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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1105)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number eight of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on January 18, 2022, the committee is proceeding to a briefing by the minister and her officials on the minister's mandate letter and matters related to her department.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. Please inform me immediately if interpretation is lost, and we'll ensure it is restored before resuming.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those joining us by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself before speaking. Please note that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. For those in the room, your mike will be controlled as usual by the proceedings and verification officer.

I'd now like to welcome the Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, who will be with us for the first hour, and the officials, who have joined us virtually and in person for the full two hours today.

Minister Murray, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

I am very pleased to be here today, in Ottawa, on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[English]

Having served on this committee in a previous Parliament some 10 or so years ago, I want to thank you for the work you do and for your invitation to speak with you today as the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

I'm joined by senior officials from DFO and the Canadian Coast Guard, including Timothy Sargent, deputy minister; Mario Pelletier, commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard; and other knowl-

edgeable officials. After my remarks, we'll be happy to take your questions.

As we know, Canadians are feeling the impacts of climate-related extremes first-hand, from devastating wildfires and flooding to heat waves and droughts. Our oceans play a critical role in climate change. They are a source of sustainable rural economic opportunity that is so important to Canadians, provided that we pursue an agenda for long-term sustainability. This means prioritizing long-term success over short-term expediency at times.

In the years to come and in alignment with my mandate letter, my focus and that of my department is on some key priorities.

One is the fishers and their communities on all coasts. Another is to defend, protect and restore coastal and marine habitat. Another is to enhance species protection, including effective actions that rebuild and regenerate fish stocks and limit illegal fisheries. I want to make sure that Canada's ocean plant and fish biomass grow in diversity and abundance, and thus contribute to the fight against climate change and contribute to opportunities in coastal communities. Finally, as a result of this work together, I want to build a stronger and more sustainable blue economy.

Our government is making generational investments to protect and restore Pacific salmon and their ecosystems by working in partnership with indigenous nations and other governments. In the DFO, we're creating a road map to transition away from open-net pen salmon farming in coastal B.C. waters while introducing Canada's first ever aquaculture act. On the east coast, I fully support fishing opportunities for communities aligned with the precautionary principle that serves to protect and regenerate marine environments and the life forms they sustain.

I know how important the Canadian Coast Guard and its work protecting mariners is on all three coasts.

Our continued investment in small craft harbours will support the commercial fishing industry. Since the modernization of the Fisheries Act in 2019, millions have been invested to implement the provisions of the renewed act, which includes new funding for data collection and science for priority fish stocks and fish habitat Canada-wide.

Underpinning this necessary work are the learning, respect and partnerships that DFO is developing as our government delivers on our commitment to reconciliation through nation-to-nation relationships with indigenous peoples. This is why my department, for example, created a stand-alone Arctic division to fundamentally reset the way the department coordinates and conducts business to better serve indigenous peoples and northerners.

The blue future I envision is one where our prosperity is the net result of our efforts to achieve a healthier environment and a stable climate. This means supporting innovation and seizing emerging ecosystem-friendly economic opportunities to protect the long-term prosperity of coastal communities. These are new industries that make these communities more resilient and add to the important work they do fishing the resources of the ocean.

Canada's blue economy strategy for Canada must prioritize ocean health to drive ocean wealth for people. In pursuit of this ambitious agenda, we will work to halt and reverse nature loss by meeting our goals to conserve 25% of Canada's land and waters by 2025 and 30% by 2030. We will modernize the Oceans Act to better understand and mitigate climate change impacts on ocean ecosystems. We will explore ways to renew and expand the scope of the coastal restoration fund to waterways beyond coastal areas. We'll build on the ghost gear program successes to get more lost and abandoned fishing gear, plastics and debris out of our marine ecosystems.

• (1110)

[Translation]

This year, as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Canadian Coast Guard, our government is continuing to renew the fleet.

[English]

The significant long-term investments in new ships for both the Canadian Coast Guard and the navy are creating good-paying jobs for Canadians and will be doing so for decades to come.

Across government, we have the partnerships, science, political will and financial resources to reimagine our future and solidify Canada's reputation as a supplier of top-quality seafood and as a leading ocean nation determined to rebuild, regenerate and restore our oceans for the generations to come.

[Translation]

Thank you.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go to our questions.

Mr. Perkins, you have six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, 65 days ago this committee gave you notice of this appearance for two hours after two meeting debates. Several days ago, we got notice of this meeting that you were going to appear for

two hours with the entire department management team with you to back you up.

Less than two hours ago, we got notice that you decided to defy the vote of this parliamentary committee and stay for less than an hour. Who ordered you to not appear for the full two hours—the Prime Minister's Office or your government House leader?

Quickly...and I don't want to hear from the officials.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that question. I am really looking forward to this hour to hear your questions—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Answer the question, please. I don't have a lot of time.

Hon. Joyce Murray: —and respond to them. The officials will then be able to—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Answer my question about who ordered you to shorten it today, please.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Pardon me?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Answer my question and keep it short, because I have only a few minutes.

Who ordered you not to appear for the full two hours as per the vote of this committee?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Mr. Perkins, I am happy to be here to answer the questions.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. Next question.

Minister, did you read the first application process, not the one that was altered by your department several months later but the first application process, for the fish harvesters benefit? Did you read it—yes or no?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Mr. Perkins, the fish harvesters benefit has provided well over \$100 million for fishers—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'll take that as a no. You never read it, like the Marshall decision.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Perkins. Please address your remarks through the chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Chair, I will ask the next question and see if the minister can answer this one.

The original fish harvesters benefit lined up nine stages to application. The first step was to identify which of the following situations in 2020 were the "most applicable" to their situation. Since you haven't read it, I thought I'd read it to you.

In outlining the five scenarios, the application did not say “self-employed and one other”. It listed five options. Option three was, “Shareperson who is a crew member, who earns a share of the revenue.” It does not say “self-employed shareperson”. It does not say “or”. You keep misleading the House when you say that it was both.

Yes or no, do you agree that the original application process said “shareperson” only and that you and your department have confused thousands of fishermen in how you interpreted it afterwards?

• (1115)

Hon. Joyce Murray: I agree we are doing our level best to serve Canadians and support them during this COVID period, Mr. Perkins, and that's what the fish harvester benefit was all about—

Mr. Rick Perkins: By clawing back 5,000 fishermen's benefits after telling them that they were eligible by saying “self-employed” fisherman—okay. So you couldn't answer that question.

Your director of policy, Jason Rondeau, who worked for the previous—defeated—fisheries minister, in an email to Nova Scotia MPs' offices, in response to questions about the benefit when it was set up, wrote, “Someone who earns their income as a % of the catch, rather than a set wage or salary, would be eligible for the Fish Harvesters' Benefit”, and, after receiving the fish harvesters benefit, it doesn't impact somebody's “EI eligibility”.

Some 99% of fishermen fit this category, yet your department points to revenue, which then points to social development, which points to everybody else except your own responsibility for not implementing the program you set out.

Who was wrong, you or your director of policy, Jason Rondeau?

Hon. Joyce Murray: This program was intended for fishers who are not eligible for CERB. If—

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's not what your assistant said in the email.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. Six years I've been a parliamentarian, and I have never seen a more rude member of Parliament to a witness—ever. He is not speaking through you. He is speaking at her. He is cutting her off and he is being extremely rude.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

I'll remind Mr. Perkins again to address his remarks through the chair, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay, Mr. Chair.

I'm waiting for an answer from the minister, and she uses talking points to avoid them and Mr. Fisher—

Mr. Darren Fisher: He's not waiting for an answer.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I am.

Mr. Darren Fisher: He's not waiting for an answer.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Fisher. Please don't interrupt.

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Chair, on a point of order, let's look at this as a really strong opportunity to ask questions, which Mr. Perkins is doing, but also to allow the minister a few moments to answer the question. That's the least all

of us could ask for. That's what Canadians want. That's what fishers want—anyone who touches this file.

Let's look at asking substantial questions to get meaningful answers.

The Chair: Continue, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

That was not a point of order, in my opinion.

I've given the minister an opportunity to answer the question. She avoids the question.

Why did the fish harvester benefit say that you were self-employed, as one option—and there are five options—and that you were a shareperson, as the other, if it wasn't intended for fishermen of that nature to be included by the benefit?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Mr. Perkins, this benefit was stood up very quickly to get money into fish harvesters' hands who were not eligible for CERB, and that's what it has done. The department has asked for funds back from those who applied who were not the intended recipients of this particular benefit.

During the COVID period, whether it was CERB or other kinds of wage subsidies, the government had to act very quickly, which sometimes meant not as thoroughly as if we were spending six months to a year to put all the parameters and policies of the program in place.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Then you shouldn't be clawing it back from them if you screwed up on the application process. It isn't fishermen who should be paying for it. It should be the department.

Hon. Joyce Murray: May I also add that this was intended for fishers whose earnings had a significant decrease. We didn't have that information at the front end. That's why the fish harvesters needed to put the information in afterwards as to what their decline in wages was. In some cases, there wasn't a decline in earnings, so that's where the funds needed to be—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have emails from fishermen who had it clawed back, who had a 90% decline.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins. Your time is gone. I did allow for the time for the intervention for the point of order by Mr. Fisher.

We will now go to Mr. Morrissey for six minutes or less, please.

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

Welcome, Minister.

