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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1430)

[English]

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 17 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on April 7, 2022, the committee is meeting to hear from the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard and officials on the issue of capelin fishing regulations impeding weir fishing in the Charlevoix region of Quebec.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. For those participating via video conference, which I think is everybody, when you are ready to speak, click on the icon to activate your mike. Please speak slowly and clearly for the interpreters. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. Interpretation is available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. Please inform me immediately if interpretation is lost. We'll ensure that it's restored before resuming. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function to speak or to alert the chair. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

I'd now like to welcome the Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, who will be with us for the first hour.

We'd also like to welcome our Department of Fisheries and Oceans officials, who have joined us virtually as well for the full two hours. We have with us, once again, Mr. Timothy Sargent, deputy minister; Mr. Adam Burns, acting assistant deputy minister of fisheries and harbour management; Mr. Sylvain Vézina, regional director general from the Quebec region; and from here in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Tony Blanchard, regional director general.

I understand that we have some substitutions here today. Jenna Sudds, MP for Kanata—Carleton, is substituting in. Jaime Battiste, MP for Sydney—Victoria, is also joining us.

One other, Francesco Sorbara, the member for Vaughan—Woodbridge, was to be joining us as well.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Greetings, Ken. I'm here.

The Chair: Okay. Good.

Minister, we'll now go to you for opening remarks for five minutes or less. I don't know if any of the officials are speaking as well, but you can let us know if they are.

Whenever you're ready, please go ahead.

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Good morning, Mr. Chair and colleagues, the regulars and the subs to the committee. It's a pleasure to join you from my home on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish nations and to attend with senior officials from Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

For those who would prefer to hear my remarks in English, please listen to the interpretation.

[Translation]

Capelin is a small pelagic fish widely distributed throughout the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and it plays an important role in the marine ecosystem as a key forage species for numerous marine fish, mammals and seabirds.

In the estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence, which represent the 4RST divisions of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, or NAFO, capelin is managed as a single stock. The spawning season of the stock begins in the upper estuary in late April and early May, and progresses eastwards and northwards in July and August.

Newfoundland and Labrador region is the department's lead region managing the 4RST capelin stock. Its management is conducted through a multiregion advisory process involving the department's Quebec and Gulf regions, as these three regions have fish harvesters with fishing access to the stock.

The 4RST capelin fishery dates back over 100 years and is currently managed on the basis of a single total allowable catch, or TAC.

• (1435)

[English]

The Chair: Minister, can you try moving your boom up a bit higher?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Okay. I'll try that.

The Chair: It sounds much better now.

Hon. Joyce Murray: All right. Good.

I'm sorry about that.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Historically, Gulf capelin have been mostly landed by the Newfoundland seiner fleet in area 4R, the area of the Gulf of St. Lawrence near the western coast of Newfoundland.

Quebec capelin fisheries do not occur in that portion of the Gulf and, instead, only take place in areas 4ST, the eastern portion of the northern Gulf and in the southern Gulf. The province has a small-scale weir fishery in the estuary that has opened on May 1 in previous years, while the main fishery in Quebec occurs in June in area 4S, off the coast of Blanc-Sablon on Quebec's lower north shore.

As mentioned, the capelin weir fishery in the estuary is small in scale, with only two active licence holders. This fishery targets capelin during beach spawning events. In April 2021, the licence holders involved in the capelin weir fishery in the estuary requested the advancement of the opening date of their fishery to April 1, from the usual May 1 opening. At that time, the 2021 stock assessment and advisory committee meeting had already taken place, which were respectively held on March 18, 2021 and on March 26, 2021.

The next 4RST capelin stock assessment is scheduled to begin on April 20, and the advisory committee will be held a few days later on April 25, 2022. The request by licence holders to advance the opening date of the capelin weir fishery in the estuary will be discussed at the April 25 advisory committee meeting. As part of the ongoing process, we will evaluate the advancement of the opening date of this fishery to April 1, starting in 2023.

Following the stock assessment on April 20 to 21 and the advisory committee meeting on April 25, I have asked officials to prepare options, in consultation with the industry, that could allow weir fishermen to open before May 1 if the assessment is positive. This consultation approach regarding modification to management measures is consistent across all fisheries in Canada.

I am happy to answer any questions related to this work.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now start our rounds of questioning.

Up first is Mr. Perkins for six minutes or less.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Minister, thank you very much for joining us today in this unusual meeting during our constituency break. I appreciate your accommodation of Madame Desbiens' request.

Thank you very much also to my colleagues on the committee for putting aside time for this.

Minister, in your opening remarks you mentioned that you're looking at this for next year, and I appreciate that. Was there no consultation with the weir fishermen before the meeting of the advisory committee that was held in March of this year?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question, Mr. Perkins.

We always do consultation with the fish harvesters involved in the fishery. That's done after the departmental experts have looked at the data, analyzed it and brought it together. The options are then presented in those consultations.

I will ask my staff if they'd like to add any other details .

• (1440)

Mr. Timothy Sargent (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Sylvain, perhaps you could comment on this one.

[Translation]

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

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

This year's capelin consultations have not been held yet. Last year, they were held in March. This year, the advisory committee's consultations are scheduled for April 25, in just over a week.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

Is that it from the officials? Okay.

Minister, I was looking at the integrated fisheries management plan for capelin in 4RST. In what year was that integrated fisheries management plan first launched?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll ask the officials to answer that question about the date.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Sylvain?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Since the fishery is managed by my colleague Tony Blanchard, I would ask him to answer this question, please.

Thank you.

Mr. Tony Blanchard (Regional Director General, Newfoundland and Labrador Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Chair, I'm not sure of the exact date.

I can check that. Some of these plans are updated.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Would it be 10 years ago or maybe five years ago, just generally?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: Yes. It was likely around 10 years ago, but I'll get the date and get back to you.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

I don't need the specific date. I was looking for the year, just generally.

Is it updated every year with the latest thinking or understanding?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: The document is not necessarily updated every year. It could be every two years, and then it's updated with what the latest information is at the time.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay.

This might have been updated last year or two years ago.

Mr. Tony Blanchard: Yes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay.

Can the minister or perhaps one of the officials tell me what science was done to determine the abundance of the stock, the assessment we have in this plan and the annual TAC that's done?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

My understanding is that a number of different elements go into this. It includes several new elements this year, including data as to what groundfish are eating in the area. A variety of types of data have to then be harmonized. That is part of the process before the actual assessment of TAC can be confirmed.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Minister.

Section 2.4 of the plan states, "There is no directed abundance survey for capelin in the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence"; however, planning for a survey is ongoing.

Can one of the officials or the minister tell me how long that planning for the survey has been going on? When might we start seeing a regular abundance survey of capelin in this area?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll pass that to my officials to answer.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: It is clear that our data for capelin are fairly limited, so we are trying to make improvements in that regard.

Currently, our capelin data come from reported commercial landings, a fishery performance index derived from commercial landings of the 4R seiner fleet in Newfoundland and Labrador, capelin bycatch by shrimp trawlers, biological samples from commercial catches, and specific bottom-trawl surveys conducted by the department in the summer.

All of that information enhances our data and was used to develop an indicator that was validated through peer review. Our data quality is beginning to improve, and we will certainly see results at the next peer review committee meeting, which is scheduled for April 20.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Do we have direct abundance science?

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: No, not right now.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

I think that's my time, Mr. Chair.

● (1445)

The Chair: It is, sir, indeed.

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

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

Good afternoon from P.E.I., Minister.

I have a couple of questions. I want to get a better understanding of this fishery. I understand that this committee is meeting because of an impact on two weir fishers. Is it correct that there are only two fishers who are licensed to fish?

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's correct.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: And they have requested moving the opening date from May 1 to April 1.

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's correct.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: In the past, has the weir fishery been able to exploit their quota or their part of the resource on the opening date?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll have to ask my officials whether they were able to fully exploit their portion. I know that it's a very small portion of the overall fishery.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes, but were they able to catch the amount they were allowed to catch? Who could answer that?

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank Mr. Morrissey for the question.

For the capelin fishery, it's a total quota that takes into account the entire 4RST division. Since capelin—

[English]

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. That's fine.

