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Chair

Mr. Scott Simms

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)): Order. This is meeting number four of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

I want to thank our guests for coming.

Our witnesses, from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, will be here until 4:45 p.m. Is that correct?

Mr. Tom Rosser (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Yes.

The Chair: Even though we're scheduled until 5 p.m., we'll stop at around 4:45 p.m. That should get us through two rounds, certainly, if the last meeting was any basis.

Don't forget, that we have committee business following this. We'll get into our study and we'll get into witnesses at that point.

In the meantime, as was scheduled, we have departmental officials: Arran McPherson, Tom Rosser, and Kevin Stringer, from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Mr. Rosser, I understand you will be speaking on behalf of the group.

Mr. Tom Rosser: I will, with your permission, Mr. Chairman, make some brief introductory remarks. Then my colleagues and I will be pleased to answer any questions committee members may have.

The Chair: The floor is yours.

Mr. Tom Rosser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wish to begin by thanking you and indeed, all committee members for inviting us to be with you today.

[Translation]

As the chair of the committee already said, members of the Fisheries and Oceans Canada senior management team are accompanying me today. We have Kevin Stringer, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystems and Fisheries Management, and Arran McPherson, Director General, Ecosystems and Oceans Science Sector.

As you must know, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is the main federal department responsible for managing fisheries in Canada and protecting the country's waters. Last Tuesday, our colleagues, Deputy Commissioner Jeffery Hutchinson and Mario Pelletier, talked to you about the important work being done by the Canadian

Coast Guard. Today, we will focus on the department's mandate when it comes to fisheries.

Ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, we have committed to ensuring compliance with world-class standards in an industry that employs many Canadians, especially in coastal communities. Thanks to its coastline and its healthy environment, Canada has become the 7th largest exporter of fish and seafood in the world.

[English]

Internationally, there's a growing demand for sustainable fish and seafood products. Accordingly, we foresee that, at a global level, aquaculture will play a key role in this regard in terms of meeting that growing demand. We are committed to the development of the industry in a sustainable manner that protects marine ecosystems and conserves wild fish populations.

As a department, approximately 85% of our workforce is located outside the national capital region, which makes us a highly regionalized and decentralized department. We have six regions that are responsible for delivering departmental programs: Pacific, Central and Arctic, Quebec, Gulf, Maritimes, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Honourable members, our work is grounded on sound science, forward-looking policies, and operational and service excellence in an effort to ensure that we were able to deliver on our mandate. The work that we do also enables economic prosperity across maritime sectors and fisheries, including those in local, coastal, and first nations communities.

To meet our mandate, the department supports strong economic growth in our marine and fisheries sectors to enable greater economic benefits. It supports innovation through research in key sectors, such as aquaculture and biotechnology, and contributes to a clean, healthy environment and aquatic ecosystems through habitat protection, oceans management, and ecosystems research.

Our minister, the honourable Hunter Tootoo, will appear before you in the coming weeks to discuss his mandate commitments and departmental direction. These include: increasing Canada's marine protected areas to 5% by 2017, and 10% by 2020; ensuring that we are continuing to use scientific evidence and considering climate change when advising our minister when he is making decisions affecting fish stocks and ecosystems management; continuing to work at fostering strong relations with the provinces, territories, indigenous peoples, and other stakeholders, and to co-manage our ecosystems and oceans; working with other departments and agencies to carry out key initiatives, such as reviewing Canada's environmental assessment processes, meeting the commitments of the national shipbuilding procurement strategy, improving marine safety, and examining the impact climate change is having on Arctic ecosystems; developing new programs and policies to enable strong commercial, recreational, and traditional fisheries while growing key industries; and supporting important habitat and conservation efforts.

• (1535)

[Translation]

We are very proud of our department's work, as we have made significant contributions to Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We will continue to build on our past successes, and we look forward to new accomplishments that will benefit all Canadians.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to meet with you today. We look forward to working closely with you over the coming months and years.

I will now yield the floor to my colleagues Kevin Stringer and Arran McPherson, who will provide a brief overview of their area of responsibility.

Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Stringer (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystems and Fisheries Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thanks, Tom.

Very briefly, my sector is the ecosystems and fisheries management sector.

[Translation]

The Ecosystems and Fisheries Management Sector is responsible for operational policy, the management of programs and the daily administration of most aspects and operations vital to the department that do not come under the Coast Guard.