Through you, Chair, just as a clarification, when you use the term “share of the catch” or “percentage of the catch”, the fisherman has the option of having interpreted in two ways for the benefit of EI. A percentage of the catch can allow you to collect labour EI benefits or seasonal EI benefits. If the fisher chose to be insured as a labourer, then they were not eligible under the program that we put in place. There was no confusion. It was very clear. You cannot claim as a fisher if you choose to consider yourself a labourer. That's allowed in fishery through the special fishing EI benefit in the act as well as labour. There was no confusion.

Minister, thanks for appearing. The record will show, since we've been in government, ministers have appeared every time this committee requested. This was not the case with the former government. That minister appeared rarely before the committee.

I want to actually examine things important to our fishers.

In your opening statement you made a timely comment, “source of sustainable rural economic” development.

Madam Minister, yes, the lifeblood of rural coastal communities is the fishery. If you could, I want you to inform the committee how our government has enhanced the efforts in protection, because if we do not have adequate protection of the fishery resources, then the sustainability of those coastal communities are undermined.

Could you briefly advise me on how we have increased the department's capacity to protect the very valuable fishery resources our coastal communities depend on?

• (1120)

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that question, Mr. Morrissey.

I think all Canadians on all sides of the House want to see the fisheries and the local fish harvesters and their communities have a long-term ability to earn a living from the sea.

As you point out, that is about protecting the viability of the stocks. Our government has been very focused on that with a number of programs. We are focused on coastal restoration, so that, where habitats are a challenge for fish stocks, we can restore those habitats and restore the stocks. We're focused on fisheries that are feeble. Unfortunately, some of our fisheries are feeble. The allowable catch is lower in those cases and sometimes in a moratorium, as we've seen with the redfish for many years.

We have a number of additional compliance and enforcement officers to make sure that the illegal and unregulated fishery is addressed, whether it is in our local communities or on the high seas. There are a number of tools. We want these stocks to be available for coastal communities for the long term.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Minister, just quickly, could you provide the committee with the actual number of additional protection officers our government has hired in the department?

It's an area I long lobbied for and advocated. You may not have it, but could you provide the committee the actual additional numbers of protection personnel?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I will ask my officials to provide that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

I'm turning my time over to Mr. Kelloway.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to MP Morrissey.

Minister, thank you for being here, and to the department, thank you as well.

The government has committed to conserving about 25%, I believe, of our lands and waters by 2025 and 30% by 2030. We know that this will halt and reverse nature loss, protect biodiversity and build climate change resilience across the country.

Can you explain to us, Minister, what has been done to date on this? What steps are you taking to reach these goals in terms of reaching out to the stakeholders who are involved, namely, fishers and other ocean stakeholders?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for the question on this very important program.

When we were elected as government, about 1% of ocean areas were in marine protected areas, and I know that Canadians are happy to hear that there are now 14% of our ocean areas under marine protected area status. We're aiming, of course, for 30% by 2030.

These protected areas will not be eliminating fisheries opportunities. In fact, the four key measures that will not be allowed in a marine protected area are things like deep-sea ocean mining, oil and gas development, dumping of waste and those kinds of matters. We are working very closely with aboriginal partners. It's a key part of our indigenous reconciliation commitment to not just partner with indigenous communities but actually to invite their science to be some of the bedrock of our approach to these matters.

This program is also incredibly important in the Arctic as it provides opportunities for indigenous people. We are making great progress. This will be a way to also do science to understand the impacts of climate change on the oceans, as well as the ocean's ability to help mitigate climate change. I'm looking forward to the Oceans Act amendments that will address climate change in our oceans.

• (1125)

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

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens, for six minutes or less please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the minister and her officials for being with us.

We're conducting a study on labelling and traceability. This is one of the topics I proposed to the committee.

The witnesses we're hearing from are discovering that there are big differences in the criteria for quality, responsible fishing and even safety, depending on whether the product is an import or export.

What do you think of these differences, Madam Minister? Do they put Canadian fishers at a disadvantage compared to EU imports and exports?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'm sorry, but I didn't quite understand your question, so I'm going to ask one of my officials to answer you.

Mr. Timothy Sargent (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Canada must show leadership in traceability to ensure sustainable fisheries and the long-term prosperity of the seafood sector.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is working with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to implement a boat-to-plate traceability program.

Stakeholders from various sectors submitted comments during public consultations that ended in December 2021. The government is reviewing these observations.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Madam Minister, are you open to the idea of creating a working group that would bring together representatives not only from various departments, but also from fisheries organizations and certain important industries? For example, we could work on implementing a concrete traceability and labelling plan. We could even create a position of auditor general for traceability and labelling.

What do you think, Madam Minister?

Hon. Joyce Murray: There will be representatives from several departments around the table.

I'm glad you asked me this important question. I think traceability and labelling will reduce illegal fishing activities.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I think the idea of having an auditor general responsible for traceability and labelling is interesting for the future. Are you open to that idea?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I won't get into those kinds of details right now, because the development of this initiative has just started, but I think it's a good idea.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: You have three minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Madam Minister, I talked to you about the weir capelin fishery in the St. Lawrence River. The problem is

that you want to universalize the fishing periods, but the dates of that particular fishery are not consistent with those of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This is an urgent matter. For the only two remaining capelin fisheries in the St. Lawrence that constitute intangible heritage, we would like the fishery to be able to begin on April 1, but your department has extended this date to June 1. There isn't any capelin left in the river in June.

Is your department open to addressing this issue quickly?

• (1130)

Hon. Joyce Murray: My department is very concerned about this important issue, on which Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador have differing views.

I will ask the officials to answer your question in more detail.

[English]

Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Harbour Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We engage with our stakeholders in setting when we have seasons and the opening of seasons. To provide more details on this, we would be able to provide a written answer to the committee.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

We'll come back to it in the next round of questions.

[English]

The Chair: That's great. Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today. I have more questions than I have time, but I do want to quickly address.

Before we get started, first of all, I understand the frustration caused by having reduced time with the minister today, but I do want to highlight, with all due respect to the member, that behaviour that is confrontational and aggressive is a barrier to women's getting involved in politics. Around the table today and currently within Parliament women make up only 30%. At this table, the competition is between me and Madame Desbiens and now the minister who has joined us today. I hope that in the future when she joins this committee, Minister Murray will be treated with the respect she deserves. I personally am not in favour of the treatment I just saw. I wanted to express that and to express my frustration at witnessing and being part of that today.

I have many questions, Minister, that I want to ask you, and I do hope that we can have future follow-up questions as well. Minister, in your mandate letter to the government, you said that the clear timeline for the removal of open-net pen fish farming in B.C. waters was the end of 2025. That stated goal doesn't seem to be consistent with the actions of your department or the realities on the water. That's what we're hearing. DFO is currently reviewing an application by one open-net fish farm in Clayoquot Sound that could see a 33% increase in capacity, for just one example.

DFO is also reviewing applications for the creation of a new salmon fish farm in B.C. I'm wondering why DFO is even considering applications to intensify fish farming in B.C. when that goes directly against the commitments of the government to phase out open-net pen salmon farming in a few short years.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I want to thank the member for her intervention around decorum at the committee. Thank you very much for that.

Thanks for the question on my mandate to work on a responsible plan to transition from open-net pen salmon farming in coastal British Columbia waters by 2025. I will mention that some of that work has already taken place, with over three and a half million salmon removed from the Discovery Island site since December 2020.

We are working towards a draft plan in the coming months that will allow us to receive input from the industry, from stakeholder groups and others such as workers and indigenous communities. My vision of this is that we have a vibrant salmon aquaculture industry on the west coast based on technology that is not open-net pens. That means a careful, inclusive, science-based approach, and we're working on a road map towards that.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister.

I have more questions around fish farms, but I want to make sure I get to some other topics that are important.

Last summer, DFO made the decision to close the majority of B.C.'s fisheries to conserve rapidly declining salmon stocks. However, in a recent report, we found that B.C. fishers were stuck at the docks while Alaskan commercial fishers caught 800,000 sockeye salmon that were headed for B.C. waters. This is similar for pink, chum, chinook and coho.

The Pacific Salmon Commission is meeting this week. I'm wondering; will you be bringing the interception of B.C. salmon to the commission? Also, is your government willing to examine mechanisms to amend this treaty before the next review in 2028 to address this issue before there are no salmon left?

• (1135)

Hon. Joyce Murray: I know that the state of our Pacific salmon stock is an urgent concern to all of us, and nobody wants to hear allegations that another country is intercepting our fish. The actuality of that, I think, needs some neutral scientist to examine.

Because Global Affairs Canada is the one who sits at the table in terms of the Pacific salmon treaty, I've asked them to raise this.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

I didn't check my time. If I have one more question, one of the issues I've heard most clearly from B.C. commercial fishers is that our current licensing model for fishing on the west coast is fundamentally broken and leaving local fishers behind. It's an issue that this committee in particular studied in great detail in 2019, recommending that DFO develop an owner-operator licensing model. These calls have been echoed by UFAWU.

I'm wondering when we can expect DFO to create a beneficial licence model for west coast owner-operators to support local fishers, and not anonymous licence-holders like foreign corporations.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I think the member probably is aware that there are varying views on the ownership model on the west coast. The structure on the east coast is quite different at this point.

In order to look into this situation, we have put in place a review of the beneficial ownership of the fisheries on the Pacific coast to understand the current situation and then explore changes that might be appropriate in the future.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

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

Through you, Chair, thank you, Minister, for appearing today. You've been the minister now for 114 days.

Minister, my colleague, Mr. Perkins, and I sent you three letters 57 days ago, on December 21. We've yet to receive responses from you despite requesting a response. It seems that either you don't open your mail, or you ignore the responsibility to answer questions raised by Canadians and other elected representatives. Which one is it?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I certainly am interested in any communications by any of the members around this table. I appreciate your work. Your perspectives are important, and I look forward to providing you with an answer.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Minister. We look forward to a timely response.