My next question, Minister and officials, would be, if it's part of a global quota, what is the effect on the capelin fishery in this region? Does it include...outside of the area designated for the weir fishery? Is it the same stock that's part of this global quota that impacts all the Gaspé region?

Could you just explain that a bit more? Are we just talking about the geographic area where these two weir fishers are, or is it a larger geographic area affecting other fishers?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I know that it's all managed as one stock. For any substock elements, perhaps Mr. Vézina can answer.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you tell us how many fishers are licensed to fish this quota that could be exploited by the weir fishers?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank Mr. Morrissey for the question.

Only two fishers harvest weir. They are based in an area where there are no other capelin fishers. The closest fishers are in the 4T division, to be precise. The other fishers in Quebec are in the 4S division, in Blanc-Sablon, so right along the Labrador border.

[English]

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How many fishers are in the 4S area?

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Unfortunately, I don't know the answer to that.

Mr. Blanchard may have the information for the entire 4S fishery.

Can you answer that, Mr. Blanchard?

[English]

Mr. Tony Blanchard: I'm checking for that number right now, but we're probably in the range of 300. That's in the entire stock area, but I'll get a better number for you shortly.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay.

The reason for my question, Minister, is that there is a long history of having advisory committees that are consulted with before substantive changes are made within the fisheries. If a change is made here, my question goes to this potential impact in a larger area, because there's one stock here in a particular geographic area, including other parts of Quebec, including the Gaspé and Labrador. Would I be correct in that opinion, Minister?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Well, yes, that's because it's managed as one stock. Also, there is always a precedent set if a decision is taken, for example, to make a change without doing a full consultation with others.

I think one thing that's also relevant here is that the weir fishery has always opened on May 1, because ice conditions didn't allow for the spawning biomass to come on the beaches for the weir fishery before then. Last year was an unusual year, when the weather was warmer. The ice melted earlier, and the fishery could have been prosecuted earlier, but for 10 years, May 1 has been just fine. That's why we are consulting with the harvesters as to the possibility of making an opening on April 1 from here on, even though it's likely that the area will be iced in and they won't be able to utilize it.

Because climate change is changing the patterns, there could be another year of early opening and early ice melt and, in that way, if there is agreement on April 1 for the weir fishery itself, that will enable these two fishers to pursue what I consider a culturally significant and important fishery in the Charlevoix area.

• (1450)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Chair, what's my time?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. I have a little time.

Minister, it's my understanding—and I'm not overly familiar with capelin—that capelin is a fish resource that's prone to wide fluctuations in biomass. Is that correct?

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's my understanding as well.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Getting management right is extremely critical to the long-term availability of this resource. Is that a fair conclusion?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Absolutely. Getting widespread input into the TAC and the opening date is very important. It doesn't work to freelance and do openings that are not set in the frame for the capelin stock for a particular year.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

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

[Translation]

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

I want to start by thanking everyone for mobilizing in response to my request. This is an issue that requires urgent attention in my view. Obviously, I would have preferred that the circumstances be different, but this was a last attempt to save the two weir fishers in my region. Unfortunately, the fishery is in jeopardy just as the Government of Quebec is looking to give it an intangible heritage designation.

I want to recognize how many people have come together to make this meeting happen, from the interpreters and the clerk to the technical support team and my fellow members. Considerable effort has been expended to address an issue that has a minor impact on the stock, but a huge impact on the survival of two fishers. That is why today's meeting is so important.

My first question is for you, Minister.

What exactly do you know about capelin fishing? Have any of the officials with you today ever seen the capelin weir fishery firsthand?

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray: I won't speak for my team, Madame Desbiens, but there are many fisheries that I have not been present at that I learn about, as the minister. Working with my department and the science, I make decisions accordingly.

In terms of the importance of this meeting, I agree.

[Translation]

I also had the opportunity to follow up on your request to convene a meeting. We discussed it, and I asked department officials to look into your request. For that reason, the opening date of the fishery may be moved up this season and in future seasons.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

It's wonderful to hear you say that you are open to the possibility of giving our weir fishers special consideration.

I want to ask you about two things.

We are here this afternoon to help you and your team understand that the minimal impact of the capelin fishery may not be a good enough reason to stamp out the livelihood of these two fishers. That is why we want to see a moratorium or special permit issued in connection with the conduct of this specifically defined fishery, recognizing its minimal impact on the stock, so that fishers can begin harvesting immediately.

The capelin are rolling. I put on my rubber boots and saw it for myself. They roll in and die on the shore before being eaten by gulls. What people want is fresh fish right away.

What's more, every day counts for the fishers because they catch small quantities at a time. Every day, those small catches are distributed while the fish are fresh, and they are processed right away. People are very happy with the product, especially when it comes to buying local.

Here's my first question. Are you open to letting the fishery proceed immediately? Seniors are waiting for the capelin, and people are mobilizing. Everyone is waiting for the capelin.

Here's my second question. Can you invite the two fishers to participate in the consultation process so that they can explain the reality of the capelin fishery to the department's scientists and make their case?

Keep in mind, Minister, that the weir fishers are not looking for the season to open on April 1. They want it to open when the capelin start rolling.

• (1455)

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you, Mrs. Desbiens and Mr. Chair.

I heard the member raise this point about the capelin life cycle and the minimal impact this fishery has on the resource at a previous committee meeting.

What you must understand is that we manage several fisheries across Canada—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I understand.

Hon. Joyce Murray: To have the trust of the public and of fishers, it's very important that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans have a framework governing how people fish, when people fish, how much people can fish and who is allowed to fish. You're asking me to break with that.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: No.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I've asked the department to find a way to open this fishery a little earlier this year and in years to come.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you for your response, Madam Minister.

Mr. Chair, I believe I have a little time left to ask one last question.

Why, for the past year—

[English]

The Chair: Madame Desbiens, you have four seconds left in your time. It's hardly time for a question and an answer.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: All right, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sure we'll get back to you again during this portion of the meeting.

I will now go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

Taking in all of this information that we're talking about today, I'm wondering if you could clarify, Minister or staff, a little bit more about what the consultation process that you're referring to would look like with those impacted if this date were to be moved up a month this time next year.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I will ask the ministry officials to answer that.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: If we move the fishery date up a month to April 1, which is what we are considering doing and what the meeting that will happen later in this month will consider, we would need to make sure that the science assessments that we need to do for that assessment meeting are done in time so that we can have the meeting in March.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

In regard to the science that's used, I know that previously there have been benchmarks used in making those decisions. What would that look like for the science that would be used to support the decision to move up the date by a month? Can you expand a little bit more on that?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Go ahead, Sylvain.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: I'd like to thank Mr. Sargent for his question.

The work required to assess a fish stock is quite extensive. Data is processed in the fall and after that, several data analyses and validations are done. The science assessment process involves researchers who validate the information. Therefore, it's a lengthy process that's done in advance so we have all the right information we need to properly assess the resource.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: What would this look like for the impacts on the entire area? I know that the two weir fishers who are in Madame Desbiens' riding are our main topic of discussion here, but they are within a larger area. What would be the impacts?

In your opinion, Minister, would this provide the outcome that is intended to benefit those who are feeling that they are not able to fish the capelin they are seeking?

• (1500)

Hon. Joyce Murray: My understanding is that, for most of the recent past, May 1 has been an adequate start to enable the weir fishery to take place. Because of the ice in the river, the fish don't come before that period. In fact, capelin are fished in other parts of their habitat far later in May or even in June. If we were to move this date forward to April 1, my understanding is that most years the two weir fishers would still not be able to start any earlier than they have been historically on May 1. It does mean that, if there should be an unusually warm year when the ice has melted sooner, they would be able to go out and do their weir fishery before May 1 and after April 1.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

I'm trying to understand all of the moving pieces, because I can appreciate that with climate change we're going to see continued changes to the patterns we're seeing in fisheries, and perhaps the way things have been done historically will no longer work.

I appreciate that willingness to always be re-evaluating, but I'm wondering about the approach being taken with the 4S area we're speaking about. I know that in British Columbia we have very specific regions that we look at, and I'm wondering if a more region-specific approach would be more appropriate for us to understand how to best have the fishers set up appropriately as climate change continues to occur.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that, and also for your comment that the department does try to be flexible and to recognize that when conditions change, there could be changes that would assist our fish harvesters. That's exactly why there's been so much focus on looking at this date.

