



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 084

Thursday, October 26, 2023

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 84 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Before we proceed, I simply want to remind members to be very careful when handling the earpieces, especially when your microphone or your neighbour's microphone is turned on. Earpieces placed too close to a microphone are one of the most common causes of sound feedback, which is extremely harmful to interpreters and causes serious injuries.

We are joined today by the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, the Honourable Diane Lebouthillier, who will be with us for the first hour. Officials will be with us for the full two hours today. Joining the minister in the first hour is Annette Gibbons, deputy minister of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and Mario Pelletier, commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard.

Once statements are done, we will proceed to rounds of questions and answers.

We will begin by hearing from the minister with her opening statement.

When you're ready, Minister, please proceed.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, colleagues.

I would first like to thank you for inviting me today to discuss my new portfolio and my priorities as Minister.

Fisheries has been an issue of high priority for me since I was first elected. In the Gaspé and the Îles-de-la-Madeleine, this is not the livelihood of thousands of workers, it is also a major economic engine for my region, a rural region surrounded by the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the St. Lawrence River and Chaleur Bay.

Before beginning, I want to take a moment to thank the men and women who get up early every morning and risk their lives on the water to feed their families, stimulate the Canadian economy and exercise their right to fish in accordance with their traditions, under

the treaties. Fishing is much more than a simple economic exercise. Fishers contribute to our national cultural fabric in a profoundly meaningful way, and I salute them for that. I also want to thank Fisheries and Oceans personnel for all the work they do in this regard.

I would now like to discuss my priorities as Minister.

First, I want to ensure that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the DFO, listens more attentively to our coastal communities and makes a greater effort to understand their situation when it comes time to make decisions relating to fisheries management, investment in crucial infrastructure like small craft ports, and other important issues that call for involvement by the Department.

Obviously, I am not telling you that we will always end up with decisions on which everyone agrees, but we will try to consult these communities more often, and those decisions will be made in a way that gives the sector concerned time to prepare and adapt, if necessary.

This all applies both to fishers and to processors, and to environmental groups, indigenous communities, sailors and scientists. Our coastal communities want to be part of the solution. They are our eyes and ears on the ground. I have made it clear to the people in my office and in DFO that they are to assign renewed importance to this priority.

It is important to talk about science. With the fact of climate change and the resulting heating of the oceans, we are going to be swimming in uncharted waters over the next few years. It is now more important than ever to collect the best scientific data in order to make the most informed decisions possible.

[English]

Mr. Chair, my third and fourth priorities relate to growing the blue economy and following through on critical steps on reconciliation between Canada and the indigenous peoples who have called Canada home from time immemorial.

[Translation]

I believe that fisheries are, first and foremost, a sector that generates economic development and creates jobs.

Canada has the longest coastline in the world. A unique opportunity is open to us, by taking measures such as:

[English]

transitioning away from open-net salmon pens; encouraging new methods of aquaculture while saving the Pacific salmon from further risk; and encouraging international partners to open their doors to Canadian seal products, so fish stocks are protected from predation and indigenous communities can lead the way on this potentially game-changing industry.

[Translation]

Canada must invest in innovative technology and infrastructure in both the fish harvesting and the processing industries, to guarantee that we continue to be a world leader and to be competitive for generations to come.

I also want to reiterate my sincere commitment to working closely with indigenous partners and First Nations communities in a spirit of reconciliation. This important work will sometimes take time and will undoubtedly involve numerous difficult and highly emotional conversations, but I can assure you that I will always be there to listen to indigenous voices and guide my department in the right direction through this difficult but important process.

As a final point, Mr. Chair, I want to say that I am pleased to be working with all of you on the studies and important work you are currently doing or will be carrying out in the future.

[English]

I particularly look forward to reading your report on the seal and pinniped study once it has been tabled in the House. This is a topic of interest to me. I'm looking forward to seeing the conclusions and recommendations of your report, so we can move forward on this economically untapped resource.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I will turn the floor back over to you. I am now ready to answer my colleagues' questions.

Thank you.

[English]

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Minister.

We'll go right to questions.

We have Mr. Small up for six minutes or less.

• (1105)

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

My question for the minister is regarding a marine protected area that was created in a riding near Gaspé on the American Bank.

In 2018, the minister said that establishing this marine protected area would allow the re-establishment of seals in the region. Numerous witnesses before this committee have said that the Gulf of St. Lawrence is overpopulated with seals.

I'd like to ask the minister whether seals are overpopulated, or whether they're in need of re-establishment.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: The American Bank is also in my riding, which extends from the Gaspé to New Brunswick. Promoting seal products is one of my priorities. I see this as a new resource, one that is almost 98 per cent usable. This is a priority. We are going to work with the fishery sector, with fishers and the industry, to promote this new resource. In fact, we have recently invested \$700,000 in research.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

[English]

With respect to Bill C-251, which would have developed a framework for the management of seals, does the minister think the fishing industry in Gaspé and Îles-de-la-Madeleine is against managing seal populations?

Did she vote with her constituents, or was there another reason for her voting against that legislation?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Could you repeat the question, please?

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: With respect to the minister's vote on Bill C-251, does she think she voted the way the people of Îles-de-la-Madeleine would have wanted her to vote? The bill was to create a framework for the management of pinnipeds—seals.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: We have to establish standards in order for seal to be properly developed as a resource. We have to work in tandem with the communities. It is important to find solutions by collaborating with partners in the industry, both the fishers and the processing industry. We want to promote seal products. There is still work to be done to market those products in the future as well.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you for that response.

After eight years, a nearly 50% increase in employees in the minister's department—over 750 are here in Ottawa—and a nearly 50% increase in budget, does it seem reasonable that the northern cod management plan was not released until the end of June this year?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: On the subject of cod management, I can tell you that I experienced the repercussions of the cod moratorium on the cod fishery. I come from a village of fishers and people who worked in the processing plants. I am very well aware of the impact of the cod fishery. The fishery was reopened in the early 1990s, and that was tragic. It is important to collect a lot of data.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Chair, I'd like the minister to answer.

Does she think that it was reasonable to delay the cod management plan to almost July 1 of last year?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: On the cod fishery, we received information yesterday and we have made major decisions, but I am going to continue to be cautious on this subject. However, we will be working with our partners so that we do not end up facing another moratorium. I knew what repercussions a moratorium has on the fisheries, and I am going to be cautious going forward, precisely to avoid harming our communities.

• (1110)

[*English*]

Mr. Clifford Small: Yes. Given yesterday's news that cod has been out of the critical zone since 2016, with that tremendous economic opportunity missed in the fishing industry—which they really would love to have been able to take advantage of, especially last year when the crab industry was suffering a lot—why was the limit reference point not changed much earlier than this, given the huge increase in DFO's staff and the budget increase?

Why has DFO not performed better and acted in a more timely fashion than they have, so that harvesters and plant workers in the processing industry could take advantage of a higher quota, and when groups like the FFAW wanted a 25,000-tonne cod quota last year?

It doesn't make sense that all of a sudden you changed the lower reference point. Why couldn't it have been done last spring?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I want to remind my colleague that I experienced the devastation that the moratorium on the cod fishery created in the communities. As I said, we are going to be cautious. We are going to work with the industry and the organizations. You may rest assured that I will not be imposing another moratorium on the industry.

At present, I am happy with the data that has been collected. I also do not understand why people are saying there were problems in the crab industry last year. Where I come from, the crab fishers all caught their quota of crab. Things are going well in the crab fishery.

My objective is to continue working with people in the fish harvesting sector and the processing industry. I want to ensure that we have fisheries in the future for our children and our great-grandchildren.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

Before I go to Mr. Cormier, I will remind members that once you are recognized for your questions, the five minutes or six minutes, whatever it might be, is your time. You can ask questions. You don't necessarily have to wait for an answer, but it's always good to wait for an answer as well. The time is yours. I am not in control of your time once you start.

We're going now to Mr. Cormier, for six minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I would like to welcome you and congratulate you on your appointment as Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. It was very nice to see you in my riding this summer. We very much enjoyed meeting with various groups and we also had the opportunity to participate in the Tintamarre held during the Acadian Festival. That was a memorable experience.

We are neighbours, Minister. In fact, we live across from each other. We share the same bay, Chaleur Bay. What you said earlier is music to my ears. You have told the officials in your department that they have to understand the situations in our regions and the day-to-day difficulties in the fisheries.

I know you are familiar with the challenges we have to meet. The mackerel fishery is closed. The spring herring fishery is closed. As you know, this year has probably been the worst year for the fall herring fishery. The shrimp fishery is going extremely badly. The communities that depend on these fisheries, the fishers and the plant workers, need help.