Minister, do you communicate with your parliamentary secretary regularly, and does he keep you apprised of what happens at this committee?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I have the great fortune to have an excellent and effective parliamentary secretary, who is very engaged with fisheries, not just in his own community in Nova Scotia but across the country. We are in frequent conversation about how we can support this committee and our fishers in their communities across the country.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Minister.

When the Pacific strategic salmon initiative was announced last year, former minister Jordan—she was, I believe, the fourth minister in five years, and now you're the fifth—repeatedly stated that it would be built from the ground up. Last week at committee, a DFO official told this committee that the PSSI is the conduit for your government's response to the floods that ravaged B.C. and aquatic habitats last November and December.

Minister, what is the status of the PSSI, and when will it be functioning?

Hon. Joyce Murray: This is absolutely a signature initiative. As you know, it comes with close to \$650 million of funding. It preceded the floods, but, yes, one of the pillars of this—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Can you tell us when it will be up and functioning? That's the question.

Hon. Joyce Murray: It will be up and functioning as soon as we are ready to put cheques out the door for this very important work.

Mr. Mel Arnold: There's no definite time then. You don't know. Thank you.

How much of the PSSI's \$647 million—you mentioned almost \$650 million—has already been committed and to what?

If you don't have the answer today, you can say that you don't know.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I will ask my officials to answer that question. I would be happy to talk about the key priorities of this funding.

• (1140)

Mr. Mel Arnold: We have been reduced to only one hour with you, Minister, so I would rather not receive an answer from the officials. If you don't have the answers, the officials can provide that in writing after the meeting. Thank you.

As the PSSI is being built from the ground up, who is determining how it is being built and in what forums are these determinations being made?

Hon. Joyce Murray: The PSSI has been laid out in four pillars. There is conservation and restoration, harvest transformation, hatchery and enhancement, and also collaboration with the provincial, municipal and indigenous communities. There are a number of factors to it.

DFO will be determining what is funded. We have yet to bring forward some of the specific programs that money will flow through, but I can tell you that it will restore coastal restoration funding.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Minister.

In 2019, the Prime Minister issued former minister Jordan a mandate to make new investments in fighting aquatic invasive species. Apart from adding a single full-time position at DFO Pacific, Minister Jordan failed to deliver on her mandate. The commissioner of the environment and this committee have repeatedly warned your government of the threats of aquatic invasive species, that they are acute and that equitable distribution of resources for fighting AIS must be delivered.

Minister, will you stand up for British Columbians and other Canadians and finally deliver new investments to fight against aquatic invasive species?

Hon. Joyce Murray: We will deliver effective responses to invasive species, and we are doing that on all coasts at present.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I beg to differ, Madam Minister.

What new actions are being taken to address the threat of AIS in B.C. and western Canada, other than the environment minister's announcement for national parks? What other measures?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'm sorry. Was that AAS? I didn't catch—

Mr. Mel Arnold: It's AIS, aquatic invasive species.

Hon. Joyce Murray: We have a number of measures on aquatic invasive species from green crab to lamprey eels, so I'm not sure—

Mr. Mel Arnold: I'm referring to new measures.

Hon. Joyce Murray: —which specific one, but we can give you an answer in writing.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

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

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

British Columbians know of Minister Murray's passion and expertise for the environment, but not just the natural environment. Her record is also an understanding and appreciation for the essential elements of our social, cultural and economic foundation on the west coast. This is what she's bringing now to the whole country. Therein lies, I think, a fundamental conflict, particularly in this portfolio.

We see stocks across the country in bad shape. We see our harvesters struggling to make a living as the government tries to balance the need to preserve and restore stocks with the interests of communities small and large to earn a living. I would like to ask the minister how she intends to balance those two struggling attributes of her portfolio.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for the question and for your long-term contributions to the fisheries committee.

That is, indeed, the challenge of fisheries. People in remote communities really depend on their harvest activities, but I have also heard from them that they are very intent on ensuring that the next generation of their children and grandchildren can benefit from the fisheries and fish production work.

We all have the same interest, which is that, in the long term, we have a healthy ocean. It's the healthy ocean that is the basis for healthy local economies.

I'll mention one program that I think is going to be very helpful in this, which is the blue economy strategy that my mandate asked me to put together. The blue economy will be very focused on rural communities and opportunities, innovation and ways to have new and more jobs in rural communities as we seek to rebuild and make resilient our fisheries and oceans for the years to come.

• (1145)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you Minister.

As we look at balancing those two needs, there's a constant argument over science. That argument comes from all directions. In the last Parliament, we saw science out of the DFO that said that the aquaculture installations on Discovery Island weren't a significant risk. That didn't pass the sniff test.

There are others who will also challenge the science that the DFO is using to not allow mark-selective fisheries or other fisheries that they believe are abundant enough to be fished.

I'd like the minister's assessment on the state of science in the DFO—especially with the major investments we made back in the 42nd Parliament—and these conflicts that keep coming up.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Science is absolutely the underpinning of what we do at DFO. I have a great deal of respect for the scientists at DFO. Yes, we significantly rebuilt the science in this country after 10 years of a Conservative government that did not respect science and cut budgets for science. That has been a critical part of what we're doing.

Scientists don't always agree on everything. The process of science is almost like a challenge function. People bring their data and results forward and discuss them with others to reach, as best as possible, a unified conclusion. Different opinions and analysis are inherent in science.

With respect to the salmon aquaculture comment, DFO says that there is minimal risk from particular threats to the wild Pacific salmon. However, those minimal risks are cumulative if there is a number of potential diseases or parasites. In my view, with the absolute crisis that we're in with our wild Pacific salmon, any addressable threats need to be addressed. We want to be the generation that has protected our wild Pacific salmon and made it more resilient and healthy, not the other way around.

The science is important, but so is the outcome. That's what I'm determined to focus on.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

The Chair: I was just going to tell you that your time is up, Mr. Hardie.

We'll move on now to Madame Desbiens for two and half minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The minister said something about fishing in marine protected areas. She seems to have said that it's probably allowed, but it's prohibited in the American Bank. So there is some confusion there, which I just wanted to bring to the committee's attention.

I would like to come back to the capelin fishery in the St. Lawrence. It is an intangible heritage that we care very much about. I understand the major concerns of the departments about all kinds of things, but we also have to be concerned about the expertise required in the capelin fishery. We have documents in front of us right now that we have shared with the minister and the officials. It is a set of studies conducted by scientists that confirm that there is no link between the St. Lawrence capelin population and the capelin population of Newfoundland and Labrador, and that a small capelin can travel 200 kilometres, but not 2,000.

So I want to stress that. I would like the minister to tell me that officials from her department will be looking into this matter very soon so that weir capelin fishing in the St. Lawrence River will be allowed in Charlevoix as early as April 1.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for the question.

We aren't ready to announce the decisions we're going to make on capelin.

However, I know that the stock is a little low.

[*English*]

We need to build it, but the science has not been concluded and the decisions have not been made as to the allocation of that stock.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I would like to draw your attention to the fact that an incredible amount of capelin is rolling into the St. Lawrence River. We've rarely seen that. So the quantity is there.

I'd like your department's scientists to address this issue quickly, because there are two unique fisheries at stake in Canada. If fishers are not given permission to fish in these two fisheries as early as April 1, they are at risk of disappearing, leaving only the one in the Maritimes. Instead of setting the date for April 1, your department has postponed it to June 1, which is frightening and catastrophic for fishermen.

I would really like you to assure me that your team will urgently look into this matter, Madam Minister. Can you give us and our fishers that hope?

Hon. Joyce Murray: We will look into this, and I will ask the officials to follow up.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair. I'll be sharing my two and a half minutes with my colleague MP Taylor Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleague for sharing her time.

Through you to the minister, it's good to have you before the committee today. Fish harvesters across Canada were pleased when, in 2020, your government made the eligibility criteria for the EI fishing benefit more flexible in light of the pandemic, in light of the challenges they've been facing. After the most recent fishing season, fish harvesters on the B.C. coast, hundreds and hundreds of them, applied for the EI fishing benefit based on the criteria on the government's website. After they applied, it seems the criteria on the website were changed. Now ESDC is rejecting all of their applications.

I've spoken with the fishermen's union. I've spoken with the unemployed action centre in Prince Rupert. These are organizations that have worked for decades with fish harvesters to help them apply for benefits. They understand the criteria in detail. They're baffled as to what's happening here. They've tried to engage both with your department and with ESDC repeatedly and have heard nothing back.

Can you tell the committee, are you aware of this issue and what are you doing to address it?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you to the member for that question.

I'm certainly aware of the fish harvester benefit and the decision to quickly stand up a brand new benefit in a matter of weeks due to the impacts of COVID potentially on harvesters' income, especially those who couldn't access the CERB.

We, being the collective government, through Service Canada and the tax department, are doing our very best to address any confusion that occurred. The intention was clear. That was a benefit for those who could not access EI.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, if I could clarify, this isn't the fish harvester benefit. This is EI. This is the EI fishing benefit that the issue is with.

I encourage you to talk with the department officials and figure this out as quickly as possible, especially to get back to the parties who have been requesting engagement on this issue. That's the real frustration here. There's radio silence. Your department is not getting back to the fishermen's union and to the advocates.