In terms of a regional management, the weir fishery is quite specific in a specific area of the fish habitat, and I don't envision that it will impact or make changes to the rest of the capelin fishery. This would be for the two specific harvesters.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

I need to wrap up my time here, but how does this impact the licences that these fishers or others in the area receive? Are there any changes to the licences that need to be considered through this process?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Not that I know of. This is really about the terms and conditions of the fishery itself.

I want to thank all of the committee members for taking time in your constituency week to pay attention to matters that are not your constituents', necessarily, and for your interest in this. The department has been very responsive to my request. Because this is a culturally significant fishery, albeit very minor in the grand scheme of capelin management, we're doing our best to address the requests of the fishers.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

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

Thank you to the minister for being here today and, in fact, to all of her team.

Minister, I've heard you talking about a framework for capelin management. Last year's assessment advisory committee was exactly a full month earlier than this year's. Would you consider a framework to be a process that works within consistent dates year to year?

Hon. Joyce Murray: We certainly endeavour to do that, Mr. Chair.

In fact, the work involved in this assessment, especially with respect to the weir fishery, is highly specialized. This year's assessment was impacted by the unexpected unavailability of the unique expertise required. The department is working to ensure that others are trained on this highly specialized science so that we won't have this situation again, but it did delay the delivery of the science assessments.

• (1505)

Mr. Clifford Small: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the minister and her team at what point the data was collected. I'm thinking that it was last summer during the various fisheries and that in fact there were no acoustic or trawl surveys done, so basically you're operating on fisherpersons' log-books and observers' reports.

It seems to me that you've had this data in your hands for quite a long time. I don't understand why this is so late and why it's causing this fishery to be held back, when you said earlier that it's very insignificant. In 2020 and 2021, the quotas were set in 4RST at 9,300 tonnes each year and, from what I've heard, it's steady as it goes in terms of the stock in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. What do you have to say about that, Minister?

Hon. Joyce Murray: In the last stock assessment, conducted in March 2021, data related to bottom trawl catches and demersal fish diet were presented for the first time. This year's stock assessment actually integrates new sets of data into its analysis. That is set to begin on April 20.

The officials here with me today can of course provide more detail on the history of the science in this fishery and the importance of this year's data from next week's assessment, because it does bring in some new streams of information to try to make the analysis as accurate and effective as possible.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister if she thinks that maybe the capelin might be over-forged. We've heard the expression "forage fish" quite a bit, and we've seen herring in the Pacific and in Atlantic Canada and a mackerel fishery in Atlantic Canada being shut down this year. Are we on the brink of a decision like that for the Gulf of St. Lawrence? Is that what this is all about?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for the question.

I think what this is all about is one MP working on behalf of their constituents to get an opening that is outside of the frame of this fishery. We're working to find a way to be more flexible in the opening for that particular heritage fishery. That's what this is about, and the total allowable catch for this fishery will be available soon, within two weeks. I expect to make it public at that time.

Mr. Clifford Small: Given the fact that it's insignificant and stocks are stable, there's really not much reason to stop these fishermen from going ahead right now, wouldn't you say?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I would say, Mr. Chair, that it is very important that we recognize that the framework for fishing be respected, because there are literally thousands of people whose lives and livelihoods depend on the fishery. There are hundreds of different stocks at different levels of vulnerability in different fishing areas, and the way to ensure that the maximum economic benefit for individual harvesters and their communities is gained while the long-term conservation, viability and health of the stock are not impacted is to have a framework for each fishery.

It is very important that such a framework be respected by the fish harvesters and that there not be efforts to try to poke holes in it and say, "Here's a reason why it doesn't count for me, and I want to do my own thing." If that's done in one place, Mr. Small, that will be done in your area as well, and you can see the logic of how that is not a good thing for the fishers, for the fish or for the management approach.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do I have any more time, Mr. Chair?

• (1510)

The Chair: No, you've gone way over, actually, Mr. Small.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

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

Go ahead, please.

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

Thank you, Minister, for appearing. It's always good to see you.

What's happening right now? Do we know what's going on with the capelin? Are they spawning at this moment?

Hon. Joyce Murray: As far as I know, they're not. It's still iced up in the weir fishers area, but I may be a couple of days out of date, and I'll ask the regional experts to add to that answer.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: I'd like to add that my team was in contact with the fishers on Sunday, and they indicated that the capelin had not yet arrived in the area and had not yet begun to roll in. I have not heard anything since Sunday, though.

[English]

Mr. Ken Hardie: Is it fair to say, then, that had there been some success at getting an opening as of April 1, there wouldn't have been any fish to catch?

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's correct.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Have there been wide variations in the spawning timing of capelin over the years, particularly with respect to the impact of climate change?

Hon. Joyce Murray: In nine out of 10 years, there has been no variation. May 1 has been an opening date that served to provide this fishery.

Last year, the spawning happened earlier, though the date in the frame was for May 1. Last year was an exception. That may become more common. It has not been common in the past, but should that change, we are looking to consult with other fishers around the flexibility for the weir fishers to have an earlier open date, even though they may not be able to use that extra month for the most part.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Looking at the map, we have 4S, 4T and 4R. Are the capelin runs different in each of those areas?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I will ask my officials to explain the differences. It is managed as one stock.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I know that, but I was wondering if it was just one big mass of fish or if there were differences, particularly between 4S, 4T and 4R.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Tony, go ahead.

Mr. Tony Blanchard: I would say the short answer is yes. There are some variations, depending on the area.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I guess then the question becomes perhaps one of equity. I believe this is something the minister referred to.

If a fishery is allowed in area 4T, would this be seen as equitable by fishers in 4S and 4R?

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's the very reason why consultation with the harvesters is important when any change is being contemplated.

My understanding is that most of the other areas have a later opening date. This would not necessarily benefit any other fisher whose zones are likely to be still iced in on April 1.

Mr. Ken Hardie: You say that the ice is out a little bit later. Is it all out usually by May 1?

Hon. Joyce Murray: No, it's not. In some areas, it's not until May or even early June.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Is it then reasonable to suggest that area 4T actually does get a head start, even with an opening in May?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes, there is a head start because of ice conditions in that particular area.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

That will do for me for this round, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

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

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: When the capelin fishery starts is a matter of tides, moon phases and several other factors. Last year, the capelin were ready to catch as early as April 3 or 4. This year, the capelin are ready to catch now since there has been no ice on the shoreline for a few days.

I also believe that we have a duty as members of Parliament, as elected officials, as ministers, as researchers or as scientists to demonstrate to those who listen to us and rely on us that we know how to use common sense, an important factor in our respective fields of expertise.

Last year, the fishers lost 50% of their income. Whether we are talking about April 26, which is toward the end of the month, or May 1 for this year, it amounts to the same thing and the fishers are going to lose over 30% of their income. This puts the very existence of this fishery in jeopardy.

Why haven't you consulted the weir fishers in your past considerations? On April 9, 2021, we asked the department to hold consultations and do some scientific research to avoid what we are experiencing right now.

• (1515)

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will ask my officials to answer the details of this question.

My understanding is that the conditions are not such that the fish are spawning on these beaches yet. Nothing is being lost this year. We are endeavouring to advance the opening date. We're having discussions with other harvesters as we need to in our commitment to consult in making changes to an integrated fishery management plan.

I don't understand the member's assertion that the fisheries have been lost. We are responding to a specific request of two individuals. Whether they are specifically in the consultation or not.... I will leave it to my department to let Madame Desbiens know how the consultation is organized.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Mr. Chair, perhaps I can add to that.

The next advisory committee is going to be held on April 25, as I think members know. Certainly the two individuals will be very welcome to take part in those discussions.

Our understanding of the ice conditions is that there's still some ice. I'm looking at the daily ice chart for the Gulf of St. Lawrence and there's still a lot of light blue in the Charlevoix area.