Minister, have you asked the officials in your department and other ministers to look into these issues? As you know, problems like these can have a devastating effect on our communities.

Are you going to do everything you can to help these people, who depend on these fisheries?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question.

I was very pleased to go out on a tour, starting with New Brunswick, right after receiving my new portfolio. I wanted to meet the people who work in the fisheries, both in the fish harvesting sector and in the processing sector.

As I said, climate change is a matter of great concern for people involved in fisheries. According to the most recent scientific data, the St. Lawrence River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence have got warmer. That will certainly have consequences.

In my opening remarks, I said that over the next few years we are going to be navigating uncharted waters, and so it is important that we work together, that we collaborate. I am very aware of what is happening in the fisheries sector. For example, people in the Maritimes who work in the processing industry earn, on average, about \$30,000 per year. It is therefore important to provide the populations that will be experiencing the impact of climate change with good information and support.

I want to reassure my colleague: discussions are taking place among my colleagues and ministers to find measures to implement, to help the people in these industries.

As well, it is important that the municipalities and provincial governments work with the federal government.

• (1115)

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Minister.

I have more questions to ask you, but, because I am such a good colleague, I will be splitting my speaking time with my colleague Robert Morrissey.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Minister, welcome to the committee. I will follow up on the question from my colleague Mr. Cormier.

What are your expectations leading into 2024 regarding a mackerel bait fishery for the gulf region, including Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Gaspésie?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Thank you for that question.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is currently holding discussions concerning mackerel and herring. We know that there are studies that have been done. We should also have the results of the negotiations undertaken with the United States. The deputy minister may be able to give you more information on that subject.

As I said, this subject is important to me. I have had discussions with some of my colleagues, but also with representatives from the fisheries industry. The people in the industry say that Canada has been much stricter than the United States. The people on the Atlantic coast have talked to me a lot about the difference between the United States and Canada. As I said, I think it is important to continue to collaborate with the actors in the industry to find the most appropriate solutions.

I have to tell you, however, that the herring fishery is difficult this fall. The fishers are not reaching the quotas that were authorized. In addition, the size of the mackerel has really declined in my riding.

Climate change is not helping matters, and this problem is worrying the entire fishing industry. The subject is brought up again at all my meetings, both with people in the fish harvesting sector and with people in the processing sector, even when the fisheries are going well. I am told that they need data, they need to work with the department, now more than ever. I am personally working to restore trust between the department and the industries.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Minister.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

We will 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 also want to welcome you, Minister. You know that we are very pleased, in Quebec, to know that we have a francophone minister in the department. In Quebec, fisheries are certainly an economic tool,

but they are also an element of our culture. I am very happy to see you in this department.

I am also happy that my colleague Mr. Cormier was able to raise the problems associated with mackerel, herring and shrimp, which are in danger.

We are often told that we do not have the means to determine the status of the resources. We are repeatedly told that the existing measures are not adequate and are not up to date.

Do you hope to find budgets so that you are able to do more to measure the extent of the problems associated with the resource in the St. Lawrence and the Gulf of St. Lawrence?

• (1120)

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Regarding the St. Lawrence River and the Gulf, the Maurice Lamontagne Institute is able to collect scientific data. Its work also involves the fisheries sector.

I do think that we have to make use of the expertise of the people who go to sea, on the much more specialized scientific expertise, and on the expertise of the industry and the Institute when it comes to research and development.

With respect to shrimp, we should be receiving a report at the end of October. It will then be forwarded to the peers. After that, we will be able to see how things are going.

Obviously, we have work to do when it comes to the science. We are currently navigating uncharted waters in terms of everything going on in the environment. This is causing a lot of concern in the industry.

We also have to make investments. I think of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans as an economic development department. As I said, the fisheries sector provides employment not just to fishers, but also to construction workers. For example, I am thinking of shipyards, the people who build and repair the boats, and so on.

There is an important economic side to fisheries and we have to acknowledge this. It is an economic development sector based on a renewable resource.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: In economic terms, of course we have to take into consideration the large number of fishers and all of the socioeconomic activity around the fisheries. So there is a domino effect when a fishery is closed, for example.

Some fishers find themselves with nothing, in economic terms. They have no support and they do not qualify for employment insurance. As the resources decline, there are fewer active processing plants.

Do you have something to offer these people so they can escape their financial hardship?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: What we are doing is that we are working with the people in the industry. As I said earlier, I lived through the groundfish moratorium. At the time, there were programs put in place. In fact, I am very familiar with the consequences of those programs. At the time of the moratorium, I was 30 years old and I was working in mental health. I know the adverse effects of some of the programs that were put in place. In my opinion, we will have to work together so we do not end up in the same situation.

There are other opportunities right now when it comes to the resource. I am thinking of seal and ocean perch in particular. Let's not forget cod; that population is actually doing a bit better. Nonetheless, I am staying very cautious in the case of cod.

As I said, there was a moratorium on groundfish. Almost the same thing was done, the same actions taken, for the shrimp fishery, and we are now seeing what resulted from that. It has not been going well for people in the shrimp fishery for two years now.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Along the same line, we are hearing news about problems being experienced by seaweed harvesters. At present, the seaweed harvesters and the Océan de saveurs company are having to harvest seaweed in New Brunswick.

How can it be that the criteria for harvesting in Quebec cannot be met by these fishers?

What are you proposing, to ensure that this segment of our economy stays in Quebec?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I think the seaweed issue is a priority. Seaweed is an important resource and we have to preserve it. We need seaweed for reproduction, for example. However, as I said, I can't talk about specific cases.

The Atlantic seabed and the seabed where I come from are not necessarily the same. The water temperature is not the same, and where I come from, sea urchins eat the seaweed. As I said, there are enough problems involved in the seaweed harvest and there must not be any more.

Work has to be done on preservation and that is one of my objectives.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: But there is a variable that has to be taken into account. The seaweed has to be pulled out, somewhat like strawberries. When apples ripen, they fall from the trees. In the same way, there is seaweed that detaches by itself, and in fact that is what fishers hate. Even if the fishers want to leave the seaweed where it is, they can't do it.

● (1125)

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: My position is very clear on this subject. We are not going to change the law. One of my responsibilities is to preserve the seaweed for future generations. Just as for the fishing industry, I am very aware of what is going on in environmental terms, when it comes to both harvesting and processing.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

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

Before my time starts, I would just like to acknowledge, please, that the meeting started early today. That meant I missed the beginning of the minister's presentation to the committee. I'd like you please to add to our next meeting a conversation around ensuring equitable representation from all parties around this table.

I just wanted to point that out.

The Chair: This won't come off your time, Ms. Barron. We started the meeting on time. It was probably 11:01 a.m. when we actually hit the gavel. There was quorum in the room at that time. We started right on time.

Your time is yours.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The time on my digital clock was not, in fact, at that time. It was two minutes prior. I realize that it's only two minutes, but it was two minutes prior.

I also realize that quorum was there, but there was not equitable representation from all parties. I think that's the bigger conversation that needs to be had around meetings being started when there are Conservatives and Liberals in the room but not representation from all the parties, in particular when two parties have only one person representing.

I would like to address this at a further meeting. I wanted to point out that two minutes were missed as a result of the meeting starting two minutes early, but I do have questions for the minister. I certainly don't want to take away from utilizing our time with the minister.

First of all, Minister, I would like to welcome you and say congratulations on your role. It's a very important one. I'm sure we are all excited to be able to work with you on the important issues.

Currently, Minister, we've undertaken a study on science, specifically around the CSAS process. Recently, a peer-reviewed paper was published and sent your way from UBC and Dalhousie University, talking about the CSAS process and around concerns about the manner in which science is being utilized by decision-makers in DFO.

I'm wondering, Minister, if you've had a chance to look at this report, and if you will commit to fixing this issue that we are seeing around clear ethical and transparency issues in the decision-making process, which often is looking at business interests and undermining science and public interest.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Thank you for the question.

I want to say that I think it is important to open the discussions and ensure that Fisheries and Oceans Canada works with the organizations in the industry. There have to be discussions with the people involved: scientists working in the universities, environmental groups, indigenous communities, people in the fish harvesting sector and people in the processing sector, to be able to make the best decisions possible.

All partners operating in the fisheries sector have the same objective: to have sustainable fisheries. We are very familiar with the consequences for rural communities of misusing or mismanaging the resource.

I am open to the idea of working with all the partners and with the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. I know that some colleagues have sat on the committee for a long time and I know that they work very hard and make recommendations. In my opinion, this work is going to be essential.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister. I hope the scientists who submitted this report to you will receive an official response to the report soon.