Hon. Joyce Murray: We will speak with ESDC, who manage EI, and ensure that these questions are not falling between the cracks, so that you, on behalf of your constituents, can receive an answer.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I cede my time to my colleague.

The Chair: There is actually none left. It's gone over, but that's a good try.

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

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming.

In following up with the questions that I said I would ask you before the committee, I'll start off with this one. Are you committed to working with our angling community, yes or no?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Awesome.

This is a letter to you from the Public Fishery Alliance dated February 4, 2022, asking for a chinook retention opportunity in areas 28, 17, 18 and 19 in B.C. This is the letter's ask:

...we are asking that your department works with the public fishery representatives via the SFAB process and local SFAC Chairs to develop fishing plans that permit much needed public access to Chinook in the spring of 2022. This is when stocks of concern from the Fraser, or stocks identified as small stream stocks of concern, are not present due to their summer and fall run timings. During this same [time] period hatchery marked Chinook are prevalent.

They're in the millions, Minister. The risk to threatened stocks has proven simply to not be there. Will you open a limited fishery from April 1 to May 31, 2022, as requested?

• (1155)

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

First, I want to say that as a coastal British Columbian I know how important the recreational fishery is, and it's multiple times the value per fish, in fact, than some of the commercial harvest. We currently do have a mark-selective fishery, a limited set of availability, which is open until the end of May.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Minister, can I just clarify? That specific question is for those areas. They're asking if there's going to be an opening for that time period. Can you just answer that one specifically?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll ask my officials to answer about specific areas, Mr. Zimmer, but we do have an opening that is until the end of May.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: My time with you here is very limited, so I'll follow through with them on that afterwards.

If you could refer to that letter and the ask and really look at what they're requesting, they've been shut out of the fishery for the last couple of years even though there have been hundreds of millions of marked fish coming up from Washington State that are there to catch—110 million, to be exact—so the opportunities are there. We asked the previous minister, who's no longer here, for the same opportunities, and she wouldn't listen. We're asking that to, hopefully, have more of a hearing from you as a British Columbian.

I'll move on to my next question. This is to speak about what you had talked about: a mark-selective fishery. It's being established in B.C. You talked about there being one, but I'm going to ask a specific question that is from Chris Bos of the South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition: "The whole topic of moving forward"—and this is more of a long-term solution to the problem of salmon stocks that are at risk—"with the transition to Marked Selective Chinook and Coho Fishing is probably most important to the long-term survival of the Public Salmon Fishery in B.C. Marking all the hatchery Chinook and Coho must start as soon as possible as it will take several years before those clipped juvenile fish will come back as marked adults to the fishery."

Three to five years is the turnaround, even if we get started today, Minister.

The B.C. government has said to get going on a mark-selective fishery. Twenty-five members of Parliament from all parties, including my colleague Mel Arnold, signed that letter asking for a mark-selective fishery. The Cohen commission's recommendation 30—I have it here—calls on the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to establish a mark-selective fishery. When are we actually going to see that happen, Minister?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that question.

We're going to see some results of our study of the pilot on mark-selective fisheries. The reality is that while this is something that has been asked for—yes—it also can have detrimental effects on very vulnerable chinook stock because of the mortality levels of the wild salmon that are caught during a mark-selective fishery. We do need to be very careful how this is applied, and we are doing the research now on what the experimental or pilot mark-selective fishery is telling us in terms of whether it conserves or it creates extra pressure on the vulnerable stock.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: We've actually had evidence, which I produced for the last Parliament, that said that the fish mortality rates of even caught fish is very low. The mortality rate is extremely low.

You talked about a pilot program running in B.C. now. Can you give us more details of what that actually looks like? A lot of the angling community in B.C. doesn't have any idea of what this pilot program is. I would suggest these should be the folks who are actually.... They're the conservationists who are on the river in hip waders on the weekends picking up garbage. They should be part of this pilot program. I'm a little concerned that they're not part of it.

Could you maybe explain what that looks like?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

We do consult with stakeholders and indigenous communities in everything we do as a ministry.

The very vulnerable chinook stocks have about a 20% mortality when they are fished in a mark-selective fishery. We need to think about where we are having the mark-selective fisheries and at what time, so there is not an interception of the wild stocks that are too frail to be fished.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: When they're in holding pens, survivability goes way up.

Thank you, Minister, for your time.

The Chair: Your time is now a little bit over.

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

● (1200)

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing today.

I know from your previous work that you are invested in conservation and indigenous and community consultation, as you have referred to already in this meeting.

We've also referred already to the Pacific salmon strategy. You were able to reiterate this as a priority for you. It's a priority for me as well. I'm representing Yukon. I was reassured from our earlier meeting with officials that consultation is under way.

I'd like to hear from you, as minister, about your engagement and work with Yukon partners, both at present and [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] indigenous leaders about implementation of the Pacific salmon strategy as it applies to Yukon.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

When you were saying that I am known to be consulting, that's true. I also want to mention that as a former tree planter I have a great deal of appreciation and respect for the work of fishers out in the elements, in good weather and bad, doing the hard work to provide for their families and their local economies. I do appreciate the work of fishers.

I understand that there are huge challenges to the salmon fishery in Yukon. Within the first few weeks of being minister, I met with leadership—the environment minister and others—from Yukon and heard about those concerns. Yes, the Pacific salmon initiative will certainly be addressing concerns of the salmon stocks in Yukon. I look forward to this initiative being ready to roll out in the months to come.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

Minister, in your mandate letter you were directed to support community shoreline and oceans plastic cleanup efforts. I'm interested in what steps you and your department are looking at in order to carry this out.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that.

It's so important to fish and to fishers that we have healthy oceans. Ten million dollars to remove ghost gear from the oceans has removed some 1,300 tonnes of ghost gear and hundreds of kilometres of lengths of rope. We intend to continue with the ghost gear program to pull this out of the water as well as to make sure that our regulations are such that less debris goes in the water. For example, in the shellfish aquaculture industry on the west coast, we're looking at regulatory changes to prevent that debris from being on the coast.

The change from using styrofoam in docks is also an important one because styrofoam has a very detrimental impact on fish. When it gets ground into small bits, the fish eat it thinking it's food and then, with full stomachs of non-nutritious substance, they starve.

We're taking a lot of measures. It's an important issue. Thanks for raising it.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

I know that in your previous life as a provincial minister in B.C., you introduced the first comprehensive strategy for total product recycling stewardship, including requiring that producers assume responsibilities for removing products from the waste stream.

In your opinion is this akin to making polluters pay, and are you looking at a similar approach, in your current role, for tackling plastic pollution, particularly microplastics?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

Indeed, it's true that I did introduce the first producer responsibility framework for products that are harmful in the waste stream.

Plastic is a national issue that goes beyond the fisheries ministry, so I am working with the environment minister on this, and I think producer responsibility for waste is an excellent way to go. I am certainly a champion of that model, and it's a great point that with plastics and styrofoam and gear, that could also be a way forward. I appreciate your raising that.

• (1205)

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you, Minister.

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

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Small for five minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the honourable minister for being here today to take some questions and for providing some witness.

Earlier as the minister was being questioned by my colleague Ms. Barron, I heard the minister reference neutral science. Is there a type of science other than neutral science? Is there a biased science, and who or what would that bias be towards if, in fact, there is a biased form of science?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

Perhaps I need to clarify. I don't recall talking about neutral. I think what I said was that scientists do research and then they explore each other's outcomes and—

Mr. Clifford Small: No, the question was about Alaskans taking B.C. salmon, and you referenced that perhaps we need some neutral science. Anyway, let's forget about all—

Hon. Joyce Murray: Oh, I understand.

I meant scientists who are neither Alaskan nor British Columbian—

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay. That's wonderful.

Hon. Joyce Murray: —who come in and take a look at the runs and who is catching them.

Mr. Clifford Small: Yes. You meant international. All right. I'm sorry.

I was a little bit uncertain as to what you meant there.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes. I meant politically neutral.

Mr. Clifford Small: Politically, yes, and we'll be politically correct.

The Prime Minister has mandated the minister to leave as many fish in the water as possible in a bid to reduce carbon. The minister has indicated that fish harvesters should accept this and that, with the technological advancements, they can now work remotely from home. I read that in a news article from yesterday, while I was coming back from Newfoundland and Labrador.

Could you explain to us how working remotely works in the fishing industry?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'm not sure exactly what the member is referring to by this.

My view is that the work that fish harvesters do is extremely important, and the blue economy strategy seeks to add opportunities to rural communities and—

Mr. Clifford Small: All right, so we'll talk about some more opportunities especially here in Atlantic Canada. Currently in the Atlantic region there are no federally funded salmon enhancements, while in British Columbia, of course, there are 20 federally funded fish hatcheries.

I'll quote from the minister's mandate letter regarding an initiative for wild Atlantic salmon:

...to make new investments and develop a conservation strategy to restore and rebuild wild Atlantic salmon populations and their habitats.

How many salmon enhancement projects do you have in the planning stages right now for Atlantic Canada, and more specifically Newfoundland and Labrador?

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's a question for which my officials can supply you an answer.

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay. That's fine, and I'll accept an answer in writing. In fact, that would be wonderful.

I have one more question here, which is actually coming from the commercial harvesting sector. Right now we have 400 non-core groundfish licences that are just hanging in limbo, and they'll die with the licence-holders. A recent decision in the Nova Scotia courts was in favour of transferring category B lobster licences.

Will that affect the 400 non-core groundfish licences in terms of transferability in Newfoundland and Labrador?