As the minister said, over the last 10 years, the capelin came before May 1 in only one year. Even last year, fishers were able to go out and fish and make some income as they've been able to do every year over the last 10 years.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Through you to Minister Murray, in British Columbia there was an announcement regarding herring reductions and the UFAWU called on the government to invest \$5 million to improve monitoring efforts for that fishery. The FFAW on the east coast also made a similar request in the wake of the mackerel announcement last month.

I'm wondering what investments this government has made in monitoring efforts to ensure that we have the best information available to make assessment decisions such as those we're speaking about today.

Thank you.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

To the member, my goal is to grow the fish and seafood industry in Canada. It's an incredibly important one, with a lot of export dollars. To grow this, we need to have stocks that are in healthy condition. That's why monitoring is so important. That is a key part of what the ministry and our scientists do.

I would like to turn it over to the officials on the question of how much money is invested in monitoring herring.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I don't think we have that information at hand.

Mr. Chair, I just want to clarify this. Is this herring across the country, specifically on the west coast, or in 4RST?

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: It's just in general.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Mr. Chair, we can certainly get the member that information.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Minister, I would be remiss not to ask, while we're here, about one issue that's very important to constituents in my riding.

We're talking about workers and the impacts on fishers right now. I wanted to put out there that right now on the west coast we're seeing the impacts of the open-net fish farms in our Pacific waters. A commitment was made by the Liberal government to have these fish farms out of the Pacific waters by 2025. Instead, we're seeing expansions of the fish farms. Sea lions have been trapped in one of the fish farms in Clayoquot Sound and they remain there as we speak. We know that there are detrimental impacts on our marine ecosystem.

• (1520)

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We are here to focus specifically on the capelin fishery in Madame Desbiens' riding and the two weir fishers. I think it's probably appropriate if we stick with that focus as opposed to broadening it, especially to the extent that Ms. Barron is taking it.

The Chair: I tend to agree, Mr. Hardie.

Ms. Barron has gone way over the time limit. We will move on anyway at this point.

I will remind members that Mr. Hardie is correct. The motion actually deals with the issue at hand, and that's exactly what we're supposed to be here for today.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Now I will go to Mr. Arnold for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and officials for being here.

I will move right into questions today.

We've heard it mentioned that the science assessment done for this is quite complex. Minister, I believe you spoke of a framework and that the assessment this year was impacted by the unavailability of specific expertise. Is that the lack of trained personnel to manage this fishery? What were you referring to?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

I would say that we need more trained personnel so that if the personnel who are trained are unavailable for some unexpected reason, we have backup, and that's exactly what we're doing. We're training some more of our regional personnel to be able to fill in.

Mr. Mel Arnold: How many personnel would be in the region under the purview of DFO?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll turn that over to the deputy and his team to answer.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Go ahead, Sylvain.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: I thank the member for his question.

The team of scientists is certainly quite big. However, because there are many species of fish, when you look into issues like the capelin, you certainly—

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold: We're just really looking for the overall number in the department.

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: I would say that the overall number is 150 to 160 employees for the Quebec region only.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Minister, does DFO's 4RST capelin stock assessment cover the weir fishery in question?

Hon. Joyce Murray: My understanding is that the stock is managed as one unit. The assessments for the different parts of it would all be conducted, but the framework is determined and consulted on and made public as one fishery.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

It's been reported that 30.4%, fewer than one-third, of Canada's wild fisheries are currently considered healthy. What is DFO's classification of the capelin fishery in question? Does DFO consider the

population to be healthy, in the cautious zone or in the critical zone?

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's the determination that the ministry scientists are doing as we speak. There are meetings happening that will lead to the April 25 decision that will be made public at that time.

I will turn it over to the officials to see if there's anything they'd like to add.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I would just say that at this time we don't have a precautionary approach, so we don't have it in the critical zone, the healthy zone, or the cautious zone. That's not to say that we don't make decisions based on science. We do. That's the science that, as the minister referred to, will be brought to the stock assessment on April 20 and then to the advisory committee on April 25.

• (1525)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Does the capelin population require a rebuilding plan?

Hon. Joyce Murray: If it's not framed in terms of the limit reference points—in other words, the critical zone, the cautious zone and the healthy zone—then that would say there is no rebuilding plan at this point, or under way. But as the member is aware, it is our commitment to bring rebuilding plans forward for any stocks and all stocks that are identified as being in the critical zone.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

We know that capelin is a forage fish for other species harvested and in fisheries like cod. How did DFO's rebuilding plans for species like cod, which feed on capelin, factor into the management decisions for forage fish like capelin?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Well, that's an excellent question, and I'm looking forward to the answer. I think what the member is referring to here, in general, is the importance of forage fish as food for other important species like cod, but also for Atlantic salmon or tuna on the east coast. The forage fish are critical to the whole ecosystem of the health of the oceans and the other fish that we count on. That's why we pay attention to them.

I will turn it over to the officials to add to that.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Go ahead, Adam.

Mr. Adam Burns (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Harbour Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thanks.

Mr. Chair, the minister absolutely correctly reflected the role that forage fish play. We do have a policy frame, including a bycatch policy to ensure that we're not intercepting other fish in directed fisheries, as well as our forage fish policy. Both are meant to help further guide management decisions to protect forage fish stocks, which do play such a critical role in the ecosystem and, as the member noted, in the recovery of groundfish such as cod.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

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

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, who is on the advisory committee that will meet on the 25th? Could somebody tell me who this advisory committee is? Give me a general makeup. How many fishers and how many from the bureaucracy will be there?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll ask my officials to answer that question.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Go ahead, Tony.

Mr. Tony Blanchard: I don't have the exact list, but it would be harvesters from different feed sectors in different regions, the processing sector and DFO, as well as the provinces. Some of the provincial governments will be represented, as well as the DFO.

I can get a detailed list, but I don't have that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Have any of these other parties requested a change of the opening date on this fishery we're meeting on today, outside of the two fishers?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: Not that I'm aware of.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Would I be correct in assuming that two individuals want to do something that the rest of the industry is not fully on board with?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: Or they certainly haven't made a statement about it.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I think the advisory committee meeting is happening on the 25th, so I don't have any information as to whether the members of the advisory committee believe that this is a request that makes sense or that they would support.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Have there been requests from this committee for that advisory committee to meet earlier?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Not that I'm aware of.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's a pretty broad reflection of the industry and the stakeholders involved. Would that be correct?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Minister, could you opine on one part, because what I see here is a couple of individuals who do not like the management practice that has global support? Do you get many requests from a group of fishers that are contrary to where the general industry wants to go? If you managed the fishery that way, what would the fishery look like in Canada?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I can't say that I have received requests from two individual fishers to make a change to an entire framework of a fishery. That's not been my experience.

• (1530)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: So, in this instance, the two fishers involved here have not reached out to you directly to change this.

Hon. Joyce Murray: No, they didn't. They reached out to me through their member of Parliament, whom I met with on this issue.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. As a public figure, I often hear from various fishers with contrary points of view. If we went down that road in every different direction we're asked to go, we would have a very different-looking fishery, and I'm not sure that it would be all that viable. I can understand and use your comments that

public trust must be maintained in the process, and we do that through these advisory groups. Sometimes as a politician I'm not happy with the decisions they make, but until this stage, I will err on accepting their decisions through this advisory process, which is made up of a broad base and uses the science of the department to give us the best decision. I'm pleased to see that it's a process that you will stay with.

Mr. Chair, I don't have any further questions, unless the minister wants to comment on my comments.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that perspective, because there are indeed tens of thousands of people for whom the fishery is very important, for their livelihood and their communities. We cannot manage it one by one to satisfy individual interests. That's why having a framework for management of the fishery is so important for public trust and for conservation of the fishery, so that our fish and seafood can continue to be a critically important economic driver for individuals, their families, their communities and our country.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

That completes two rounds of questioning.

Minister, it's my understanding, and I think the committee was informed, that you were available for the first hour.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes.

The Chair: If that is the case, that hour has been exhausted.

Before you exit, I want to say thank you to you and your officials. I know they're staying for the second hour. I believe this is the 17th meeting that this committee has held, and you've been at three of them, so I want to thank you for that. It surely shows your interest in the committee and what we're doing as a committee.