[English]

My sector consists of fisheries management, so managing fisheries in Canada's three coasts and our international responsibilities; fisheries protection, habitat, aquatic invasive species, and authorizations under the Fisheries Act; the oceans program, integrated management of oceans and the protected spaces strategies; aboriginal affairs, where we work with indigenous governments and groups on their fisheries and other related matters; aquaculture, as the lead federal agency for aquaculture management in Canada; small craft harbours, repair, maintenance, dredging, and related matters working with the harbour authorities in Canada's small craft harbours; aquatic species at risk, for the 111 species that are listed

and advice on listing, recovery strategies, and prohibitions and permitting; licensing and planning, where we operate the national online licensing system to support fisheries and the catch certification office to enable exports; and conservation and protection, which is really the fisheries officers corps who oversee compliance strategies for all of the above.

As Tom said, like the rest of the department, the sector which I have responsibility for is 87% outside of Ottawa in regions from coast to coast to coast. It makes it a challenge, but our view is we're far richer for it and better connected to stakeholders.

We rely on partnerships with everyone, within the department, other government departments, indigenous groups, provinces and territories, key stakeholders, the fishing industry, etc. We rely first and foremost on our colleagues in science, on all of the issues that I've talked about: fisheries management, aquatic species at risk, aquaculture, etc. We depend on science advice; we're a science-based department.

I think Arran's going to say a few words about science and then throw it open for questions.

Ms. Arran McPherson (Director General, Ecosystems Science, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Kevin.

Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for inviting me to be here today to talk about the work that science does at the DFO.

There are more than 1,500 DFO science employees across the country working on board Canadian Coast Guard vessels, some of which you heard about earlier in the week, in coastal and freshwater laboratories, and in offices in regions across the country.

Through the research and monitoring activities we undertake, science supports management decisions in a number of key areas, some of which Kevin has already described.

We undertake work on the status and trends of aquatic species to inform on sustainable harvest levels and conservation objectives. We look at work to study the potential impacts of human activities on aquatic ecosystems and how changing environmental conditions are affecting the species and the ecosystems that they inhabit. Finally, by monitoring our oceans, including their physical, chemical, and biological features, we inform predictive oceanographic models and navigational charts.

I wish to make a couple of other points. One is on the value of peer review. Peer review is really fundamental to the work of DFO science, as it ensures that we're able to provide the best available information and advice to guide decision-making. We generate more than 300 peer review pieces of advice a year, all of which are available online.

Partnerships and collaborations are very important to the work we do. Through our collaborations with all different types of research partners, we're able to leverage the data and expertise of others in the field to ensure that the work that science is doing is the best quality for the department and the Government of Canada.

With that, I'll turn it over to the Chair.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, folks.

My apologies to my fellow colleagues. I neglected to mention that we're also going to deal with Mr. McDonald's motion that he put forward. I'm sure you've all read it by now. We're going to deal with that during committee business, after we deal with this.

Speaking of Mr. McDonald, you're up first. You have seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I may not need the full seven minutes, but I'll try to use it up.

Most of my questions, given that I'm from Newfoundland, will be more—

The Chair: Sorry, are you saying you want to split your time?

Mr. Ken McDonald: No. I'll fill it in.

The Chair: I just had to make sure.

Mr. Ken McDonald: I'll start by saying again that most of my questions will relate more to the region that I come from, Newfoundland and Labrador, and hopefully the answers will apply to there as well.

First off, in regard to the priorities of DFO when it comes to projects and funding for small craft harbours in Newfoundland and Labrador, what are the priorities in that particular source of funding in terms of Newfoundland and Labrador?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'm happy to answer that. I'll talk a little bit about small craft harbours writ large; it's a really important program.

The core program is \$95 million a year. Of that, \$75 million goes to repairs, maintenance, dredging, and those types of things. Again, as with all of our programs, it's really operated in the regions, including in the Newfoundland and Labrador region. Our regional headquarters in St. John's... As in other regions across the country, we have a set of criteria, and in terms of repairs, maintenance, and dredging, there are always more requests than we have funds for, but it is a pretty substantive program. There is, as I said, \$75 million across the country. I'm not sure what the specific amount for Newfoundland and Labrador is.

We work very closely in Newfoundland and Labrador with the harbour authorities, as we do elsewhere. They're an enormously important resource. For the most part, harbour authorities have been established in most of our key harbours across the country, and they really run things. They're volunteer organizations. We estimate that their volunteer work adds up to about \$24 million of additional contribution.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, as elsewhere, we work with them on priorities. We have a set of criteria for projects, and the projects range. There is a large number of harbours in Newfoundland and Labrador, more than in most other areas. That's the nature of the

history and the importance of the fishery, as you well know, in that province. So there's always a lot of work to do.

There are specific criteria that we apply. There's a program of works that's designed every year, and they're announced as the year goes on.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Looking back at the past 10 years, major cuts were made within DFO. Can you elaborate on how these cuts in funding and jobs have affected operations, again specifically as they apply to Newfoundland and Labrador?