Hon. Joyce Murray: The court decision was about the minister's decision on a particular licence. It was appealed based on the fact that there was not enough information for the determination. We accepted that. It was not setting a precedent for any of the other class B licences. These are licences that were provided decades and decades ago under the clear understanding that they were not saleable and transferable.

• (1210)

Mr. Clifford Small: My next question is on herring in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The percentage threshold of undersized herring is much lower in terms of legally taking herring and the herring quota, as compared to Nova Scotia.

Do you have any plans to have a more equitable approach in terms of allowing a higher percentage of undersized herring to be allowed to be retained in Newfoundland and Labrador?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Fundamentally, I am focused on the long-term sustainability and the rebuilding of stocks that are in the critical zone.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you very much.

When the harvester pulls up—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small, but you've gone way over your time. I wanted to give you a chance to get in your round of questions, and to get an answer to the last one.

I believe that's it for the minister, according to a message I was just passed by staff.

Am I correct in saying that? I see heads nodding.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, it appears the Minister may have some more time available. She doesn't seem to be dragged away, so if she's able to stay, the members had requested two full hours with the minister. If she is not being dragged away, can we do another round of questions?

The Chair: That will certainly be up to the minister, Mr. Arnold. I know her staff have indicated to me that her time was up five or 10 minutes ago. She did stay a little extra than the first hour, even though we were a bit late in getting organized and going. A lot of that is kind of our own fault, with members not getting here on time, which is always a problem, as well.

A voice: And technical difficulties.

The Chair: Yes, technical difficulties, that's right.

Continuing on, we have Mr. Morrissey, for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

My question is to the deputy minister.

Mr. Sargent, on numerous occasions before this committee, on a number of studies, the issue that has been raised with great concern is the alarming growth of the unreported and under-reported cash sales both in lobster and crab. This is identified as one of the most significant threats affecting these two species, which are the most sustainably successful fisheries on the east coast.

Mr. Sargent, are you aware of this concern being expressed by fishers in the industry?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Absolutely, we are.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How long have you been aware?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We've been working on this for months.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: For months...? It was raised a couple of years ago. It's been on the radar for several years.

Are you advising the committee you've only been working on it for a couple of months?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I can speak to what I've been involved in. The issue of cash sales has been around, I'm sure, for decades.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Just so we're clear, a cash sale is not illegal. It's only illegal if it's not reported.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Yes, that's right.

I'm not sure what the question is.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The concern is when it's not reported. The minister spoke about the importance of sustainability and our international reputation. Our international reputation is built on our marine sustainability certification of species, which demand absolutely correct data on catch volumes. When it's unreported or under-reported, it's undermining the data in that key program. Again, are you aware of this concern and this practice?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Are you now telling me that the department has been acting on it?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: As you can imagine, this is something that involves not just our department.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes, I'm aware.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We're working with all our various partners: provincial, since obviously they have the jurisdiction over processing; the CRA; and some federal partners on this.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Mr. Sargent.

This is extremely important. It's been raised numerous times before this committee as a trend that's growing all too alarmingly. You have fishers who are watching and seeing what's going to go. It's extremely important that our country maintain our credibility on the MSC certification side of it.

Could you advise the committee on the rollout of the small craft harbours program? Our government has committed significant new dollars to the very critical and essential area of small craft harbours under your ministry. Can you advise us of how much of the last budget will be committed to rollout and projects before the end of this fiscal year?

If you don't have that, perhaps you could report back to the committee in detail.

• (1215)

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I'll turn to our ADM of fisheries and harbour management for this one.

Go ahead, Jean-Guy.

Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron: We've made decisions on how the \$300 million should be spent, our priorities and projects. However, on the rolling out of the cash and the project design, there may be a lag in the actual expenditures. The projects have to go out to tender, so the specific financials are not exactly determined. It takes a little bit of time. The decision on which projects, to try to get this money out in as quickly a fashion as possible, has already been taken, and we are currently trying to push through the procurement process. We could provide a more detailed list of these priorities.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I would like more detail.

Could we assume, then, that the construction season coming up this summer will be quite active?

Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron: We're hoping that, through the procurement process, it will be an active summer. For us, when you get money for two years, it is about getting projects that are, as close as possible, ready for the shovel.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: In the little bit of time I have left, could you provide to the committee, sometime, these additional contributions that our government has made? We upped, I believe, the A-base budget on the capital. How has that impacted the number of harbours that would still have barricades or would still have restrictions on them because of years of chronic underfunding in small craft harbours?

Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron: The department has had the same A-base budget for—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I'm talking about the additional capital expenditures. Our government authorized, I believe, \$200 million and then \$300 million.

Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron: That's right. There's been over \$780 million of additional, what we call “temporary” spending in the small craft harbour for major capital projects. Dozens upon dozens of harbours are affected. We could provide a list of what projects were undertaken and those projects in which the money—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What I would like to know is how many harbours that were barricaded or viewed as unsafe have now been removed from the list as a result of these investments.

Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron: I would not know the number offhand.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No, I know you don't know offhand. That's why I'm asking you to provide it to the committee.

Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron: Yes, that's perfect.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

We will now go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to get clarification on area 12B, which I believe is east of Anticosti Island, where there's a problem with the indicative crab fishery. Three of the eight fishers in that area, who are basically the most active fishers, have had their licences revoked. They're experi-

encing anxiety because their licence won't be renewed. Departmental decisions are vague.

Can you give us any information about this problem?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I'm not aware of this situation, but I can certainly inquire and provide the committee with details, if you'd like.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you very much. It's a very urgent issue, so I hope we'll get the information soon.

I'd like to come back to labelling by addressing the officials.

Do you think your government will have significant funds to support a labelling and traceability task force and frame the desire to align with EU methods and models, for example?

• (1220)

Mr. Timothy Sargent: That's a very good question.

As the minister said earlier, we aren't primarily responsible for this work, but rather the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. So that would be a question for them.

I'm not saying that we don't work together, but it's the agency that is leading the file.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Would you support the creation of a working group where all stakeholders could talk to each other? This would maximize the effectiveness of the communications and lead to a comparable model fairly quickly. The idea would be to bring all the representative organizations and associations together around the same table to make their submissions and discuss an effective plan.

Do you like that idea?

[*English*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron: As the deputy minister mentioned, this is more than a DFO file, but a CFIA file. We've been engaging with all the interested stakeholders in this process. The process began as one of simply looking at mislabelling of fish in, probably, a tricking-the-consumer sort of way.

The departments have decided to engage more broadly on this and had a discussion paper put out to the public to engage all interested stakeholders. One of the things we expected, and we were correct in that expectation, was that different stakeholders see the opportunity for a complete or different traceability system that goes beyond whether your cod is cod and not tilapia when you're at the grocery store, to the other benefits, be they conservation or anti-IUU fishing and whatnot. I believe the minister for CFIA will be putting out a “what we heard” report shortly on this, which, of course, is the beginning of the next round of consultations with interested stakeholders. The scope of the final program has yet to be determined.

I think the honourable member's question was whether we are engaging with stakeholders in the development of the program, and the answer to that would be yes.

The Chair: It was a long “yes”. Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I believe this question is perhaps best for Deputy Minister Sargent, but it's to whomever can best respond. I want to follow up on my question to the minister around the removal of open-net pen fish farming in B.C. waters by the end of 2025. I specifically want to reference Mr. Beech's "as was heard" report from 2021 that states:

any responsible transition strategy must position the sector for growth and job creation, with particular attention to rural and coastal economies.

Unfortunately, I'm hearing from first nations, coastal communities and impacted workers who have been left in the dark and aren't seeing any action on a responsible transition plan.

Can you speak to when a timeline will be set for a responsible transition plan, and will the government set aside emergency funds for the workers and communities to help with this transition?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We are hard at work on the plan.

I'm going to ask our ADM for aquatic ecosystems, Alex Dostal, if she can respond directly to the question.

Ms. Alexandra Dostal (Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Chair, thank you so much for the question.

In terms of the net-pen transition plan, as the minister indicated during her remarks a little earlier, we will be going out and undertaking consultations on a proposed plan so we can hear from interested partners and stakeholders throughout British Columbia on the development of the plan.

In addition to that, I want to flag that in terms of, as you had mentioned, impacted stakeholders, for example, there is a suite of economic programs that we have for impacted workers. Again, as we think forward on the transition plan and the net-pen plan, we will be consulting and hearing from British Columbians before the plan is finalized.

Thank you.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you. I hope this is clearly communicated to those who are wanting to make plans around how they are going to keep food on their table moving forward.

I believe my other question is best suited for Mr. Pelletier.

I want to touch briefly on the MV *Zim Kingston* cargo spill on the west coast of Vancouver Island, as we're still feeling the aftermath of the spill. Just last weekend, volunteers led by Epic Exeo were working hard to clean up even more debris that they suspect came from another broken cargo container from the spill.

I'm not sure if this question is directly for you here, but as the government looks towards a potential extension of the oceans protection plan after 2022, will you ensure that it includes provisions for an integrated response plan that includes a local task force to help address cargo container spills, as I proposed in my motion, M-41?

• (1225)

Mr. Mario Pelletier (Commissioner, Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Yes, obviously we're

working on the extension of the oceans protection plan in order to address some of the remaining gaps. We've done a huge lessons learned on the OPP1 and we've done great things in OPP1 that allowed us a good response to the *Zim Kingston*. We're going forward with a request for an extension.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Perkins for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, officials, for staying for the full two hours.

The minister in her testimony said that fishing continues in all marine protected areas with the existing marine protected areas that have been put in place for the country. Is that correct?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I'll ask Alex if she would take this one, please.