Again, thank you for your appearance today.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

Thanks for the commitment of all committee members, as I said before, to use a constituency week to prepare for and attend this committee meeting.

The Chair: Thank you again.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go now to our next round of questioning, starting with Mr. Perkins for five minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

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

Again, thank you to the minister and officials for their time.

I'd like to go back to where I left off. I assume, Mr. Chair, we'll allow Deputy Minister Sargent to be the gatekeeper as to who should answer the question so I don't have to direct it to whichever official.

Getting the science right was one of the things the minister said in response to, I think, Mr. Small's questions, and it is critical for this. I'm going to go back to the fact that we've had now, for at least a decade, an integrated fisheries management plan for capelin in the 4RST area and, I believe, for the other main area where capelin is fished, 2J3KL, off Newfoundland. However, the department seems to do science differently in that the other area, 2J3KL, in that it has a regular abundance survey done—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, the interpretation isn't working. I waited a little while, but I can confirm that it's not working at all.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. We'll get that checked on, because I'm not getting interpretation on what you just said.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: The interpretation is working again.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: It seems to be there now, so we'll continue.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I also have a bit of my COVID cough still, so I'll try not to cough into the microphone.

I won't repeat what I already said...or should I start again on that for Madame Desbiens? Should I start over on my question?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I would have like that, yes, but I don't want to waste your time.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's never a waste of time.

I'm just going to pick up where I left off before. The minister said that getting the science right, obviously, is something we all aspire to, and I'm going to come back to the fact that one of the most vital parts of the science for capelin in NAFO 4RST doesn't seem to be done. We've had a plan for more than 10 years. The integrated fisheries management plan talks about maybe getting a plan to do a plan on the science. I'm not getting an answer particularly on when or how long that's been going on.

Meanwhile, off of Newfoundland, in 2J3KL, DFO does an abundance survey regularly and, therefore, has a better understanding of the size of the stock. I'm going to come back again with my question about why no abundance survey is being done on capelin in this area in order to be able to provide a better management plan in terms of the TAC that's set every year, as well as some other marketing initiatives that would come. We haven't changed the TAC much over the last few years—it basically stays between 8,000 to 10,000 tonnes—and perhaps if we had a better sense of the size of

the biomass, we would have a different TAC for fishers and more opportunities.

Could you explain to me why, after all these years—in 10 years of a fisheries management plan—we're still not doing an abundance survey every year in this region?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question.

I'd like to come back to this.

I mentioned earlier that in the past we didn't have an abundance indicator. However, I mentioned efforts we've made in recent years to integrate data on 4R seiner landings and shrimper bycatch of capelin. I also mentioned the Department of Fisheries and Oceans surveys. Once we have that information, we'll be in a position to get an abundance indicator. It will be tabled at the science committee's next meeting, which is scheduled for next week.

Some improvements are being made in that area.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: But you're not doing the sounding stuff. This is a mathematical formula based on landings and market, not on the actual science of the size of the biomass. I'm wondering when that will be done. That's my first part.

The second part is that, without it, there's an eco-certification that the product cannot get, because we don't have an idea of whether or not we're fishing this responsibly, other than algorithms based on landings and market needs, basically, rather than the actual biomass.

When we talk about science being “critical”, I don't understand why we haven't made the effort in this region to do that part of the science.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: As I said, things are getting better. We use the commercial survey in the multi-species survey that's done in the various areas. We will continue to improve the indicators.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay, so there is no plan to do an eco-science....

The last question, I think, before my time runs out, is on predation as an issue with all fish species. The integrated fisheries management plan talks about the predators of capelin being cod, halibut and turbot, with of course cod and turbot not being very robust stocks and not posing much of a threat, I assume.

I'm curious as to why the predation and integration management plan doesn't mention seals as predators, since seals also consume capelin. Are you looking at seals as predators?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Maybe I'll answer this.

We don't have any evidence that capelin are a really important part of the seal diet. Of course, capelin are not very big. I think the predators that we focused on are the ones the member mentioned, and I would also note redbfish as a potential predator for capelin and something that we need to take into account as we look at potentially reopening part of that fishery.

• (1540)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My time is probably up.

The Chair: Yes, it is, right on mark.

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

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McDonald, it's nice to see you and my colleagues this week. I hope we're all having a productive constituency week. Before I begin, I want to wish everyone a wonderful Easter long weekend, Passover or Ramadan, whichever folks may be celebrating.

I think this is my first time on the fisheries and oceans committee in my six and a half years in Parliament, but ironically, before I begin my questioning, I want to add that a number of decades ago I grew up in a fishing town, in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, so I'm very familiar with the operations of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

I worked in a cannery. My mother and many of her sisters cleaned salmon, or "filleted" salmon, which is the word I should use, because it is filleted, not cleaned. Also, I worked at J.S. McMillan Fisheries for three summers, and that was great money. I know what herring is, and herring roe, groundfish and crab, and what seiners, trollers and gillnetters are, and who all those wonderful folks are, because they were all my friends in high school and my neighbours.

I saw the industry transform itself and reduce considerably as the catches unfortunately declined, but nonetheless it provided a stable income for many thousands of families where I grew up, so it's near and dear to my heart, Ken, and it's ironic that I'm here.

Going on to capelin, for the department officials, I want to talk about the consultation process in this area and others. How important is it to have this consultative process and an open line of communication with the people fishing these stocks?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Thanks for the question, Mr. Chair.

It's very important. Those fishers are out on the water. They see things that we don't necessarily. It's very important to get their input.

It's very important to get that input in a coordinated way, and that's why we have our advisory committee process. We can actually get everybody in the room and people can hear other people, and we can actually have a conversation about what people have seen out on the water, what their views are, how they interpret the sci-

ence and how they come at the science. We can actually have that integrated discussion so that everybody can hear what's being said.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Just to follow up on that, on the stock assessment that's done and the confidence level on that, and specifically with this species of fish—I'll be frank and say that I'd never heard of capelin until today—in terms of the confidence level you have with regard to the stock assessment of this species, how confident are we? I know how important this is. You can open up a fishing season at 12 o'clock midnight—open up for 12 hours—and if you're wrong, we know the issue is there, obviously, with the number of tonnes that are allocated, but how confident are we on this species per se?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Capelin are one of the more difficult species to forecast and, therefore, to manage. They have relatively short life spans. The populations often consist of a few key age groups, so you will have kind of a big population and then a couple of years with a small population. That means it's quite variable.

A lot of the fluctuations we see are more driven by environmental factors than they are by fishing activity itself. That is not to say that fishing activity doesn't play a role, but whereas fishing activity is easy to monitor, often the environmental conditions are not.

It is one that has a wider margin of error than some of the species we manage that live longer or are much more predictable.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Sargent, thank you for your answers. I have a final question.

I'm not sure how long you've been on this file, but in recent years, have you seen changes with regard to climate change and environmental factors that impact the size of the catch being taken back to port and so forth?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Across all of what we do, we certainly see the impacts of climate change on both coasts. We see species often moving north to some extent, although that's not true everywhere. We have seen significant changes in the gulf, for instance.

I'm just going to turn to Tony for capelin itself.

Can you talk about the trends in that stock?

• (1545)

Mr. Tony Blanchard: I'm not sure we'd call them trends, but there is some variability over the years of the size of capelin when it's mature and taken into fishery.

We don't know exactly what is causing that. We don't know what environmental conditions, exactly.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Chair, how much time do I have left? Have I used it up already?

The Chair: You have about 16 seconds. It's hardly enough time to get a question and an answer in. I think we'll probably cut it off there.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: I would concur with that, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, everyone. It's great to see everyone today.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Two and a half minutes really isn't much time.

First, I'd like to point out two things. Everything I'm hearing is making me shake my head, because the capelin have been rolling in for two days. I'm sorry, we're talking about ice and all that, when the capelin have been rolling in for two days. For the past two days, our fishers have been losing money, which puts the very existence of their fishery in jeopardy next year. I wanted to set that straight.

Second, the fishers have written two letters to the minister and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. This is very important. She says she hasn't heard from anyone, but we sent a big folder three times, in which scientists and experts from all over Quebec confirmed to us that the DNA of the St. Lawrence capelin is not in any way connected to the Newfoundland and Labrador capelin.