The other question, which I recently also brought up in my letter to you, is around the Prime Minister's mandate to transition open-net pen fish farms out of Pacific waters by the end of 2025. Work is apparently under way on transition planning, which is much overdue, and at the same time, DFO officials continue to receive, consider and approve applications for production increases at existing farms.

In Clayoquot Sound, for example, DFO has granted three farm production increases of 25% to 50%. A further seven applications from the same company are under review by DFO, involving increases in tenure size, investment in new pens, and production increases.

Minister, my question for you is this: Can you tell the committee how you plan to meet the 2025 deadline to remove these open-net fish farms from Pacific waters as well as have a real jobs plan for all those who are impacted?

• (1130)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane LeBouthillier: My government is determined to implement a responsible transition plan for open-net fish farms. We know that the Pacific salmon stocks are fragile and that protecting them will have long-term positive effects for the west coast.

We are going to continue working on a responsible, realistic and achievable transition plan that will protect the Pacific salmon and at the same time provide support for the workers and communities.

We have to continue to have discussions with the people in the industry, which is also what they are asking for. As I said, these are very emotional conversations and they are not always easy. In my opinion, what is important is that we make the best decisions possible.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Minister, will the 2025 deadline be met for the transition plan you're talking about?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane LeBouthillier: Discussions are ongoing at present with the various partners and with the colleagues who are around the table.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

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

Minister, congratulations on being appointed the newest Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

I join many Canadian harvesters, anglers and service providers in hoping you will do better than the five predecessors appointed by your Prime Minister over the past eight years. That record of failed appointments started off with Minister Tootoo, whom we barely got to know before he was replaced by Minister LeBlanc, who was chased from the portfolio by conflict of interest in the clam scandal. Next, we had Minister Wilkinson, who said Pacific salmon needed improved habitats, then went on to defer, for decades, the implementation of Canada's first waste-water treatment standards, which were introduced by a Conservative government. Then Minister Jordan put B.C. aquaculture workers on notice, but failed to provide a transition plan for the workers and their communities. The appointment of Minister Murray sparked some hope in B.C. that the workers and harvesters in B.C. who were being put out of work by the government's policies might see some relief, but instead we saw job losses and litigation.

Minister, will you be different from your predecessors, or are you going to continue this sad legacy for the Canadians and jobs relying on Canada's fisheries?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane LeBouthillier: I can tell you that we are always going to do a lot better than what the Conservative Party did. The government will not make all the cuts that you made. Since we came to power, we have continued to invest in small craft ports and to rebuild confidence in the science, for example. We are going to continue working with the people in the industry.

[English]

Mr. Mel Arnold: Minister, your five predecessors left a sad legacy behind. Why should we count on you to do any better? We heard you say that you will listen more. To me, that's an indication the previous ministers did not listen enough.

Would you care to respond to that?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I want to reassure my colleague; I was the Minister of National Revenue for eight years. We spent those eight years together working for Canadians. I have the confidence not only of my colleagues, but also of the industry partners I have met. I am talking about people both in the fish harvesting sector and in the processing industry.

As I said, I think it is important to work with people in the industry and make the best decisions possible. We are currently experiencing difficult situations because of climate warming and its repercussions. We cannot just criticize; we have to find solutions, all of us together, because this industry is important to all of us here around the table, and also to everyone who earns their living in the fisheries sector.

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Minister. I agree that we need to find solutions and that solutions are out there.

Minister, aquatic invasive species pose a serious threat to B.C.'s waters. A 2023 provincial report stated that if invasive mussels are allowed to invade B.C., new annual expenses for B.C. could reach \$129 million per year for the maintenance of infrastructure. For far too long, federal DFO funds for preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species have not been distributed equitably for western Canada.

Will you work with your officials to balance the allocation of DFO funds for aquatic invasive species and support the protection of water and fish habitats in British Columbia?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Teamwork is underway with the representatives of the provinces. You talk about invasive mussels, but we also have to mention green crab, Asian carp, and other invasive species.

Vessel traffic is constantly increasing and that creates problems on our coasts. It is therefore in our interests to all work together to find solutions and manage the situation. The solutions are not simple. They are complex and they call for everyone's participation. We must not believe that we will eliminate an invasive species overnight.

[English]

Mr. Mel Arnold: I agree, Madam Minister. Part of the solution is prevention. The federal government has not lived up to what's been requested by agencies.

Madam Minister, the Cohen commission report of 2012 told the previous government that timely and thorough scientific investigations were needed to determine the effects of B.C. salmon farms on wild Pacific salmon. Why did your government fail to ensure the completion of the strategic salmon health initiative, which had already conducted years of work? Will you work with the strategic salmon health initiative partners to ensure that the science recommendation by Cohen 11 years ago is finally completed?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: We have carried out nine studies in the Pacific. If you want further details, I can give the floor to DFO's deputy minister who will be able to give you details on this subject.

[English]

Mr. Mel Arnold: Excuse me. I'd like to know why your department failed to follow through on the four phases with the strategic salmon health initiative. You've been in your position since the summer. Is that something you should have been briefed on?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. You've gone almost a minute over. I'll ask the department or the minister to respond in writing to the committee.

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

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

I will note that I'll try to free up time for one question from Ms. May.

I want to say off the top that when she was our revenue agency minister, the minister was extremely helpful and effective in dealing with some of our constituents' issues. I have great confidence that "needles will be moved" as we move forward here on some of these issues.

I have two questions. This committee came up with what I think is a landmark report in 2019, "Sharing Risks and Benefits", all about the regime on the west coast. Do you have any quick reflections on that report, Madam Minister, and any thoughts as to where we might go next?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I am going to give the floor to the deputy minister.

Ms. Annette Gibbons (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We were very interested in seeing this report and we have initiated a number of activities to follow up on it. A very important document was published recently: the survey on beneficial ownership related to licence issuance. The committee seemed to have concerns about foreign ownership and what we actually found is that there are very few foreign owners in the fisheries sector.

We have also done a study on fisheries in eastern Canada and the way we manage and regulate the eastern fisheries as compared to the western fisheries. That information is also accessible.

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'm sorry. I hate to interrupt, but I have limited time. We do know this. We've heard this answer before. I'm interested in what's going to happen next. Perhaps there's a report coming out that will inform which way the ministry would like to go.

I have a second question. After a couple of years of waiting on a study that Mr. Arnold has suggested, we are going to take up the issue of illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries.

This is almost half a question for the Coast Guard. Maybe we can get into that in the next hour.

Minister, what would you have us think about as we put together our plan to bring in witnesses and talk about the IUU fishery?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: It will be important for the committee to propose concrete measures to us that will enable us to provide the people in the industry with good information concerning fines, prosecutions and the costs that illegal fishing may cause.

People often tell me, and I also observe, that when we manage to catch people who have been fishing illegally in the act, the fines imposed are very low compared to the profit the people make from this fishing. That is creating huge concern in the industry at present. There is black market activity on the docks, from what fishers are reporting to me. I am also talking about the processing sector. We must therefore work to ensure that the fishery industry is protected. I believe there is no reason for illegal fishing to exist.

To come back to what you were saying earlier about licences, I have to say that I have also received reports of this. The fisheries sector has improved in recent years. Prices are good on the lobster and crab markets, for example. Unfortunately, licences are so expensive that the next generation is unable to access them. This situation is jeopardizing the future of the fisheries. A young person can't go to a bank to borrow \$5 million to get a lobster fishing licence or \$20 million for a crab fishing licence. I am told that other people have to guarantee these licences at financial institutions.

We have to work on this. We have to be cautious. We have to be able to protect the fisheries. We are going to do this by working with the people in the fisheries sector, with the provincial governments and with committees like yours, through the recommendations you are going to make.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, am I out of time? Do we have a little time left for Ms. May?

The Chair: You have two seconds left, but that's not what I'd call sharing time.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'm sorry, Liz.

The Chair: We'll go on to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Minister, I am going to try to summarize all that. There are fears that a critical situation is taking shape regarding shrimp, herring and mackerel. It is already very difficult. The case of seaweed harvesters is also becoming a matter of concern. Harvesters are going to New Brunswick, where there is no regulation, to harvest seaweed. We also have to mention cockles, which can be harvested on one side of Chaleur Bay but not on the other. A lot of irregularities are being committed, particularly in Quebec.

Fishers decry the fact that they are not being consulted, despite their expertise on the ground. They want to protect the resource

more than all of us because that is their livelihood. I am thinking of the seaweed harvesters, of course, but also of all the other fishers who know better than anyone how things really are on the ground.

