especially lobster.

I think more surveillance in these areas, especially this time of the year, when the animals are just migrating through and moving into the feeding areas, would be really useful in terms of helping fishermen live with the right whale challenge, especially in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Thank you. We have a species here that is very sensitive, very vulnerable. Populations seem to have increased until about 2015—I just looked at a trend line—and they've been declining ever since.

After all these measures we're taking, why is that population still declining? Is it still vessel strikes and entanglements, or is there something else going on with ocean temperatures or something like that? What's causing that continued decline?

• (1725)

**Dr. Moira Brown:** It is vessel strikes and gear entanglements, but it's also climate change, so the population basically grew from fewer than 200 animals to almost 500 by 2010. Then we started to see a decline that has coincided with increasing temperatures in the Gulf of Maine that affected their plankton and meant that the animals had to go look for food somewhere else. Some of them did that in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where there weren't any protection measures in place because we didn't anticipate the whales moving to that area. We had no means to do that.

It's common for a wild animal to also go through a reduced reproduction at times when there's food stress. I think that's gone on, so right now, yes, the population decreased quite sharply, especially from 2017 up until the year before last. However, now it looks like it's levelling out, and a bit of time will tell.

Again, though, the whales have to take care of the reproduction side, but we have to take care of the vessel strikes and the gear entanglements.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Martel, you're next on the list for the remaining two minutes, or so. Would you like to go ahead? Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Sproul, you said earlier that the government could do more to help the fishery prosper. You also said that we no longer have ambassadors appointed by the government.

Would anything else make our fishery more prosperous?

[*English*]

**Mr. Colin Sproul:** That's an important question. First and foremost, I implore the government to continue to fund the excellent and important work of people like Dr. Brown at the Canadian Whale Institute, and particularly the Canadian Wildlife Federation, the Marine Animal Response Society and the Campobello Whale Rescue Team—I think that's really important—but also to continue to fund science in the lobster industry so that we can better understand lobster migration and abundance patterns, if the need arises, to shift our fishing effort due to the presence of whales.

We all need to recognize that Canada sometimes goes to great efforts in agriculture, mining, softwood lumber and auto manufacturing to defend the interests of Canadian business people and workers abroad. I think the efforts that have taken place in the fishery pale in comparison to any of those, but we've seen the departments and staff detail the incredible economic value the fishery is delivering to Canada. At this point I think it's time for fishermen and fisheries to get their fair share of government support. Telling the tale of Canadian fisheries and how sustainable and responsible they are on an international level is the best way to advance this industry.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Good. Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for the valuable information from our witnesses. It's very much appreciated.

Thank you to the committee.

I move adjournment.

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