I'm fuming here.

I'd like to know if you can promise us that our fishers will be invited to the consultations next April.

I'd like you to confirm that you are absolutely certain that the capelin rolling in and dying on our shores shore right now are altering the critical mass of resources in the St. Lawrence at this very moment.

[*English*]

Mr. Timothy Sargent: First, if I understand correctly, will the two individuals be invited to the advisory committee? Absolutely yes, they will. I think we have the contact details, but we would invite them as a matter of course.

As to what's actually going on, I'm here in Ottawa, so if someone is standing on the shore and looking at capelin, I'm not going to say that person is necessarily wrong. I see the ice conditions. I know that this is a regular ice year.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I'm on Isle-aux-Coudres and I can see the capelin.

You will understand, Mr. Chair, that I'm a little out of sorts, because it breaks my heart. We're going to witness the disappearance of two fishing techniques that are indigenous legacies—I would like to emphasize that—and that have nothing to do with the techniques used off Newfoundland and Labrador, which we've been talking about for the last hour and a half. You have to understand what weir fishing is. They catch the capelin that are coming ashore to die anyway. I don't know what else to say. I am really beside myself.

Are you able to explain why, when we've known about the problem for a year—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

That's well over the two and a half minutes allotted.

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

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

To clarify, is it expected that I'll have two rounds of questions before the end of the meeting or just one remaining?

The Chair: You should get another slot after this one, if everybody finishes on time and we can stay on schedule.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Great, I do have a few further questions.

If it's okay with you, Chair, I'd like to offer my two and a half minute slot we're currently in to Madame Desbiens so that she can finish what she was trying to say, if she would like it.

The Chair: We'll go over to you, Madame Desbiens.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Ms. Barron, you just made me smile again. Thank you so much.

Mr. Sargent or Mr. Vézina, do you think it's possible to assess the weir fishing exercise separately from other activities in the area, to make sure we're comparing apples to apples?

• (1550)

[English]

Mr. Timothy Sargent: When we do our assessments, we are very conscious of the difference between the weir fishery and the other two fisheries that are out there, as we are of the 4ST fishery and the 4R fishery. It's one stock, so the science that we do is on that stock. It informs the fisheries management, but that fishery's management approach is sensitive to the different realities and the different kind of gear that is being used in these different regions. That is why the openings can be different.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: If I understand correctly, you therefore understand that we're not threatening a viable resource, which will continue to feed the mass of predators swimming in the St. Lawrence.

I'd now like to draw your attention to a document that I sent to everyone. It's a plate of female capelin, vacuum packed, from Ontario. We don't know when this was caught, because we don't have the right to catch capelin yet, but we assume it was caught last year. This was packaged in Thailand before being sold and purchased at a counter in Charlevoix. So suppliers got it wherever they could, they ordered some and they saw it arrive from Thailand.

Have you seen this? It's making quite a splash on my Facebook page.

[English]

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I haven't seen the document that the member is referring to, but I'm more than happy to see it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I'm speechless, and the colour is a disaster.

When she spoke in Boston, Madam Minister reiterated what was written in her mandate letter, that she wants to foster local sales and development and limit transportation.

I'd like to know what you intend to do here. I would actually hope that you will encourage the minister to think more about how this fishery is looming so that people won't eat capelin from Thailand sold in Charlevoix.

[English]

The Chair: You've gone way over your time, Madame Desbiens.

If the officials have an answer to that particular statement, they can provide it to the committee. We'd appreciate that.

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

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

My question for Mr. Sargent is about something he said earlier. He mentioned that capelin aren't a significant food source for seals.

I think your own department is estimating that seals consume between one million and 1.5 million tonnes of capelin per year, and that's just harp seals alone. We know that the Gulf of St. Lawrence is also full of grey seals.

Do you have any idea of what percentage of the harp seal herd resides in the Gulf of St. Lawrence?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I don't know, Sylvain, if you have that at hand.

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: I'm sorry, but I don't have this information with me.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We can get you our best estimate, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Clifford Small: Would we say one-third of the harp seal herd exists in the Gulf of St. Lawrence for seven or eight months of the year? I think that might be accurate. In that case, you're talking about half a million tonnes of capelin being consumed by harp seals alone in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Would you dispute that figure, Mr. Sargent?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I'm certainly not arguing that harp seals don't eat capelin. What I said was that, when we look at the major food sources harp seals rely on, I wouldn't say capelin was the mainstay of their diet.

• (1555)

Mr. Clifford Small: Just looking at the size of that capelin fishery there in zone 4RST, it's around 9,000 tonnes. That's not a lot of capelin compared with one million tonnes to 1.5 million tonnes consumed by harps alone, so I just want to make reference to that for the record.

How many other capelin fisheries along the Atlantic coast have a fixed opening date, or is it just this one?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I'm sorry, but do you mean for capelin, sir?

Mr. Clifford Small: Yes, that's for capelin.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Tony, can you talk about the capelin openings across the different areas?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: Yes. In the rest of the gulf and on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, it is not fixed as such. It's variable and it depends on the availability and the condition of the capelin. There's a significant consultation with the industry to determine the opening dates in the various areas. It is not a fixed date. It is fixed in regulations, but it varies each year to reflect conditions.

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

Is it possible to have that happen in a similar fashion, in consultation with these fishers, in the estuary of the St. Lawrence?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: That would be correct. Is that right, Sylvain?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Yes.

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay. That just seems a little bit odd. I guess that's the reason for the meeting here today. This policy is so out of line with the rest of the capelin policy in Atlantic Canada.

I guess it's going to be too late this year. Do you think there's going to be a big change? You must have some information at this point. It's been quite a long time since you collected all that data. You must have some idea by now as to what the outcome of the assessment is going to be. You must have preliminary information.

Do you think there is going to be a massive cut in that capelin quota? If it's going to stay status quo, you could quickly make a decision and let that capelin fishery open.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: There are a few things on that. We collect samples over the summer, but then those samples have to be processed and that takes a couple of months. There's actually more to the process than one might think. Then there is analysis that has to be done as well. There is also other data on environmental factors, and we often don't get that data until later in the year. It does actually take a while for that science to get done.

Certainly, I don't think we, as a department, want to get out ahead of the science assessment or the advisory committee. We want to have all of the information before we come to a conclusion, so we very deliberately do not interfere. I as deputy do not interfere earlier in that process. We let it play out.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Small, you have actually gone a little bit over your time.

We'll now go to Ms. Sudds for five minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

Mrs. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

This is certainly a new topic for me, but interestingly enough I witnessed capelin on a trip with my family to Newfoundland a few years ago, so I do know what we're talking about.

I have a few questions. The minister mentioned in her remarks that the next 4RST stock assessment is scheduled to begin next week, I believe. Can you explain for me what new scientific information will be included in this stock assessment?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Sylvain, do you want to talk a little bit about our science in 4RST? That's only if you've anything to add.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: I thank the member for her question.

Right now, the data are coming from the landing of the seiners, the boats that harvest capelin in Newfoundland and Labrador. They also take into account the shrimpers' bycatch when they are harvesting shrimp.

They look at the biological samples from commercial catches taken for the department's multi-species survey too. All that information is used to produce what we call the abundance indicator, which gives us an idea of fish stocks.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: Excellent. Thank you for that.

Recognizing that stock assessments are obviously an important scientific element to fisheries management and ensuring that our fishing practices are sustainable, can you explain how stock assessment typically factors into establishing the total allowable catch?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Adam, I'll ask you to walk through the mechanics of that.

Mr. Adam Burns: Absolutely.

The process that we use to develop advice to provide to the minister to inform her decision-making would start for sure with the science advice. That forms the foundation of the advice. As well, the advice is supplemented with perspectives from indigenous groups, the fishing industry, provinces and others with an interest in the fishery, which we obtain through our advisory committee process. We'd also provide the minister with socio-economic analysis to inform her of the various potential impacts of her decision.

Those three key pieces, as well as indigenous knowledge when that is made available to us, are the basis for the advice that the department would provide the minister, framed in the context of our various policies under the sustainable fisheries framework, such as the forage fisheries policy and the bycatch policy, as well as the precautionary approach policy.