Are you open to the idea of creating a round table or a study table where the fishers could contribute their expertise so that more consideration would be given to it?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: First, it is wrong to say that there is no regulation of seaweed in the Atlantic.

Second, I want to remind my colleague that I am not the Minister of Fisheries of the Gaspé and Quebec. I am the Minister of Fisheries of all of Canada. As I said, seaweed is important because it sustains fish and provides them with shelter where they can feed and reproduce.

It is in all of our interests to want to protect the resource for future generations.

• (1145)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Can we hope that the cod, mackerel and shrimp fishers will be consulted more, that their expertise will make its way to you, and that it will be taken into consideration in the final decisions?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I can tell you that I have been listening to them since 2015 and that I meet with them regularly, because I live with them every day when I go home. I am in a position to report to Ottawa on what is happening on the ground. There is no need to explain to me how things are going. I know, because I live it.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: These people feel powerless at present. Will they be getting answers? What I am hearing them say is that they are desperate and their proposals, the measures they recommend, are not being considered.

Is there an index fishery?

Are there solutions?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: There are always solutions, but I don't know whether they will always be the ones they want. We want to protect the resource. As I said, I knew about the cod fishery. I saw how the boats came back to dock late in the fall, at that time. We have to work together, and regulations are necessary.

Regulations do not always make people happy, but the important thing, in my opinion, is to have discussions. It will not always be easy and there may be emotional reactions. These discussions will, in fact, have major consequences in our communities. It is important to have honest, frank discussions, for the generations of today and of tomorrow.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. You're a little over, but I wanted to hear the minister answer the question.

I believe Mr. Bachrach is going to speak next, on behalf of the NDP.

You're up for two and a half minutes, sir.

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

Minister, it's good to see you again.

I met earlier this week with Chief Murphy Abraham from the Lake Babine Nation, which is in northwest B.C. They've been working with British Columbia and Canada on a very ambitious reconciliation initiative. At the heart of that initiative is an incremental fisheries agreement.

Lake Babine Nation co-developed, alongside your department, a term sheet and a budget that would fund that incremental fisheries agreement. They have been waiting since February 2022 to hear back from your government on whether funding will be forthcoming so that the objectives in that incremental fisheries agreement can be realized. Those objectives include increasing the capacity of their fisheries department, developing fisheries management plans and recovery plans for wild stocks, and investing in infrastructure necessary for the management of Skeena wild salmon.

The question is a simple one: Could you provide the committee with a sense of where this request is with your government, and when Lake Babine Nation can hear back in terms of the success of the proposal before cabinet?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: What I can tell you is that reconciliation is important. Our government believes it is essential to respect and recognize the rights of indigenous communities. We have work to do and we are going to continue doing it. We are going to continue working with partners in the indigenous communities to enforce their rights. We also want to ensure that the communication channels with the non-indigenous communities are kept open. The government must therefore also play a role in raising our colleagues' awareness so that everything goes well.

The important thing is to continue working with the existing communities.

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you for that, Minister.

The fact is that your department has worked very closely with Lake Babine Nation to develop what is a very compelling vision for increasing their capacity to manage the fishery under their section 35 fisheries rights. They put together a term sheet and budget that are very detailed, and they want to get to work as soon as possible.

The question—perhaps it's for the deputy minister—is this: When can they expect an answer from your government on funding for this agreement they've worked so hard to create?

• (1150)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We absolutely recognize the importance of co-development. We go to the table with indigenous partners on whatever issue we're working with them on, in order to try to move forward in a spirit of co-development.

That being said, at the end of the day, governments make decisions. We need time to make decisions on different things for the different communities we're working with. We're still working through that, in this case and in many others.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

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

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

Thank you, Minister and officials, for coming.

The first meeting I had with your predecessor was shortly after I was elected in 2021. I know that you, Minister, are new to the role, as is the deputy. At the first meeting I had in November 2021 with your predecessor in her office, with the deputy minister and most of the ADMs for the department, I raised my concerns about the department's approach to the elver fishery. At that time, I said there was a lot of poaching going on, and the department wasn't enforcing the rules.

The following year, in 2022, the department received numerous complaints from the licence-holders with evidence of poaching going on in the rivers. When they phoned C and P to report poaching going on in the rivers, C and P asked the licence-holders if the poachers were first nations, and, if they were first nations, they were told not to go and do anything.

I warned the minister then that it would get out of hand. As people knew that this species, with a \$5,000 price tag per kilogram, was now entering the black market, that would bring considerable concern. We raised it again in the winter.

I'm becoming known as “Mr. Elver”. Ask some of your colleagues on the finance committee. I think I spoke in the filibuster there for about an hour and a half on elvers.

Timothy Kerr, who runs C and P in Nova Scotia, in the late winter and spring of this year said that they have enough resources to enforce the law. In March, a month before the season opened, the department was getting daily reports of poaching already on the rivers—including from my neighbours, two minutes from my house. The department ignored it. It went on. The season started. Daily reports, with photographic and video evidence, were given to the department. It was out of hand.

There were thousands of illegal poachers this year. I had warned the minister that this would happen, and it happened. I asked the minister to do something, and I asked the Liberal members to do something. They asked what they were supposed to do. What you're supposed to do is enforce the law. Pick a river, bring in the RCMP as backup, and do the job.

The result of that, and the minister's only response, was to shut down the elver fishery for the legal elver harvesters, ending their season after 18 days and allowing all the poachers to stay on the river.

Do you know, Minister, that the poachers were still on the river this summer? Nothing was done. Absolutely nothing was done by DFO. They were on private property. The RCMP wouldn't come and deal with it, because they said C and P had not called them.

Why is it that your department does not enforce the law?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: We are currently reviewing management practices. I agree with Ms. Murray's decision at the time, to shut down the elver fishery. It is always good to take a step back, because that is the way to make the best possible decisions. That fishery had probably not been regulated previously. Nonetheless, there is still work to be done in that regard.

I also want to tell my colleague that Fisheries and Oceans Canada is there to enforce the law. We are not there to put on a show. We want things to be done the right way. When it comes to poaching, it is important to point out that there are various people engaged in it, not just the indigenous communities, as he seems to want to say. It is also practised by non-indigenous communities.

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Absolutely—100%, Minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: We have to raise awareness among people in the communities, which is why it is important to make regulations and work cooperatively.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Look, I have limited time, Minister.

The thing is that the illegal poaching that's happened over the years, for which your department has refused to enforce the law, has resulted in criminal elements from the United States, Quebec and Ontario coming here and doing it. They're still doing it, and you're not approaching it. The same official at C and P said the same thing at the beginning of July: They had enough resources to enforce the poaching in the lobster fishery, yet poaching in the lobster fishery went on all summer, with virtually no arrests.

Now, going back to the elver fishery, it was so bad that on the only river that DFO does science on, the East River in Chester, DFO pulled all the science. It was too dangerous. They wouldn't even protect that river to do the science. I don't want to hear this department come out and say, "We can't hold an elver fishery next year, because we didn't do the science this year; we didn't have the courage to protect the river that we do the science on." It wasn't—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins. You've gone a fair bit over on your time.

I want to give it to Mr. Hanley to close out this first hour of questioning.

[Translation]

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

Minister, I am very happy to have you here at our committee. I also want to welcome the senior officials. It is particularly important to have you here, given the importance of the fisheries for northern and indigenous communities, like the salmon fishery in the Yukon River and its tributaries.

[English]

Given the importance of northern fisheries to our northern Yukon communities, I want to focus on Yukon River salmon.

As you may know, Yukon River salmon are in dire straits. Earlier this fall, at the Whitehorse fish ladder, just over 150 salmon made the ladder by mid-September. The 10-year average is 850 for the same period.

Also, according to the DFO Yukon River salmon report:

Similar to previous years, 2019 to 2022, the return of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon will not be large enough to achieve the spawning escapement objectives, nor provide for harvest opportunities in either Alaska or Canada.

I want to ask you where Yukon salmon lie among the priorities of your mandate, first of all.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Salmon has symbolic value on the west coast. It is definitely part of my mandate and my priorities. An entire segment of the economy revolves around salmon.

Earlier, the cultural aspect was mentioned in connection with the east coast, but it is the same thing on the west coast. I think it is important to work very closely with the people in the sector and with the United States. We are hearing a lot of things right now. It is not easy.

We have invested almost \$700 million in a Pacific salmon strategy. We are going to continue to work together to protect the species. As we know, there are droughts on the west coast and the salmon sometimes have trouble getting up the rivers. So we need to work in tandem and cooperatively to protect the resource.