Mr. Tom Rosser: I guess I'd begin by saying we didn't come with our chief financial officer today. I would anticipate that when the minister returns to speak to the main estimates, which we anticipate will happen in the next several weeks, he may be able to provide a more detailed answer than I can, certainly with respect to Newfoundland. But it is true there have been a number of reductions in the department's budget in Newfoundland and Labrador, and indeed across Canada. There were three major exercises over the past several years. We've tried to cope with those reductions through realizing efficiencies in our operations. In many cases that has proven possible.

As I believe our Coast Guard colleagues may have shared with you when they were here a couple of days ago, despite realizing those efficiencies, there have been a couple of areas where, as an organization, we have felt pressures as a result of those reductions. Some of those are common both to the Coast Guard and to DFO. For example, I believe our real property portfolio, our portfolio of assets from coast to coast to coast, is the third largest in government. These are often aging assets, and the cost of maintaining them increases over time. That has become a pressure for us.

I know that our Coast Guard colleagues have spoken as well about recapitalization of their fleet, which of course is critical to their ability to carry out their mandate, but it's also critical to our colleagues in science, as they use those Coast Guard vessels in order to undertake their work.

So yes, we have seen reductions in the order of roughly 10% of our budget over several years. We have been able to respond to those by finding efficiencies, but it has created challenges in some areas as well.

I would invite either of my colleagues to elaborate.

• (1545)

Mr. Ken McDonald: What, if any, are your hopes for taking on more scientists in the department? According to the mandate letter, we've become more focused on science knowledge, to make decision-making based on....

What areas do you believe need the most research and attention in regard to science?

Mr. Tom Rosser: I will just offer an overview and then turn the floor to my colleague Arran.

Certainly one of our priorities as a department is to renew our workforce to ensure it reflects the diversity of Canada to bring new people into the organization. Our demographic is getting older. We're seeing retirements and attrition in the organization, and we view it as a priority, as I said, to recruit the best and the brightest of a new generation. That is particularly true on the science side of our organization, where I believe the demographic of our S and T professionals is even older than it is of our workforce as a whole.

The minister's mandate letter didn't talk specifically about renewing our science complement, but as the member rightly noted, it did put an emphasis on evidence-based decision-making, and on the importance of science and reinvestments in science.

I'll turn to Arran.

Ms. Arran McPherson: The only thing I would add to the comments that my colleague just made is that in addition to looking at the demographics of the science organization, really the scientists who join the department stay with the department. We have a cadre of scientists who are almost able to retire. The average age of those scientists is actually older than the rest of the public service and the rest of the department. I see that as independent of the mandate commitment that my colleague has already mentioned.

We'll be poised for recruiting new scientists in the future, and we'll need to look at what are the emerging areas that we'll need to reinvest in.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McDonald.

We're now going to go to Mr. Sopuck for seven minutes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Thank you very much.

It's good to see all of you again.

I have a couple of things. In the press recently, on February 24, there was an article that was reporting on a briefing note that was given to the minister, and I'm sure you're familiar with it. It was interesting, and I want to put something on the record here. Now, this was a reporter's report on your briefing notes, so I want to make sure I'm accurate here. In the briefing note there was a byline that read "Coast Guard in dire straits".

I went back to the testimony of the highly respected retired commissioner of the Coast Guard, Marc Grégoire, who you all remember. In testimony to our committee on December 10, 2013, I'm quoting Mr. Grégoire, who pointed out:

You're right to mention that the coast guard is cherished by this government.

It was cherished by the government that I was a part of. He went on to say:

Never in the life of the coast guard have we seen such a massive investment at one time. In the last few years, the government has invested over \$6 billion, and just in budget 2012, \$5.2 billion....

Yes, it's extremely encouraging to see all those investments in the coast guard, but it doesn't stop there.

Mr. Grégoire, the highly respected commissioner of the Coast Guard, made that point very clearly, clearly so I think it's disingenuous of anybody to suggest that our government short-changed the Coast Guard.

In the same article there was a quote from the briefing note. This is the note to the minister. It said:

As minister, you are well-positioned to attest to how Canada's fisheries are managed in an effective, science-based and sustainable manner and thus position Canadian industry to benefit from new trade....

Ms. McPherson, it's quite clear from this statement in your briefing note that Canada's fisheries were being very well managed using the highest scientific standards. Is that fair?

• (1550)

Ms. Arran McPherson: I'd have to actually defer to my colleague, who is responsible for the management of the fishery.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: There have been international studies that have looked at different management systems and compared Canada to our colleagues in Australia, the U.S., etc., and we do well. In the most recent one I remember—and it's not that recent—Canada was rated to be number three.

In terms of the level of science, as a manager of fisheries, as a manager of species at risk, as a manager of aquaculture, we always want more science. We will say, and we will stand by our view, that our regimes are well managed now.