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: Excellent. Thank you for that.

I'm sure all of us today can agree that it's important that the voices of fish harvesters, the industry itself and coastal communities are part of this decision-making process and are listened to as we move forward.

Can you speak to the role of the capelin advisory committee and the importance of engaging with industry about any potential changes?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Tony, do you want to talk about the advisory committee?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: Sure. It's a very important piece of the process. We get to hear directly from the stakeholders and get their perspectives as well, particularly on the advice that the science is providing but also on any of the management measures that are being considered to be changed or in place and what the implications are for them. It gives us their perspectives when we're considering requests such as the one that we expect to have discussed at the upcoming advisory committee.

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: Terrific. Thank you very much for that. I know it was discussed earlier what the composition of that advisory committee looks like as well, and I think it's so important that it properly reflects the industry.

I think I'm out of time so I'll cede but thank you very much for that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Sudds. It was close. There were about 14 seconds left, so I appreciate that.

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

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

Again, thank you to the officials for being here.

I'll direct my questions through Mr. Sargent and he can determine which other department official may be best to answer.

Could you tell us what the stock assessment trends have been for capelin over the past number of years?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Tony, do you want to talk about that?

I would say though that this stock has been quite volatile, so I suspect what Tony is going to say is that it's difficult to tease out real trends from that.

Tony.

Mr. Tony Blanchard: It's exactly what you said. It's been, particularly in 4RST, which we're talking about, a bit up and down, but nothing major up or major down. It's been up or down at a consistent level, I guess.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

What has the department identified as possible contributing factors to any upward or downward population cycles?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: The major driver is environmental conditions. We can't pinpoint specifically which of those, but it appears that environmental conditions are the major driver in the capelin abundance.

• (1605)

Mr. Mel Arnold: When you say environmental conditions, do you mean climatic and ocean temperature conditions, or other environmental conditions, such as predation and so on?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: It is all of the above, I would think.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Predation is one of those potential factors in there.

Mr. Tony Blanchard: Potentially, it is. Probably the climatic conditions are more impactful.

Mr. Mel Arnold: What work is the department doing to try to determine which factors may be more influential?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: Those are the things that are discussed during the science assessment each year.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Have those been discussed in previous years?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: Yes.

Mr. Mel Arnold: What was identified in previous years?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: I think it was the water temperature for sure, food for the capelin, and those types of things. I don't have the specifics in front of me now to give you, but they were those types of things.

Mr. Mel Arnold: What steps are available to the department to address declining trends or a low assessment?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Just to clarify, Mr. Chair, do you mean in terms of fisheries management measures or in terms of getting more data?

Mr. Mel Arnold: What tools are available to the department to turn around a low assessment?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: In terms of fisheries management, Mr. Chair, obviously we can adjust things like opening dates in an effort-based fishery. We can adjust TACs when there are quantitative limits. We can place restrictions around kinds of gear.

Those are all fisheries management tools that we have used in general, although not necessarily in this fishery or in all parts of this fishery.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Has the department ever looked at overall ecological conditions such as predator-prey ratios as part of the tools?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Our assessments are designed to look at environmental factors. As we have discussed, predation is a factor, so to the best of our ability we try to understand what the predation factors are. They obviously feed into where we think the stock is going and how effective our management measures will be.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I want to change line a bit here. It looks like this entire management area is managed as one large zone. We have a couple of harvesters who are impacted and who would have a very small impact on the overall TAC or the fishery in general, yet their fishery is being restricted in their position.

I want to relate that to a different scenario on the west coast. Interior Fraser steelhead are on the brink of extinction. They come all the way up the Fraser system in my riding and up into North Okanagan—Shuswap. Other harvest fisheries are implicated or suggested to be maybe impacting those stocks, which are on the verge of collapse, yet those fisheries remain open.

Can you explain the difference in the two different management systems?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: For the 4RST capelin, when we say that we treat it as one stock, that means the science is done on a stock-wide basis. We have one stock assessment meeting and we have one advisory committee that deals with this stock, but that doesn't mean a stock is managed in the same way for each of the sub-areas, if you like.

That's why, for instance, the weir fishery that we're all here today to discuss opens at a different time from the 4R and 4S fisheries, and of course they use different gear types. Even if we manage it as one stock, we have the flexibility to have different opening dates and a variety of approaches to the fish management.

The stock is really referring to the science part and the assessment of the stock, but the actual fisheries management tools can certainly differ, depending on local circumstances.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

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

Mr. Ken Hardie: You can hardly tell us apart, I know.

Through you, Mr. Chair, to Mr. Sargent, does DFO not have people on the ground in Madame Desbiens' riding to witness for themselves what the ice conditions are?

• (1610)

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We certainly have a lot of information about ice conditions. We publish a daily chart on ice conditions, which I look at pretty much every day. I have it right in front of me. The Coast Guard has a whole group of people who do that. It's obviously very important for mariners.

Are there capelin that are actually coming up onto the beach to spawn? We don't necessarily have people standing there watching for them. We certainly have a presence in the Charlevoix region. We have CMP officers and others.

Sylvain, do you want to speak to our presence on the ground—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Actually, I have limited time here.

With regard to the property of weir fishing versus the other kinds, such as seiners, I presume, or whatever, in terms of timing and productivity, is it not possible—to go to the core, I think, of Madame Desbiens' reason for wanting this particular session—to have an earlier start for the weir fishers, or is it that if you do it for one, you have to do it for all of 4S and 4T?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We can certainly have an earlier opening for the weir fishers if, as we come out of the advisory committee, that's something that folks are comfortable with...and then the minister currently makes the decision. Yes, we can certainly open the weir fishery earlier.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Now, once the fishery is open, is there a catch limit or a time limit on how long the fishery can go on once it's open?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: No. For this fishery, once it's open, they can go out and catch as much as they want and take as long to do that as they would like. It is a fishery, though, that only happens for a very short period, so you'd better catch them around the spawning. Once they've spawned, they'll come offshore and then ultimately die, so you can't wait until July, if they've spawned in May, or even June.

Mr. Ken Hardie: With respect to all of my colleagues, I'm wondering why we're having this emergency session when in fact it's so late that the sort of start that Madame Desbiens was looking for is long gone and likely not.... Well, there won't really be much of a material earlier start, even if somebody today made the decision to go out and start fishing.

I guess the one sticking point, Mr. Sargent, is that you said that this is pretty much the only capelin fishery that has a set date, and that all of the other dates for the start of the fishery are determined

by conditions. I wonder why that could not happen with this particular part of the fishery.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Tony, do you want to speak to the opening dates for all the different component fisheries here, and how that works?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: As I said earlier, yes, it is determined in the other areas for the fleets based on the condition of the capelin and the availability of the capelin. That's something that could be considered in this one as well. I think that may be some of the discussion that happens at the advisory committee meeting.

Mr. Ken Hardie: At this point, though, if the weir fishery is allowed to go forward and they're allowed to catch as much as they can, this would obviously be an advantage to that form of fishing over the other forms. Is that correct?

Mr. Tony Blanchard: Technically, yes, but it's a very small portion of the overall catch, usually.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Usually. All right.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have no further questions.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Hardie.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I'll try to calm down a bit first.

Mr. Hardie raised an important point when he said that it's too late for the Quebec capelin weir fishers anyway. I said that at the outset. I even said it when I asked for this emergency meeting, because every day counts.

The idea is to harvest a limited quantity of capelin each day and sell them fresh. The rest are processed as they go.

Each day represents income that will not come back later. That's why every day counts. Those two fishers are going through some tough financial times right now. Last year, they lost half their fishing income because of the capelin opening date constraint.

What I'm hearing is that Quebec's capelin weir fishers are the only ones held to an opening date, while all other fishers help themselves based on the arrival and availability of the resource. In addition, I'm being told that it's impossible to grant them special permission to fish starting tomorrow.

On what basis are you preventing this fishery? More importantly, how are you going to live with the idea that neither of these two fishers may be around anymore next year?

How can you live with that?

• (1615)

[English]

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Mr. Chair, we can certainly look, and we are looking, at what people think about the idea of opening that fishery on April 1 next year and what that would imply. The advisory committee will discuss this, and if they have a favourable view, it will go to the minister and she can make a decision at that point.