[English]

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

I'm glad you mentioned two elements of what I was going to pose as further questions.

One is on the Pacific salmon strategy initiative. I'd love a quick update from either you or Ms. Gibbons on the implementation of the PSSI, particularly as it relates to the Yukon part of the funding.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I am going to hand the floor to the deputy minister.

[English]

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I don't have a breakdown here. I can get you more on the activities in Yukon, but it's a very comprehensive strategy with a number of different pieces.

We have habitat restoration as a very important piece. We're working with all kinds of groups to do that. There's obviously a very important indigenous component and partnerships with indigenous communities, given their interest in salmon. It's the lifeblood for communities.

Work on harvest transformation.... There's a lot of interest, obviously, in recreational salmon fishing. How do we work with that? We have hatcheries. We are building new hatcheries. There are a whole bunch of different pieces.

We have been accelerating the spending of the \$700 million the minister just mentioned. I think we spent about \$74 million in the first couple of years. This year we are spending roughly the same. It is picking up at a very significant pace as we get the various building blocks in place.

• (1200)

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you. That's good.

The other part you mentioned is our relationship with the United States. In previous discussions with Minister Murray, we supported the idea of engagement with our U.S. friends on the state of salmon for the Pacific and northern species and the importance of refreshing our joint initiative.

I'm wondering whether you will continue to support a formal engagement that will bring both federal governments together, as well as the relative indigenous local, state and territorial governments, to talk about this crisis and look jointly for solutions.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I really want to reassure my colleague, since we are going to continue working closely with the United States. We will win together, but we can also lose together. Of course, I want us to win together. It will therefore be important for everyone to pull together. We are going to continue working closely with partners and people in the industry.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

Thank you to the minister.

That concludes our first hour of testimony.

We'll suspend for a quick moment.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Chair, I would like to request one more minute so I can answer the question Mr. Perkins asked me earlier.

I just want to remind him that it was his government, the Harper government, that made the budget cuts at Fisheries and Oceans Canada in relation to unauthorized fishing. Myself, I will be happy to continue investing in this department to protect the industry.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order.

I don't know why, when the minister's time is up, Mr. Chair, you're letting her go on with a "nothing to do with anything" response to something, if I can't respond to her.

The Chair: Wait a moment, please. She asked whether she could respond to your earlier question.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I didn't ask a question about the Harper government, so it was out of order.

The Chair: Nobody said no. I don't control the questions and answers. It's no different in the House of Commons—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, you cut her off. She's now five minutes after her time. I would ask that, in the future, we stick to the allotted time, as posted in the notice of meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll start the meeting on time, as well, in the future.

Minister, again, thank you.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I wanted to have the time for you, for the answer.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That wasn't an answer to anything.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll suspend for a couple of moments now, to let the officials join the table as well.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: Okay, we'll try to get started.

Welcome, Mr. Adam Burns, assistant deputy minister, programs sector, and Niall O'Dea, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

I don't think there's another opening statement. We'll go right to questioning.

I believe Mr. Epp is up for six minutes or less.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the officials for being here.

I have three short questions to start with.

First of all, who speaks for Canada at the Great Lakes Fishery Commission table?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We have a commissioner there, a federal representative.

Mr. Dave Epp: The four Canadian commissioners—

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Obviously, the department provides advice for what we're...the positions, and we work with the secretariat extensively.

Mr. Dave Epp: It's the four commissioners who speak.

As I understand it right now, there are negotiations for a memorandum of understanding between the DFO and the commissioners.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Yes.

Mr. Dave Epp: Is the DFO prepared to sign that memorandum of agreement, as opposed to a memorandum of understanding?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I'm not sure of the.... That's not an issue I'm aware of—whether it's “agreement” or “understanding”. That technical difference—

Mr. Dave Epp: One is binding on the ministry and one is not.

Are you prepared to sign a binding agreement with the commission?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I'm going to take that back.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you. If you could table that response, that would be great.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Yes.

Mr. Dave Epp: Finally, why won't the U.S. commissioners meet with the Canadian commissioners at the commission?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I can't speak for them, sir.

Mr. Dave Epp: Could you provide an answer in writing?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I'm not sure I'll be able to give you any more than that.

We're in extensive discussions on the business we share with the commission. That is going very well, but I cannot speak for the American commissioners.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Arnold.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, you have four and a half minutes.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Thank you for appearing here today. It's always good to hear from the officials.

I believe this question would probably go to Mr. Pelletier, or perhaps Mr. Burns.

We constantly hear from harvesters who are unable to fish because of stock assessments not being done due to vessel maintenance problems, vessel breakdowns or shortage of staff. This has a huge economic impact. It's a huge impact on the fishermen and processors who are losing their jobs. These breakdowns and staff shortages surely can't be because of the billions of dollars that have been poured into the Department of Fisheries and Oceans over the last eight years.

Why does DFO continually fail to provide stock assessments that would allow fishermen to harvest their catch?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We certainly work very hard to ensure we can do all the stock assessments the harvesters rely on. We have had issues, for sure, and we work through those issues as they arise.

We are obviously working very hard on a broader fleet renewal strategy. We have had new vessels delivered, including fishery science vessels for stock assessments. Obviously, when we have problems with particular vessels—for example, older vessels that are

not yet replaced—we do everything we can to find a solution. In some cases, that means taking another vessel and reprioritizing what we do where.

Mr. Mel Arnold: You're referring to vessel issues, breakdowns and so on, but what about the staffing shortages we also hear about? Vessels aren't able to sail, and we're also relying on foreign countries to do stock assessments on Canada's fish stocks. Why, after eight years, has this government failed to address these issues?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We have lots of international agreements with partner countries, whereby we share ocean areas and fish. Many countries fish in particular areas, so we do joint science with lots of different countries, given that fisheries are often a shared resource.

In terms of staff shortages, sir, we certainly are aware of the complements we need, and we work really hard on staffing. There are times we don't have the full complement needed to sail on a particular mission, but we really do a lot of planning—both in the Coast Guard, for what is needed on that side, and in DFO—to try to have the staff we need in the places where we need them.

• (1210)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

On another topic, it was announced yesterday that the cod stock assessment has now been changed from the critical zone to, I believe, cautious. The Premier of Newfoundland referred to “new historical data”. Can you define what “new historical data” would be? I believe most people believe that historical data is not new. Can you describe not necessarily the cod situation, but what new historical data.... Why wasn't it used eight years ago?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: The change in the assessment of cod is based on a change in the model used to assess the stock.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Again, I said “new historical data”.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: That includes—

Mr. Mel Arnold: What is “new historical data”?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I can't speak to the premier's use of “new historical data”. Historical data is historical data, but it is the use of certain historical data in the model. Obviously, the model is based on past data as well as current data. The new model has some different data from the past.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It sounds like you can't answer that question.

The minister wasn't able to answer why the strategic salmon health initiative program, which was started by the previous Conservative government as a result of the Cohen commission, was abandoned by your department. Why did they do that, and why did they not complete the four phases that were recommended after so many years of work and research had gone into that program?

The Chair: I would ask the officials to provide that in writing, because we've gone way over time on the actual questioning for Mr. Arnold.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Okay.

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

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

This is through you, Chair, to the deputy minister. Ms. Gibbons, are you, as well as the associate deputy minister and the most senior assistant deputy ministers in the department, aware of the growing concern on the east coast within the lobster fishery, primarily, of unreported cash sales?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Yes, I am aware there are concerns.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The department's aware. How long have you been aware?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I've been aware that there are unreported sales, illegal sales, in fisheries since I joined. That is part of the business of regulating this sector. That's the reason we have a conservation protection officer contingent—because there is illegal fishing.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Briefly, what steps has the department been taking to confirm it is accurate?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Obviously, our first line of defence, of course, is to make sure we enforce the Fisheries Act, and that people who are fishing have licences. What I would—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How many charges have been laid in relation to unreported cash sales of lobster on the east coast?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I can't give you a specific number, but—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Can you provide it to the committee?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I can talk to my team about that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay, thank you.

The fishery underpins the economy of coastal Atlantic Canada. I hear it constantly. In fact, I was with the minister this summer, and we both got an earful at the wharf on this particular issue. I want to confirm that the most senior officials in the department are aware of it, and if they are aware of it, I take it you will be taking concrete action to correct it.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: The provinces regulate the sales, so we work with them.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Ms. Gibbons, no. DFO regulates and documents the sale of lobster from the fisher to the buyer. It's the federal department's responsibility to document that particular transaction. The provinces license the buyer and they license the processor, but it's your responsibility to ensure that the documenta-

tion between the fisher and the buyer is accurate and totally reflects the catches that are being made.