Ms. Alexandra Dostal: With respect to marine protected areas and existing marine protected areas, what activities are allowed in a protected area is predicated on the conservation objectives outlined and determined for that particular area, so that's based on science and stakeholder engagement. What is disallowed in particular marine protected areas is really contingent on—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I don't have a lot of time. I'm sorry.

My question was that the minister said that fishing is allowed. My understanding is that the three existing MPAs in Nova Scotia and the one in the Gaspé have no-take zones where no fishing is allowed. Can the officials confirm that this is the case?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Specifically on Nova Scotia, I'll ask our DG, Doug Wentzell, to answer that.

Mr. Doug Wentzell (Regional Director General, Maritimes Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We do have different measures of protection in each of our marine protected areas in this region. What I can say is that, as the assistant deputy minister just commented, it really depends on the individual area. We do have fishing that occurs in marine protected areas. It depends on the exact location of that area—

Mr. Rick Perkins: With respect, that's not the question I asked. I asked about the existing three marine protected areas in Nova Scotia, so it's very specific, as is the one in the Gaspé.

I'll move on because you don't seem to want to answer the question about whether or not fishing is not allowed. I understand that there are no-take zones in all four of those marine protected areas.

The minister's mandate letter, Mr. Sargent, calls for us to achieve a "full recovery for nature by 2050". Can you tell me what that means? Is that back to what the oceans were like with John Cabot, or what does that mean?

Mr. Niall O'Dea (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): I'd be happy to take that question.

The objective of the full recovery of nature is one that is aligned with a broader commitment by the Government of Canada in the context of multilateral negotiations on the Convention on Biological Diversity that are happening currently. The objective there is to restore the resilience and sustainability of those ecosystems to support livelihoods.

I don't think, in frankness, that means returning to the time of John Cabot, but it does mean restoring the capacity of those ecosystems whether they be on land or in the water to provide the goods and services on which we as human populations depend.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you very much.

The commitment to go to 25% by 2025 and 30% by 2030, what international agreement requires that?

Mr. Niall O'Dea: It is a commitment that the federal government has made in respect of the negotiation of the new Convention on Biological Diversity, global biodiversity framework. That convention is still under negotiation, but Canada shares that objective with key countries around the world.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's a self-imposed one by the Canadian government, not one that's been determined by an international agreement. My understanding is that there's only one agreement currently, which requires 10%.

Mr. Niall O'Dea: The current Aichi targets are lower. The emerging consensus among international governments is to move towards those higher targets that you've mentioned.

• (1230)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

I'll switch gears. Regarding the temporary moderate livelihood licences that were issued, I have two questions on that.

One, how temporary are they? Two, in reaching that understanding, is there an understanding that, in granting those very valuable licences, no fishing for lobster will occur outside of the DFO regulated seasons?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Those understandings covered last season, so not this coming season. I think this minister and the previous minister as well as the department were very clear that the fishing that takes place under these licences needs to take place in the regulated DFO seasons.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We're in the middle of the season in LFA 33 and 34 where these are granted, so I can expect that when that season is over those bands and the bands in Nova Scotia will not be fishing out of the DFO regulated season.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Any licences that they receive from us, for moderate livelihood or other purposes, will be inside the regulated season, except for food, social and ceremonial, which has its own system.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay, I have one last question.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins. You've gone over time.

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

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the department officials once again for being here.

I have two questions. One is around redfish. We know there's a moratorium. It's been in place, I think, for about 25 years. There are two types of redfish. There's great interest in the fishing community as to what the next steps will be in terms of redfish. There is the belief that there is a bounty of redfish, and that it's an opportunity for another economic driver in coastal communities, like where I live and like where many of the people here live, especially on the east coast, of course.

I'm just wondering if you could give us an update on where we are in the process of reviewing the redfish quota, Jean-Guy.

Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron: Thank you for the question. This is an interesting stock for us because this is probably the first time we've taken a major commercial stock that's been in moratorium for a long time out of moratorium.

The fishery is not a new fishery or an emerging fishery. It is actually an ongoing established fishery. It so happens that the fisheries management is in moratorium due to the nature of the stock. The honourable member is correct in that one of the species is in the healthy zone. Another one looks like it's about to emerge out of the cautious zone into the healthy zone. At the end of the day, all access and allocation decisions are for the minister to make.

There are those in the traditional organizations who have been fishing this stock and have been a part of this fishery. Before we make any final access and allocation decisions, we undertook an extensive consultation with stakeholders, those who have traditionally been attached to this fishery as well as those who have an interest in joining the fishery. Those consultations have come to a conclusion.

We'll be making recommendations soon, we hope, to the minister, based on our analysis and these consultations on access and allocation, to develop an integrated fisheries management plan for the prosecution of the fishery for those who will be participating in the fishery of the future when it comes out of moratorium, which we expect will be in the not too distant future.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you very much for that answer.

My second question is in relation to the minister's mandate and its applicability to the work that you do. The minister's mandate letter speaks to advancing consistent, sustainable and collaborative fisheries arrangements with indigenous and non-indigenous fish harvesters, so I'm wondering—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Kelloway.

Mr. Zimmer, there's questioning of witnesses taking place. Could we tone it down or take it outside, one or the other?

Go ahead, Mr. Kelloway.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In relation to that question around developing a sustainable, collaborative, consistent fishery with indigenous and non-indigenous fishers, perhaps I'll look at the question of where we are right now. If we take a sliver of that contextual piece that I just presented around understandings and rights and reconciliation agreements in Atlantic Canada, where are we in terms of the numbers? How is the process going? What's left to do? I would assume there's plenty, but I'll give you an opportunity to give us a sense, a contextual piece, of where we are right now.

• (1235)

Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron: There are basically two processes that we're undertaking at the moment to advance the implementation of the moderate livelihood right of the 35 treaty nations of the Maritimes and Gaspé. Currently we have three RRAs—rights reconciliation agreements—that cover off four first nations that represent 25% of the population of the treaty nations writ large.

We are undertaking negotiations with probably a third who are still pursuing the RRA course as their preferred means of advancing the implementation of the right. This is largely in Quebec through New Brunswick and P.E.I.

In Nova Scotia, the assembly has rejected the RRA process as their preferred means to advance it at this point in time, though they have the opportunity to return to it. In the communities of Nova Scotia and in some communities in P.E.I., where they're reflecting on this, we are working on the moderate livelihood fisheries plans as a pilot providing temporary access. It allows us to have the arrangements like we saw with Potlotek or, most recently, with the four southwestern first nations in Nova Scotia.

We have re-engaged with the different first nations who are interested in those plans, including those who've already had these plans because—to a question that was asked earlier—the plans exist only for that fishery for that season, and then they cease to exist.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: The understandings are year to year or season to season.

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

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

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

I want to first pose a question to Mr. Sargent.

I want to confirm that the committee will be provided with the written answer to the question on how much of the Pacific salmon strategy initiative funding has already been committed, to whom and for what purposes.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Just clarify, exactly what is meant by “submitted” here? Is this a reference to internal government processes or is this something else? I just want to understand what was said.

Mr. Mel Arnold: This was a question to the minister earlier this morning on how much of the strategic Pacific salmon initiative funding had been already allocated, to whom and for what purposes.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: To the extent that it's been allocated to stakeholders, we can certainly provide that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Will you be providing that?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We are still at the early stages with the Pacific salmon strategic initiative, so—

Mr. Mel Arnold: The question was this: How much has already been allocated?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Yes, we can provide that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Mr. Sargent, do you agree with the minister's earlier assertion today that the geographical location of the scientists determines the neutrality of their science and that scientists in B.C. are not well suited to examining issues in B.C. or the Pacific?

Do you agree with the minister's assertion?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I'm not sure I understood the minister's remarks in that way. I'm not sure what the verbatim statement was.

Mr. Mel Arnold: We're not getting very far on that one.

Mr. Sargent, earlier in these meetings, the minister made a point of highlighting the government's investments in DFO's science in the 42nd Parliament.

When the increased investment in science was announced, I was happy to see it, but I've repeatedly been disappointed by the absence of results. Science funding was restored, but major stocks, including the Pacific salmon, are worse now than they have ever been. Nearly 10% of Canadian fish stocks have no integrated fisheries management plan. Only 21% of stocks in the critical zone have rebuilding plans in place and 33 stocks are in critical condition.

These gaps are very concerning. Why do they exist?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: You started out by asking about the money we've received for science and how that's affected our fish management decisions.

Maybe I'll ask our ADM on science, Arran McPherson, to talk a little bit about what we've been doing with that money and how it links to fisheries.

Mr. Mel Arnold: No, I'm asking why there are still gaps. Why are the IFMPs not completed?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We have a lot of work to do with the rebuilding plans. We know this. Science work is part of it, but that's not the only part of it. We have to consult with stakeholders. It's a lengthy process. We're affecting the livelihoods of a lot of people here.

• (1240)

Mr. Mel Arnold: I'll note your answer there. If you can provide it in writing to the committee after, we would appreciate it. I want to quickly move on to some further questions.

This question will be for Mr. Davis.

Last December, DFO issued a decision to reduce B.C. commercial crab harvest opportunities by 50% in harvest area E. This decision blindsided the B.C. crab harvesters and their families, some of whom have been harvesting for generations. The decision also blindsided coastal communities.

The area E harvesters were supposed to begin this season on April 1, which is in 43 days. In December, DFO told harvesters that DFO was making their best efforts to mitigate the impacts of the commercial crab sector. How has your department mitigated the impacts of your decision for B.C.'s crab harvesters?