[Translation]

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

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We will now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, please.

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

Something I didn't mention is that although the west coast is now my home, my roots are in Newfoundland. Although I am what many in Newfoundland would refer to as a townie, my family every year excitedly got in our cars and drove to the beach to see the capelin as they washed up on the shores, so I can appreciate what we're talking about today.

I want to expand a bit around forage fish such as capelin, mackerel and herring. We know they are vitally important to the abundance and health of our marine environment and coastal communities, and also to the livelihoods of fishers who rely on them. We know they're an important food source for many species, including whales, sea birds and even fish that are caught commercially.

Unfortunately, we have seen that some forage fish populations have been overfished in years prior. We know that unless there is action to manage them sustainably, there will be irreversible harm to the future populations and, as well, the fishers' livelihoods will be lost in the process.

Can you speak a little about the important role of forage fish? Can you let us know what steps you will take to set quotas or pause fisheries to rebuild these important species to ensure a sustainable future for both our marine environments and the fishers' livelihoods?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: As the member notes, forage fish are a key element of the food chain. They prey on small marine creatures and then are themselves preyed upon by larger creatures.

I want to be clear for the record that certainly harp seals do consume capelin, as capelin is an important part of their diet. However, we don't have evidence to suggest that this is the key determinant of capelin populations. I want to place on the record that we think harp seals eat capelin, along with a whole bunch of other things.

In terms of the measures we're taking on forage fish—and I'll turn to Adam at this point—we have a policy on forage fish because of their importance in the marine ecosystem.

Again, I'll have Adam speak to that, if that's okay, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Adam Burns: Within the sustainable fisheries framework, there are a variety of policies that would apply to forage fish, including the precautionary approach framework and the rebuilding plan components of that for stocks in the critical zone.

More generally, it's always particularly important for us to carefully consider the science advice and the stock status of forage stocks, for the reasons the member noted in terms of their critical role in the ecosystem. That is at the core of the minister's considerations and some of the recent decisions she's made, which have been mentioned here today.

In the case of the capelin decisions that are forthcoming, those important considerations will also be front and centre, because, as you know, the recovery and health of the ecosystem are very fundamentally linked to the health of forage fish stocks within that ecosystem.

• (1620)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Chair, do I have time for another question?

The Chair: No, I'm sorry. You don't.

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

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

I appreciate the acknowledgement that harp seals eat capelin, among other things. They'll eat your kitchen sink, I think, if they're hungry, and they'll consume everything. They are eating everything in the ocean.

In this case, you've acknowledged that weir fishing has little impact on the overall TAC or the stock, and that you're open to flexibility in the future. We were hoping there would be a little now, but I understand the process you have to go through.

Basically, as we said earlier, the TAC seems to have been set mainly at around 8,000 or 9,000 tonnes recently. The fisheries management plan says that the catch level for the fishing of capelin in this area, fishing mortality, has no noticeable effects on the capelin population.

In the absence of acoustic sounding—that important part of the science of knowing the size of the biomass—I take it that we're just doing what we've always done in terms of the TAC rather than seeing what we can do going forward, since apparently fishing has no impact, and predation and other issues must be driving the levels. We haven't gone back to those days in the 1970s when it might have been 200,000 tonnes that were being caught.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Mr. Chair, as Sylvain said, we have some new things that are going to come to the stock assessment. We have a combined index of the stock state, and we have done some predictive empirical work. As I said earlier, it's a stock on which our information is not as good as we would like. As I said, it's relatively short-lived. It can be volatile, or at least the data that we see are volatile. We have some other indicators, like environmental conditions, that we think are important. We know less about this.

Of course, with the precautionary principle, that would be a reason for us to be cautious about additional fishing effort here. Just because we don't have a lot of information doesn't mean that we can go off and allow people to fish as much as they want. We have to be cautious here, in light of the data. We have some, but it's not as good as we have for some other fisheries. We admit that.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Chair, I appreciate that. I am a bit of a broken record, but without the acoustic sounding knowledge of the biomass, it's impossible for the fishers who fish this to get an eco-certified international stamp, which would help in the development of the export market. We don't seem to really have a good handle on where it is.

As long as we keep getting a reasonably sized capelin catch around these levels, that seems to be how we manage it, and it would seem to me that a serious plan would treat capelin in this area the same as we treat it in the other part of Newfoundland, which is by doing acoustic sounding. Is that a resource issue? Is it that the department doesn't have the financial ability to do that, or doesn't have the equipment to do it in the gulf?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We certainly have limited resources, and we have to prioritize how we do that. We look at the size of the different fisheries and their economic importance when we make those decisions. We just can't do everything that we would like to do for every species.

• (1625)

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that.

I think I will turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Small, if I have any time left.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

I'm just wondering if your new assessment tools are going to change to a lower reference point for capelin, as was done with 3Ps cod in 2019, which showed that the cod was in a critical zone. Are we expecting that with capelin, and is this why that fishery can't be opened right now?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Mr. Chair, the reason the fishery is not open right now is that we have a process to go through before we change the date. It's not because we have new information or information to determine a limit reference point. We still are not at a point where we have the information to have a full precautionary approach that would have a limit reference point.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

We have a couple of minutes left.

Mr. Morrissey, I understand you're going to have a question or two. Go ahead when you're ready, please.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

It appears we've pretty well canvassed much of the information on this subject, but for clarification, there was a reference to the capelin coming up on the shore and spawning and dying, but that fishery is not controlled. If they come up on the shore, is that called a recreational fishery? Can anybody go and scoop them up on the beach?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: No.

Sylvain, do you want to speak to that?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Of course, if people go to the beach and take the fish, it's a recreational fishery, but here what we're talking about is a true licence-holder, who has—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes, I realize that, but there was a reference to the fact that they're coming onto the beach and then going to waste or dying, and people can't get them, but if you want to go and scoop them up and bring them home, as is the tradition in Newfoundland, you can do that, regardless of the date. Am I correct?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Yes.

Adam, do you have any idea?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: They would have to be dead, I believe—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Who's there to ascertain the mortality...? I'm being a bit facetious on the question. It is a wonderful statement.

I have one question for clarification, Chair.

Was there a request to open the date earlier last year? If there was—because somebody quoted it earlier—what was the context for that request, and what was the reasoning, Mr. Sargent?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Sylvain, do you want to talk through the timing last year?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Last year, the advisory committee did the stock assessment in March.

We received the request to change the opening date for capelin weir fishing on April 6, I believe. However, the new advisory committee only meets next week. That's the timeline of events.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. I'm not sure you understood the question.

My question was this: Was there a request last year to open the date early—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Yes, there was.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Morrissey: —and what was the reasoning for that request last year?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: As I said, on April 9, we received the request to move up the fishery opening date for the following year, that is, for this year.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair. I think my time has gone. I'm not sure the question was fully understood, because the answer really didn't line up with my question.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

That concludes our session. I want to say thank you to the departmental officials for taking part in our meeting today. I especially want to thank Mr. Blanchard, a fellow Newfoundland and Labradorian, for appearing, and for everything he does as the RDG in Newfoundland for our fishers and our fishing communities. I want to say a huge thank you to him from the committee.

We'll allow the invited guests to sign off just for a second before we clue up.

I see it's just committee members now. I just wanted to make a very small statement. When it comes to members' questioning time,

you can chew it all up in an opening statement, or chew up the best part of it making a statement, but it takes away from your actual time to get a question in. I try to be as free as I can be with people's time. Especially to Madame Desbiens and Ms. Barron, two and a half minutes, if it involves a large statement before you get to a question, doesn't give you much time to get an answer. It's easier in the five- or six-minute slots, but just keep that in mind, because I hate being the bad guy at the end and saying, sorry, your time is up, because you didn't actually get in time for a more detailed question. I just ask members to please keep that in mind going forward.

I want to say thank you to all the staff who made this possible today, our clerk, our analysts, our interpretation people, and of course to our members of the committee and our fill-in members for today. Thank you for making this meeting another enjoyable one. It's our 17th and everything seems to be going along quite well up to this point. Let's hope it stays that way.

The meeting is adjourned.

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