I want to follow up on what my colleague Mr. Perkins said, but from a different angle. Recently, it's been in the media—certainly in social media—that the department sponsored through fisher organizations a lobster trap retrieval program in LFA 25, which is in the Northumberland Strait, between P.E.I. and New Brunswick. An extensive number of lobster traps were recovered in that process. This was after the season, and they were still out.

If they were still out after the season, would that gear be illegal?

• (1215)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I'll ask Adam Burns to answer that.

Mr. Adam Burns (Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): When we retrieve gear through the ghost gear program, we first look at whether it's been reported as having been lost, which is a requirement of licence conditions.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Was there any gear in LFA 25 reported as being lost before the retrieval program was conducted?

Mr. Adam Burns: Absolutely. I'm sure there was. I don't know for a fact what was reported.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you check and advise the committee if there were reports of lost gear and where, and who reported the lost gear?

Mr. Adam Burns: We would certainly be able to provide you the statistics on the reporting, but we have a very high level of reporting for lost gear. There is a fair amount that happens each season.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I believe it's paramount.... Various ministers made the comment that conservation drives the department and conservation is essential for the maintenance, stability and growth of the fishery. I'm referencing lobster here.

What irritated commercial fishers was that there was an extensive number of traps retrieved that were landed, and then DFO directed and paid for them to be returned to a first nations community in New Brunswick. Can you confirm that?

Mr. Adam Burns: I would have to look into the details of that specific situation.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Would you, and provide it back to the committee?

If it was retrieved after, is the process the same? With all gear that was retrieved, was the actual original owner sought out, and were the traps returned to the original owner with no charges laid?

Mr. Adam Burns: I can't speak to specific cases, but I can tell you that when we retrieve gear through the ghost gear program, we first look at the portion that can be identified. Not all of the gear can be identified in terms of who the owner is. We then look at whether that gear was reported as lost, and that information is provided to our conservation and protection staff for further action, as appropriate, depending on the circumstances.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you provide to the committee in writing, following this, exactly what transpired with the retrieval of gear that was conducted a couple of weeks ago in LFA 25 between New Brunswick and P.E.I.? Could you provide to the committee what action was taken on the traps that were retrieved and whether charges were laid as a result? Where did the traps go after they were recovered?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

We'll now go—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, as long as I can get... Is that clear? Are we going to get that information?

Mr. Adam Burns: We will provide you with a response and all of the information we have available, yes.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being with us. We know them well and we are pleased to see them again.

I don't know who would be able to answer my question. Ms. Gibbons, maybe you could do it.

Has there been an update to the Fisheries Fund? Is there any money left in the fund, and if so, how much? Are you able to tell us?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Yes, there is money left. If you are talking about the Quebec fisheries fund, I can tell you that we have extended it. We are going to accept applications until next March. So there are two years left. I think that about 55% of the money in the initial budget will be available to be invested in the future.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Ms. Gibbons, I pointed out when the question was asked that people had been waiting a long time for a grievance to be resolved and that they were experiencing psychological distress because of that. You announced to us at that time that there was going to be a review of the approach taken. We are still getting calls telling us that there has been no progress.

Can you tell us whether there will be new facts about this soon? People have been waiting a long time for their grievance to be resolved, some of them for seven years.

• (1220)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I know there are complex cases, as there are in all departments.

I can't comment on the timetable for resolving particular cases. However, I can tell you that I am in ongoing discussions with the commissioner and with the case resolution management team. We have an internal committee that looks at the more complex cases to try to find solutions for employees as quickly as possible.

There is also an ombudsman in the department who can support the other human resources management processes and contribute to making the processes less formal. That is an avenue that can alleviate employees' fears.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: People are listening to us. I hope you are able to tell them that seven years is too long and it has to take a lot less time than that. There are people whose entire lives are focused on their work. For most people, work plays an important role in their lives. When there is a grievance, some people experience major psychological distress and family conflicts, they lose their home, they divorce, and so on. There are very serious consequences if it takes too long to resolve their grievance. I would really like you to tell them today that there is hope.

I will come back to the fisheries fund now.

You say that 55% of the Quebec fisheries fund is left. Do you have an idea of what will become of that fund, or are you waiting for applications between now and March?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Different paths have been taken. We are putting considerable emphasis on implementing technology on the boats to make them more sustainable for the fishers and better for the environment. That is an area of interest to Canada and Quebec and to the fisheries sector.

While following those paths, we are continuing to pursue the objectives we set at the outset, because they are still relevant.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Are you considering providing support? The financial situation of fishers who have suffered fishery closings is still getting worse; this was discussed last year. There are plant workers who do not qualify for employment insurance.

Are you able to tell us whether you are studying the possibility of these people being supported for the time it takes for them to make the transition to another type of fishing or to receive new ocean perch licences, for example? These people are waiting to reorganize, but they have lost a lot of money. Are you able to tell us whether you are considering financial support or some other form of assistance for these people?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: These are certainly difficult situations. We always try to see what potential solutions there are and how the available resources could be useful to various persons in the sector. We are going to continue doing this when it comes to the changes affecting the various types of fishery.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: In the fishing industry, no one hesitates today to say there is a fisheries crisis. Is that a term you use, yourself? Are you able to tell us whether there actually is a fisheries crisis, or is it just the industry it affects that may call it that?

• (1225)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: There are a lot of fisheries that are doing fine and bringing in good incomes for fishers. For example, the shrimp fishery is a very widespread fishery. A lot of fishers earn their living from that fishery. Not all sectors are experiencing a crisis. As the minister said, climate change and other factors are having an impact on the fishing industry. There are certainly some situations that are more critical than others.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Welcome to everyone here.

My first question relates to Vancouver Island—in my riding and in surrounding communities as well—where I heard from salmon trollers in the summer that the start of their fishing season was significantly delayed, and at the very last minute, almost totally without notice or consultation.

You know that I support, as well as coastal communities and fishers, the conservation and protection of wild salmon, but it's this exact chronic and repeated lack of consultation and consideration that alienates the department from the fishers with whom it should be working closely.

Can you please explain the rationale behind the decision in this case, and what consultation has been done with fishers?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I've certainly heard similar concerns about the time between the announcements and the start of the fisheries, and the lack of advance notice this year. That is obviously a concern.

I would just say in general that on the west coast, with salmon as a case in point, we have these very detailed fish management plans on a regional basis, and we do extensive consultations before we complete them. We consult with people to develop the plans, just because of salmon, in particular, being a resource with many different species, and the fact that it's in the ocean, up rivers—just the area it covers is huge. Of course, stocks are mostly not in great shape, so we didn't spend a lot of time on those consultations in the development, and sometimes we run up against the clock in terms of the opening.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Ms. Gibbons. I appreciate and agree, of course, as I said, with the conservation and protection of wild salmon.

However, can you explain why I am hearing from so many salmon trollers in areas F and G who are saying that they did not receive this consultation you are talking about? They received very short notice, therefore it limited the amount of time they were able to be out on the water and providing a livelihood for their families and communities.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: The plans I see include an extensive consultation component, so I can't speak to every single community. You're saying there are some who were not included.

Certainly from where I sit, my team does very extensive on-the-ground engagement on salmon fisheries.

If you have more specific examples you'd like to share, I am happy to look into those.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: That's exactly what I was just thinking. We can continue this conversation, and I can provide you with specifics in the hopes that the people who have been impacted can have their voices heard and have some solutions, in particular, so this is not repeated.

The other question I have is around the crab fishing season in Newfoundland and Labrador. It saw a severe collapse in prices that led to lost work, and many people were unable to qualify for the seasonal employment insurance that allows them to feed their families throughout the off-season.

At the same time as all this was happening, to make matters worse, the government changed the EI eligibility criteria to make it even harder for many of these fishers and those impacted to be able to qualify.

Daniel Blaikie, who is the NDP critic for employment and workforce development, and I wrote a letter to the minister asking if the minister will be supporting the FFAW's emergency economic support proposal. I would like to get your thoughts on the matter, please.

• (1230)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We extended the season so that harvesters could get out and catch their quota, so there was certainly a lot of back-and-forth with the harvester community to really make sure we were able to support them, given the late start to the season.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Another question I have is around evidence that Alaskan fisheries are catching hundreds of thousands of fish bound for Canadian rivers. In fact, Alaska has become the biggest harvester of B.C. wild salmon populations, even as our stocks are declining.

I've asked this question before, and my colleagues have asked this before, and I'd like to have a clear answer. What is the department going to do between now and 2028, when the treaty is renewed, to protect wild salmon that are in crisis right now?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We certainly have multiple venues for engaging with the U.S. on salmon. We have the Pacific Salmon Commission, which goes through the harvest in various areas extensively.