Mr. Neil Davis (Regional Director, Fisheries Management Branch, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you for the question.

We are in a difficult spot with this one. I think the reference is to the five nations on the west coast of Vancouver Island who have a court-defined right to sell all species except geoduck.

A court of appeal decision came out last spring, which directed the—

Mr. Mel Arnold: What mitigation efforts have been made?

Mr. Neil Davis: We have reviewed the allocations that we think we are obligated to provide to the five nations rights-based fishery and proposed an increase to their allocation. We completed that analysis in the fall. As soon as that analysis was complete, we communicated to both the five nations and industry.

In our communications with industry, we laid out a couple of potential options for mitigating the impacts in the short term. These included moving forward the area reselection process that would allow licence-holders currently in that area to move elsewhere and also to provide some flexibility on how they—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Fishermen [*Inaudible—Editor*] greater fishing pressure on other regions. It's not true mitigation, not from what we've heard from the harvesters.

I have one final—

The Chair: Your time has gone over, Mr. Arnold. I'm sorry about that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

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

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be splitting my time with Ms. Barron of the NDP. In fact, she's going to get most of this time, because I just wanted to make a couple of comments to the officials.

We have two very important studies coming up. DFO has to be ready for them. Almost two years ago, the department was thoroughly high-centred when questioned on the issue of the science behind the pinniped issue on both the east coast and west coast. You need to be ready when that study comes along with whatever science tells us—good, bad or indifferent. You do need to be ready for that.

The second one has to do with, again, a very important and necessary study that we've been trying to get done for I think a couple of Parliaments now. That's on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The Conservative motion calls for a review of this whole issue, not just on the ocean but upriver as well. DFO is going to need to be ready to talk to us about enforcement efforts, about what they see and about whether there are conflicts and gaps between the social, cultural and food fishery that first nations are engaged with versus what could be legitimately described as an illegal fishery.

I just wanted to put the officials on notice that those two areas will be a focus of questions from me and I'm sure from the others.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'd like to turn the rest of my time over to Ms. Barron.

The Chair: Okay.

You have just over three minutes, Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Hardie, for sharing your time. I will gladly take this time to ask some more of my questions.

Deputy Minister Sargent, I believe my question would be best suited for you. In 2018 the Liberal government supported an NDP motion, M-151, which was a call to combat plastic pollution in Canada's marine environments. This call included the industrial use of plastics, as we see in the shellfish aquaculture industry. Industry is a major source of microplastics and marine debris along the coasts of Vancouver Island.

I'm wondering why we're not seeing more action from this government to make sure that Canada's rapidly growing shellfish aquaculture industry is less reliant on plastics in our waters.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I'll direct that one to Alex Dostal, ADM of aquatic ecosystems.

Go ahead, Alex.

Ms. Alexandra Dostal: Great.

Thank you so much for the question. With respect to debris coming from shellfish aquaculture operators, in British Columbia, where we are the lead regulators, the conditions of licence that shellfish operators operate under actually have conditions with respect to ensuring that debris is not emanating from their shellfish operations.

Moreover, I'd also like to mention that in terms of efforts that the department has undertaken in this regard, we have the fisheries and aquaculture clean technology adoption program. This is a program that helps enhance environmental opportunities for aquaculture, including shellfish operators. Two projects that we funded under that have to do with providing funding to allow shellfish operators to be able to remove styrofoam, which has the risk, as you mentioned, of creating debris, and replace that with plastic billets, which don't have the same debris.

I just wanted to bring that to the attention of the members of the committee.

• (1245)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

As the plastics are being changed over to other options, as you talked about, how is that going to be monitored among those in the industry? I'm hearing that a monitoring mechanism is required in order to ensure that the plastics are being reduced in the waters, and to make sure that we don't have plastic ghost gear, for example, being left to drift in the waters because it's the easier thing to do.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I can jump in on that one.

We have a dedicated C and P unit on aquaculture that's watching this issue very closely.

Mr. Chair, with your indulgence, it was asked earlier how many C and P officers have been added since the government came to power in 2015. That number is approximately 300 additional C and P officers.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

As we know, the recreational fishery on Vancouver Island is a significant economic driver. I've heard recently from Vancouver Island chamber alliance, who I know wrote to you to highlight the dual impacts of COVID-19 restrictions and salmon fishery closures. I'm in complete support of a cautious approach, of course, to conservation, but workers in this industry are worried about decisions that will impact their livelihoods. These workers are asking for more transparency to ensure that they can be a meaningful partner in this important decision.

I'm wondering if you could speak today to how the department is working to promote meaningful dialogue with the impacted workers and businesses on Vancouver Island.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Just to clarify, is this about aquaculture or recreational fishing?

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: It's recreational fishing.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Thanks for the clarification.

Neil, do you want to take this one on?

Mr. Neil Davis: Certainly, and the member is quite right, this has been an important issue.

We have a very well-established advisory process with the recreational fishing sector called the sport fishing advisory board, which is a coastwide process supported by numerous local level committees called sport fishing advisory committees. They offer an opportunity for all those who have an interest, or that participate in the recreational fishery, to provide the department with advice, and for us to discuss our management approaches with them.

Specific to recreational fishing opportunities on the south coast, as the member is probably aware, there have been some fairly serious concerns around the status of salmon stocks, in particular, that have led to restrictions and constrained fishing opportunities. That does pose challenges to the sector, and we use that process to review our plans with them.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens, for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd just like to make a brief comment. I heard earlier that the department was working with fishers on traceability. However, the people I know in the industry tell me that fishers were never consulted on this. Only members of the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels de homard du sud de la Gaspésie keep an electronic logbook and place a medallion of origin on lobster. So I'm a little confused.

Let me tell you a quick story. My father is a restaurant owner. We are in L'Isle-aux-Coudres, and we make it a point to serve fish from our region, ideally from Quebec, if not the Maritimes. One day, we bought some frozen cod, which was presented to us as a product of Quebec. My father opens one of the boxes and finds a little paper inside saying "Russian cod". My father has no hair, but if he did, it would have made his hair stand on end. He took the boxes of cod, worth \$560, and threw them in the garbage. Indeed, it is inconceivable for us to serve cod from elsewhere.

How can you explain that, today, in 2022, we aren't able to have priority access to products from Quebec and Canada, before finding ourselves having to buy products from elsewhere?

• (1250)

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I agree that we absolutely need this initiative. As I was saying earlier, we're working with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and other partners to implement this.

If there are any groups that have something to say and would like to contact us or the agency to express their views, we would be very pleased to hear from them.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: In the immediate term, what could enable us to buy local products?

I went to the Gaspé and asked the restaurant owners if they served local fish. They told me that they did not, that local fish was being exported to other countries and that they were serving us rosefish from this or that country. It doesn't make sense.

What is the first thing you propose to do? I know that steps are being taken, but what urgently needs to be done to solve this problem?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I fully agree that this is an issue.

Building our brand is important for Canada and its provinces. I believe our brand is highly respected around the world.

That said, it's really the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the provinces that are responsible for managing the traceability of fish from the moment they leave the boat.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That's why it's important that there be communication between—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Madame Desbiens. Your time has gone a bit over.

We'll now go back to Ms. Barron, for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I'll leave this open to whomever is best to respond. That might be easier.

My question is around a major concern I'm hearing from many of the leading voices, like former chief and chair of the First Nations Wild Salmon Alliance, Bob Chamberlin. The key concern is around the government's Pacific salmon initiatives, specifically that the DFO is not providing long-term stable funding for projects throughout the life cycle of salmon. Constituents are worried about the future of salmon. There's uncertainty, when funding doesn't match this life cycle.

Could you share, with this emergency in mind, why funding isn't matching the long-term needs of these salmon populations?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Generally, when we provide funding, we do it for a limited period. It's often for specific projects that are time limited. In some cases, we have an ongoing relationship with a group where we provide a certain amount of money for a certain period. We evaluate how well that money has been spent, and then we can come back and give them more money later. There are many reasons why we don't give open-ended money.

The reality is that salmon stocks live for four to five years before they come back. Sometimes the kinds of projects we need to institute in order to help them don't necessarily take that long. Habitat restoration is a good example. There's no necessary need to match the lifespan of a salmon with the lifespan of the money.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

What I'm hearing is that there are concerns that it's challenging to plan projects without funding that goes longer term so perhaps that's something to consider for the future.

We know that the Pacific salmon strategy initiative is the government's main plan to help declining wild Pacific salmon populations and a key pillar of the strategy is the transformation of the harvesters and the retirement of licences. Workers in the commercial fisheries should have the support they need to depart the industry with dignity, and that's not what we're seeing unfortunately. They need the tools that they need to succeed elsewhere if we are transitioning these workers.

Will we see an emergency and transitional plan put in place for workers who are leaving this industry?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: The government has a wide range of programs, particularly under EI part II, that provide benefits for re-training and reskilling of the kind that might be required here.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Zimmer for five minutes or less please.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'll be splitting my time.

I have one question in reference to what I asked before. I asked the minister about the pilot program in B.C. for a mark-selective fishery.

We've heard many times before from department officials, we've seen the Cohen commission and I've been asking this question for the last several years. I've always been hearing this thing that's like a cloud in the sky and it's supposed to happen but it never seems to ever have substance. What does the pilot program look like and who's involved?

I'll say this as a final statement: There is the group that somebody just quoted, the SFAB, the sport fishing advisory board, and all the groups that have actually provided science to DFO, science that has actually been completely disregarded in the past. This is the same group that should be being tasked with the pilot program, involved in the pilot program, but it doesn't even know about the program, hasn't been given dates and hasn't been given any information about what this is supposed to look like.