This is a point that we engage on—the Yukon situation, in particular—extensively with the U.S. We really stress the importance of conversation and the fact that this is a shared resource and we really need to manage it in a very integrated way.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Will anything happen between now and when the treaty is renewed?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Absolutely. We're in constant engagement.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Looking back—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. You're right on the six-minute mark. That's good timing.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

The Chair: I'll now go to.... Originally, it was Mr. Small. We went to Mr. Perkins and back to Mr. Small.

Now I believe it's up to Mr. Perkins again, so we have to give up dancing.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We're just following the Liberal lead of how you share, and giving all that notice on how you share with everybody.

Thank you.

Deputy, I have some questions around some of the planning on how to fix this issue of enforcement in the elver fishery.

I'll start with how part of the challenge, I think, is traceability. How do you actually trace this? Can you tell us?

Once it's out of the water—for the people watching—how do you know who caught it and where it came from? How does a buyer know, or how does somebody at airport shipping know whether this was legal or illegal?

Can you let us know what DFO is doing to update how we could have better traceability in the elver fishery?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We're currently engaged in a very extensive review of the elver fishery, including everything from allocation to management. As part of management, we are considering the question of traceability. We're certainly not alone in this. The CBSA has a role. The province has a role.

I can tell you that in September we had a team go to Maine. This is because Maine, given the similar kind of dynamic in that fishery in that state, brought in a regime to try to have better controls from the river to export, including a licence regime and card tracking. People who are selling have to be tracked against the cards they hold. They're scanned and that kind of thing.

It's a very interesting regime that Maine has worked through. It was done in pieces—it didn't achieve it all in one year—but we are certainly taking inspiration from what it has done, and we're really looking at every aspect of how we manage the elver fishery.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's great.

My understanding, though, was that.... I know DFO did surveillance at the Halifax airport, but that was like whack-a-mole. A lot of them ended up going through live seafood facilities at Toronto airport, where I don't believe—unless I'm wrong—DFO has any enforcement people.

Does DFO have enforcement people at Pearson airport for international live seafood shipping and stuff?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: This would be a CBSA responsibility.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's CBSA, not DFO.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: It is a CBSA response. Yes. CBSA is doing enforcement of this, for sure. We are catching—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. A lot of it was going through Toronto. I never read or heard of any arrests or anything coming out of the export of illegally caught elvers out of the Toronto airport. Maybe you could get back to the committee in writing if there were some instances of that.

• (1235)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: CBSA is very aware of where the activity is. I think that's a point of discussion, for sure.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Whether it's this issue.... We've had some quota cuts whereby DFO has transferred some of the quota from legal, licensed elver fishers to first nations, and we've had some issues around the lobster fishery and issues about willing buyer, willing seller.... My understanding, from something I think I saw in the spring, is that for all fishers, DFO has something like \$175 million set aside over a number of years for willing buyer, willing seller.

Are you considering more cuts to the legal, licensed elver fishers in Atlantic Canada as we approach the season next year?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We are absolutely looking at the allocation of licence and how we meet the interests of indigenous rights holders. On the specifics of elver licences and what will happen there, again, that's not something I'm in a position to give you details on, but we are absolutely looking at allocation.

As you know, willing buyer, willing seller is the predominant approach that we use. We don't always use it, because it's not always applicable, but we really do strive to use it to the extent we can.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Going forward in the management of the elver fishery, we have a number of licensed eel harvesters. Some of them have said to me in meetings that they think it would be better for the entire stock if basically the adult eel fishery ended and those licences were converted to elver fisheries to allow those eels to go back to the Sargasso Sea and reproduce.

Is the department giving any consideration to converting the eel licences to elver licences as part of replenishing or allowing for the growth of the stock?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I think just generally we look at the conservation objectives for every stock. Certainly, eels are a listed species under the Species at Risk Act. We consider, for situations like that, just a range of different measures to ensure the conservation of the stock.

On the specific transfer of licence, again, that's a very specific question that—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Could you get back in writing, Annette? I think I'm out of time. If you could get back to the committee in writing, that would be great.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Yes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

The Chair: You were way over time. I had understood from my paper that it was going to be shared with another member. That didn't happen, so that's on you.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Gibbons and Mr. Burns, in New Brunswick there is a regional office in Moncton and another one in Tracadie, in my riding. A lot of officials, scientists and people from your team work in those offices.

Do you have confidence in those people when they send you files for making decisions about opening or closing a fishery?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: At the department, there are people who are very competent in various fields. For example, there are scientists, people who manage resource protection measures, and experts who work on small craft ports. The opinions are forwarded to me or sent to the minister. In either case, I see them pass by. There are always discussions about the files. Most of them are quite complex, and I receive advice. I will certainly have questions for making the—

Mr. Serge Cormier: Right.

[*English*]

This year there was a reopening of zones 4T5 and 4T7 for halibut. Did you guys agree that these zones should be reopened?

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Does your question relate to debates that take place within the department?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Did your office agree with Ottawa about the reopening of these two fishing areas?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: The role of the public service is to give advice, and once a decision is made, we accept it.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Burns, did you agree with reopening areas 4T5 and 4T7 for halibut?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: The answer is going to be the same as mine.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I am asking you these questions because you requested studies, studies that lasted almost three years, regarding reopening these two fishing areas.

This year, the recommendation from the Moncton local office, from your officials, from your scientists, after more than two years' study of those two areas, was to reopen them. Unfortunately, at the last minute, your offices recommended not following the recommendation made at the local level and closing those areas. It was necessary to step in and see what the reasons were for that decision.

The reason was that there might have been too much bycatch in those two fishing areas, even though the season had just ended and there had been almost no such catches.

Ms. Gibbons and Mr. Burns, could you tell me why, every time decisions are made in Ottawa concerning these regions, there always seems to be a problem and second thoughts, even after your own scientists and officials have made recommendations that supported reopening, when you seemed to be opposed to it?

How do you want the industry to have confidence in decisions like that?

I would like to get an answer to my question, please.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: There is only one department. We have experts in the regions and here in Ottawa in the national offices. We take all sorts of factors into consideration in our decisions about giving advice.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Ms. Gibbons, your own report recommended, three years ago, that these fisheries be reopened. Why was it different at your level? I am talking about your own employees.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: All our employees, in the regions and in Ottawa, compose a single entity. There are no divisions. It is not as if the region was a separate department that makes recommendations.

The debate is not over as long as we have not had discussions with everyone who has expertise on the issues. It is that way in all departments, about all issues.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Unfortunately, I do not agree with the answer you have just given me.

In any event, I am going to move on to another question.

Mr. Pelletier, I am pleased to see you again.

On the subject of ice-breaking on the bay in the region, are you ready now for the next snow crab season? Have there already been discussions with the associations so the next season can be started quickly? Are the contracts already in place in order to have the tools that are necessary for reopening our ports?

Mr. Mario Pelletier (Commissioner, Canadian Coast Guard): Thank you for the question.

I can't tell you whether the contracts are in place, but we are as ready as we were in previous years. The Atlantic region, which manages this sector, has all the mechanisms in place to make sure we are ready to do the ice-breaking when the time is right.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Pelletier.

I hope we will be ready this year.

Is my speaking time up, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, you've gone a little over.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Gibbons, I am going to come back to the comments my colleague Mr. Cormier made about the difficulty there sometimes is in reconciling various opinions, whether they come from your employees or from fishers who have direct knowledge, in real time, of what is happening on the ground. It is often difficult to understand why the recommendations that make it to your offices in Ottawa are not given the weight they deserve.

There was a study about foreign investment not very long ago. Some witnesses told us that fishing know-how was in danger because there were foreign investments that were impoverishing the fisheries sector and there was no new generation to take over.

How do you plan to ensure that there is a next generation and preserve fishing know-how, that is, transmission of skills from generation to generation and preservation of economic interests in this economic sector? No one wants to pay to work. Everyone wants to earn a living.

We have also heard about community licences, which are obviously intended more for indigenous people. Some people would like non-indigenous people to also be able to obtain more community licences, which would preserve those interests and maintain economic equilibrium in the local communities.

I would like to hear your comments on this subject.

• (1245)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Thank you for the question.

The next generation is a very important question. I previously worked in the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, and this was also an important question for Ms. Bibeau who was then the minister for that department. For example, there was talk of how expensive it was to purchase a dairy farm. In fact, it is very expensive to buy farms in general.

In some fishing sectors, the price of licences is really very high these days. It is hard for a young person or anyone else who wants to work in this sector to take on those kinds of costs.

The subject is of considerable concern to the minister. She discussed it with us when she came to the department. She is looking for new ideas and she also wants to hear suggestions from people outside the department. She is certainly going to be giving advice in this regard.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: The discussions concerning community licences—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. You're right on time. You're the first one today.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Gibbons, perhaps you can clarify something around the Dene Nation and their coordinated efforts with the Canadian Coast Guard and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Specifically, are you aware that until April this year, the department was funding a fisheries coordinator with the Dene Nation, and that your department has since cut funding for this important role?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I can't speak to that specific funding. We have programs that would support that kind of function in a first nation. We try to apportion that funding so that all communities interested in having access are able to access some funds.

I'm not sure about the specifics of that. We can come back to you on that, if you like.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Yes, please. I have concerns that have been brought forward, given the importance of the role of fostering local knowledge and having people on the ground to conduct DFO work with the community and build trust with the communities they rely on. It seems problematic, to say the least, that this role would be eliminated without thorough consultation with the Dene first nations.

My other question, Ms. Gibbons, is around sea lice in open-net fish farms.

Building on my previous questions to the minister, we know that sea lice are highly problematic and especially dangerous to migrating juvenile salmon, which are most vulnerable. Unfortunately, we saw Cermaq open-net salmon farms in Bawden Point granted a near 50% biomass increase in 2022, despite evidence, which has been brought to my attention, that it may have been in breach of its licence conditions due to excessive sea lice.

Could you please answer whether Cermaq has ever breached licence conditions? Has any licence issued to Cermaq ever been amended to allow for higher lice limits, and has it ever been fined or otherwise sanctioned for breaching lice limits?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I can come back to you with details as appropriate. What I would say on sea lice more generally, for the committee's interest, is that we are starting a full scientific assessment process of the impacts of sea lice on aquaculture in B.C.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): No. It's Mr. Small.

The Chair: Oh. You switched it up.

Okay. It's over to Mr. Small for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is for Ms. Gibbons.

Stakeholder groups like the MFU, the PEIFA and the UFCA in the Maritimes are quite concerned that the rights and reconciliation agreements being negotiated are being negotiated secretly and without any transparency.

Is there any chance that all stakeholders can be represented at the table during these negotiations?

• (1250)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I think this is an issue. Fish harvesters and indigenous communities are fishing side by side with each other in their communities. We know there is a great interest on the part of non-indigenous harvesters in what the government is negotiating. We certainly try to work on that education and discussion piece.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thanks, Ms. Gibbons.

You just said that both indigenous and non-indigenous share a resource and work side by side. Why are non-indigenous not sharing in the consultation process?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: There are discussions about what we are doing, absolutely. We consult with the non-indigenous fish harvester communities and associations on what we are doing in general. I've had discussions myself on that subject.

There are constant conversations.

Mr. Clifford Small: The concerns I'm bringing to you are based on conversations I've had as recently as two hours ago with these stakeholder organizations in the Maritimes.

Why are these agreements not being published in the Canada Gazette, per the requirement laid out in Bill C-68?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I'm not sure if one of my colleagues has more to add on this, but the agreements we have with indigenous communities are nation-to-nation agreements, so they would be subject to this sort of protocol in that context.

Mr. Clifford Small: Is it a policy decision, or is it on a legal basis that these negotiations are strictly nation to nation and not bringing in all stakeholders?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We are informed by various things in our interactions with indigenous communities, which are founded fundamentally on the constitutional rights they have.

Mr. Clifford Small: Is there no policy currently you're working off in the development of these RRAs?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: As I said, these are nation to nation, and in that context we respect that nation-to-nation construct.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you respect the rights of stakeholders who have had a certain level of access to the resource? Why do you not want to negotiate with those stakeholders? In the case of elvers, for one, the whole industry is watching what's going on with them, and they're nervous. You've made them extremely nervous, because 14% of their quota was confiscated. There were no negotiations and there was no regard for willing buyer, willing seller. This is not coming from me. This is coming from the people who are involved in that industry, and they're concerned. What are you going to do about it?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We always have consultations with industry before we open fisheries. We have consultations on changes and on allocation of quota.

Mr. Clifford Small: My last question is a brief one, Mr. Chair. Either official can answer this one. Do you respect the work that this committee does?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Of course.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you respect the reports that come out of this committee?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Yes.

Mr. Clifford Small: Last year we put out a report with a recommendation that Canada match the Americans' mackerel quota, and it was completely disregarded. There was no dissenting report. It was a unanimous report. Why was that recommendation not followed? Did you have any consultations with the Americans on that? Just be brief. You have 30 seconds or less.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I believe the response to the committee on your mackerel report is pending. We expect it to be made available to you shortly. We are constantly in discussions with the U.S. on the management of resources like mackerel, which cross the borders.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

I'll turn it over to Mr.—

The Chair: Your five minutes are up, buddy. You've gone over, actually.

We'll finish off with Mr. Kelloway for five minutes or less, please.

• (1255)

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I'm the last questioner between you and a meal.

I want to focus, actually, on two things. The first is the Canadian Coast Guard College, which is located in Sydney and is an absolute jewel in Cape Breton, and for Canada as well, in terms of training men and women across this country from coast to coast to coast.

I want to look into something that I receive a lot on locally but also provincially, where we have the Canadian Coast Guard College and we have the cadets. I hear often from industry and from indigenous folks and leaders in indigenous communities. Also, a fair number of times I've heard, from a safety perspective, of the need to look at more of a presence of Coast Guard vessels actually in the vicinity of Sydney. I'm wondering if that's something that perhaps is being looked at with partners or if it's something we could look at doing a deep dive on. It is something that has consistently come up, and I think it is worthy of a real, tangible discussion.

That's one question. I'll try to give my other question and then let people answer.

Elvers have been brought up a lot today with respect to the last couple of years and the unlawful actions of quite a few people. You talked about going to Maine and about looking at some of their best practices.

I am wondering if you can dive in just a little deeper as to some other best practices that we may have learned from that trip, i.e., regulation changes and fines that are actually meaningful and impactful, that would persuade someone...or have them think twice about doing it.

For folks at home, my understanding is that if you think of a 500-millilitre jar of peanut butter and put elvers into that jar of peanut butter, it would get you \$5,000 illegally.

I'm wondering if you could speak to the other measures on the elver file that we may be looking at, from our Maine experience, but also from other research you've done.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have an allergy to peanut butter now.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: They take the peanut butter out.

Mr. Chair, I hope the parliamentary secretary will permit me a very quick correction on something I said earlier, if that's okay.

On eels, I believe I used the wrong term. Eels are assessed by the committee on species at risk as "threatened", not "listed". I just wanted to be clear on that.

Mr. Kelloway, we have certainly looked—and are looking—at all aspects. There's still quite a bit of work under way, and we're really trying to work very intensively, given the expectations around 2024.

Looking at the regulatory regime, for example, which would include fines assessed, things that are prohibited and activities that are prohibited, we're taking inspiration from the Maine case in elver, just because it is so relevant and proximate.

Other things that are done in other countries with species that are similar to this are things we are looking at.

On the Coast Guard, of course, I'll turn to the commissioner.

Mr. Mario Pelletier: Thanks for the question, and thanks for your kind words about the college. Having attended it more than 38

years ago now, I take particular pride in the very essential work it does to support the fleet of the future.

As far as more resources around Cape Breton are concerned, through the national shipbuilding strategy we have a new lifeboat at Louisbourg station. It's much more capable than the one we used to have. Part of the fleet renewal plan, too, is to have a dedicated training vessel at the college. That has yet to be built, but it's in our plan, so there will be more resources available there.

We always station our large assets just off Cape Breton for north-east Nova Scotia. We call it the search and rescue zone, so we're very mindful of our presence everywhere.

I'm happy to report that the new lifeboats we got from two shipyards are extremely efficient, and the crews are very proud to be operating them.

• (1300)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway. That concludes today's allotted time.

I will apologize to Ms. Barron for starting early. Apparently, we checked the clock here in the room, and it is actually three minutes faster than everybody else's clock. However, I will remind everybody that it is on you to be here on time, because I'd like to start on time regardless.

Also, if you're participating on Zoom, you're expected to sign in 15 minutes prior to the meeting for sound checks and everything else that has to be done in a timely way.

Again, we will try to adhere to the exact time instead of the time on the wall, but they're supposed to be fixing the clock for us. The next meeting should start exactly at the right time, because it will all have been fixed.

Again, I want to say thank you to all the staff, the clerk and all the officials who made this meeting possible, including, of course, the translation team and the table staff.

The meeting is adjourned.

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