I'll preface my question with that information, so please answer.

• (1255)

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I think, Neil, you're best placed to take this one on.

Mr. Neil Davis: Certainly, Deputy.

As the member may be aware, last year we did receive a series of proposals for mark-selective fisheries from the SFAB, so they were very involved in putting those together. The department reviewed those with input from science but also giving consideration to things like whether the proposals would implicate FSC access for first nations, and made decisions that, quite frankly, were very risk-averse, given the status of stocks in southern B.C., not just those in the Fraser but also others.

We've had now COSEWIC assessments done on I think upwards of 30 chinooks stocks as well as sockeye stocks—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Can you get to pilot program, please?

I just want to know what the pilot program is because that's what my question was. I already know what was done last year and what wasn't done.

Mr. Neil Davis: We've implemented some of those mark-selective fishery proposals. We, also under the PSSI, have identified that the expansion of mass marking and mark-selective fisheries is one of the things we would like to explore. In that vein—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'm going to stop you right there, “like to explore” is more of this cloud in the sky talk. Frankly, we've been talking about this for the last 20 years and to hear more talk about this.... I want to hear detailed plans. I already heard that the pilot program was happening this year, and that's what I'm asking for detail on.

I'm going to pass the rest of my time to Mr. Perkins, but I'd like a detailed report of this pilot program provided to the committee.

Thank you.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Chair, how much time is there?

The Chair: You have two minutes and 15 seconds.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of questions. I've had a number of fishing groups in Nova Scotia provide ATIPs to DFO, and the department has, over the last few months, edited them and sent them back before processing them. When those groups refused to accept the edit and put those ATIPs back in as originally written, the ATIP division of DFO said we're closing it and not answering these.

Is that a normal practice?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I'm not familiar with these specific ATIPs so I'm not going to be able to answer that one.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'll send them over to you afterwards. Thank you.

I raised this in the meeting we had with the minister some time ago and left a letter on the issue of the elver fishery, for which, while I got a general response, I'm still awaiting for a specific response back.

Elver fishermen in my riding, as you know, have had a proposal in for elver licences and a processing facility in my riding for the last two years in partnership with the Acadia First Nation. They were told recently, according to them, that they won't be getting any licences and that any new elver licences will only go to first nations, some of whom haven't even asked for them.

Could you comment on what the status of issuing new elver licences is in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Maybe I'll ask our RDG, Doug Wentzell, to answer that one.

Mr. Doug Wentzell: Thanks so much.

In terms of the elver fishery, this is a fishery we are managing very closely, given the conservation concerns. In terms of the specific question, we are working with first nations who have expressed an interest in this fishery over several years, and that is the department's—

Mr. Rick Perkins: What about commercial fishermen, non-indigenous commercial fishermen?

Mr. Doug Wentzell: We do know about the possibility of partnerships with first nations within our region. Those partnerships could still happen. Our priority in terms of access is with first nations partners at this point.

Mr. Rick Perkins: They were told to talk to me.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

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

• (1300)

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you for the opportunity, and again I appreciate the time you're spending with us.

I wanted to just come back to microplastics and the question I asked the minister, and just focus a little bit more in this area.

Deputy Minister, maybe I'll ask more about your approach to microplastics writ large, and whether you are in fact looking at a “polluter pays” model and also at scaling up some of the more grass-roots cleanup efforts that we currently see being publicized.

Mr. Niall O'Dea: Thank you for the question.

Chair, I'll outline a couple of the activities we're undertaking in this regard. We're working very closely with our colleagues at Environment and Climate Change Canada on their efforts to address plastic pollution, and more broadly to address questions around creating a circular economy.

In that regard, the microplastics, which the member points to, often are of origins further upstream and in terrestrial systems. Our work with Environment Canada is on getting at some of those upstream sources as well as determining measures to prevent and remove those substances once they are in watercourses. That effort is under way currently, building on commitments made at the G7 and beyond, and we look forward to bringing forward more details on that in the months to come.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

I want to cede my remaining time to Mr. Hardie. I believe he has one further question.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you very much, Mr. Hanley.

To the officials, in the 42nd Parliament we had report 21 entitled “West Coast Fisheries: Sharing Risks and Benefits”. We have not seen much, in fact, let's say anything, from the department on the 20 recommendations that were made in that. I know this question somewhat comes out of the blue, but to the degree that you're familiar with that report, can you give me a sense as to whether or not action, consideration, planning or work have been under way?

Mr. Neil Davis: Thanks for the question.

We have actually taken a number of steps in response to this—

Mr. Ken Hardie: With respect to those recommendations...

Mr. Neil Davis: Yes, it's specific to the recommendations.

One of them, for example, was about conducting a comparative analysis of licensing and managed regimes on the east and west coasts. We contracted that work. A report was completed and issued around March of 2021.

We have also undertaken work in response to the recommendations related to transparency to analyze the technical requirements associated with setting up a licence and quota registry that would be publicly available for anyone to research information. We've also been undertaking a fairly extensive engagement with some of the key groups to really set the stage for broader discussions about the full suite of recommendations.

The last piece I'll mention is that there was also a recommendation that talked about the kind of socio-economic data we would collect to inform decisions. There is also work going on with our policy group to examine what further kinds of surveys or data collection we could undertake to respond to that recommendation. The last thing I'll mention is that on that broader suite of recommendations, we do expect to be going out and initiating larger or broader engagement with external groups about FOPO's recommendations in the coming months.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you for that. Those recommendations are highly important on the west coast because of the situation there.

I would appreciate in writing from the department just a notion as to what other ministries need to be involved. When we're talking about setting up a registry of beneficial ownership of licences and quotas, that's not normally something that the DFO would become involved with. If it can, great. If it cannot, then who should we be talking to?

In terms of action on these recommendations, even though right now we're struggling to make sure that nobody is going to catch the last fish, we hope there's going to come a day where we're back to abundance. These matters of how we share the benefits from the fish coming out of the ocean will really matter and we want to be ready for that.

Mr. Chair, that's what I had. Thank you.

• (1305)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

We'll now close it out with Mr. Small, for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Fish harvesters are being marginalized in major discussions about their livelihoods. Harvesters' input in DFO scientific and management processes is becoming less and less, with seats at the science and industry advisory tables disappearing. For example, harvesters have asked for science work to be completed in new mackerel spawning areas off the east coast of Newfoundland. They voluntarily collected samples and proposed to collect scientific information that DFO will not collect, yet mackerel harvesters continue to be ignored as they watch their quotas being caught.

Will you commit to creating a system of increased participation for harvesters in fisheries like the mackerel fishery in fishery science management? If so, when would you implement something like that if you decided to let fishers be more involved in science?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I'm not sure I agree with the premise of the question, because I think there are a lot of ways for fish harvesters to be involved in our science processes, and subsequent to

that, in the fishing management processes as well. However, specifically on mackerel, I'd ask our ADM of science, Arran McPherson, to weigh in on that.

Dr. Arran McPherson (Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystems and Oceans Science, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): I'll start by apologizing that my headset was not functioning right at the beginning of this committee and I unfortunately won't be using a mike.

To the member's question around mackerel, I'd just like to address that it's really important to have open discussions with harvesters around what science is required, which is why for the mackerel fishery we convened a technical working group between science, managers and harvesters a number of years ago and have been working to increase data collection, as well as address the questions that harvesters have brought to us.

We have looked at a number of sampling regimes. We've collected juveniles, we've done genetic work, and we continue to engage with our harvester colleagues on the questions they have.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you very much.

I wonder if you've heard reports of western Atlantic mackerel actually being found in Iceland. The migratory patterns are changing with the changing climate. Are you about to adjust how you do your sampling, and where and when and what times of the year, and things like that?

If climate is evolving, is your science evolving and how accurate do you think your mackerel science is right now? Do you think it's accurate at all?

Dr. Arran McPherson: We use a number of different data streams to evaluate the status of mackerel. As I mentioned in my previous response, we use otolith microchemistry, genetic analysis, juvenile studies and trawl studies, all of which allow us to put together a picture of how these different populations of mackerel evolve and occur in our—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

We absolutely need interpretation.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'd ask Ms. McPherson to probably provide a written response, because without the headset we're not getting the proper interpretation.

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay.

The Chair: Can we get a written response to those questions from Mr. Small, please?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Mr. Chair, I would be happy to do that.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'll just go back to a question I was trying to ask the minister while she was here, regarding herring size threshold.

Do you think the dumping of hundreds of thousands of tonnes of herring because it's just below the size threshold is a good conservation policy in Newfoundland and Labrador, or should we be following the policy that's in place in Nova Scotia?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: There are a number of factors that go into the policies in the different regions. The policies are different, but they have the same conservation objective. The reality is that, when we manage a fishery, things like net size or whatever, there are going to need to be thresholds, and sometimes things will fall on one side and then on the other side.

• (1310)

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay. Let me interrupt. Why do we have a different policy for Nova Scotia than we have for Newfoundland and Labrador?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We have different regions at DFO to reflect the diversity of the fishing industry across our country. It's of-

ten the case that we have the same objective, ultimately, which is to preserve stocks, but we go at it in a different way. It depends on the gear. It depends on the boats. It depends on the structure of the industry and on populations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

That concludes our session for today. I want to thank the officials for their time here with us today and the information they've provided. I know that they've committed to responding in writing to a number of questions, so we look forward to seeing that information as well.

I wish everybody a good day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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