Can we use more? We can always use more and there is no question. I don't think you'll find many public servants who wouldn't say that.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I'm a fisheries biologist who's done science in the past. One trade comment to all of us is that we're always asking for more information.

I'm glad to have you state on the record that under our watch—because we were in government for the last 10 years—the scientific capability of your department, as evidenced by the state of Canada's fish stocks, was clearly not degraded.

I would assume as senior civil servants you watched the election campaign closely, which I think is important for you. You would specifically key in on any election commitments that would relate to your department's functions, and develop plans related to those statements and platforms, depending on who won the election. I wouldn't expect otherwise.

I have a quote from the Liberal platform on the Liberals' commitment to unmuzzling scientists.

We will value science and treat science with respect.

We will appoint a Chief Science Officer who will ensure that government science is fully available to the public, that scientists are able to speak freely about their work, and that scientific analyses are considered when the government makes decisions.

You made a point that there are 1,500 scientists in DFO. I am assuming that based on this commitment we are now in a position to invite anyone of those scientists to appear before this committee. Is that correct?

Ms. Arran McPherson: Yes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay, while you're thinking about that, I will give you a specific example.

Recently the City of Montreal was allowed to contravene section 36 of the Fisheries Act and dump, I think, eight billion litres of raw sewage into the St. Lawrence. I'm sure your department is familiar with that. Yes, Mr. Stringer nodded. My assumption is as well that a scientist or two in your department would have written something up about that particular incident and the possible effects on fish. I'd be shocked if your department didn't at least keep a watching brief on that particular event. Is that a fair assumption, that you kept a watching brief on that incident?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: We kept a watching brief on it. It was an Environment Canada lead. Environment Canada has the lead responsibility for section 36 under the Fisheries Act and this was deleterious substances going into the water. It was Environment Canada, but we were in touch with them.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Good. My assumption would be that scientists in your department would have done an evaluation of what the impact of this spill might have been on the important fish stocks in the St. Lawrence.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: We're always monitoring. I can't say for certain that there was a specific document that was done, but we're always monitoring what happens in that area of...

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Given the government's commitment to free and open exchange of scientific information, and the ability of scientists to speak out on issues of environmental concern, when will we be able to have the scientists who looked at this particular incident in front of our committee, the actual scientists, not the heads of the department?

Ms. Arran McPherson: As my colleague said, we don't have the information about who or if any of the DFO science staff provided advice in this specific case.

I will go back to a comment I made in the opening where I talked about the peer review process that we undertake at DFO. When we are asked for advice formally by the management of our organization we go through an open and transparent process, invite stakeholders to participate, and publish the results of that work online.

• (1555)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay, but again in this particular case scientists are able to speak freely about their work and in written peer review documents. I understand that's what you do and those are good things. The political commitment by this government is to allow scientists to speak freely and openly. That's in public and includes the comment about public policy, the comment on incidents.... I use the Montreal sewage spill as a specific example, but there are many other briefings and analyses that are done in your department for internal use, I'm sure.

Again, based on this commitment, those would obviously be available to us.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Tom Rosser: I don't know that we have much to add other than we have for some time had a high level of transparency around the science we do to inform decision-making. Should the work of any of our scientists be of interest to the committee, I think that as a

department, we would be quite amenable to making them available to you.

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly, for seven minutes.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the department officials for coming to the fisheries committee and talking to us today. We appreciate your testimony and the information you provided.

I'd also like to ask Ms. McPherson to thank the 1,500 scientists and technicians that work for the department across the country for their good work day in and day out.

I have lots of questions, but I'm going to start off with a quote from the minister yesterday. This is in reference to the recommendations of the Cohen commission. He said:

Many of those recommendations have already been implemented and we are in the process of developing ways to move forward on the remaining ones.

Could you comment on just how many have been implemented?

Mr. Tom Rosser: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the question.

Over time, action has been taken on some Cohen recommendations. The minister's mandate letter, as committee members will likely be aware, did reference moving forward on the Cohen recommendations.

As the minister had done with many of his mandate priorities, within a few weeks of assuming office, he travelled to British Columbia and met with a number of experts and stakeholders in the Cohen commission's final report, including Justice Cohen himself, to seek their advice on how best to move forward with that mandate commitment.

I think what the minister was referencing in the commentary was there are some activities that have been undertaken. He's assessing what those are and assessing what a sensible way forward would be. That's how we're approaching Cohen.

I don't know if Kevin has anything to add.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: There were 75 recommendations made by Justice Cohen, and the minister was obviously briefed in his response, so there is a number. Could you provide this committee with the number of recommendations that have been implemented and the number that are being worked on? You can do that at another time, which we would really appreciate.

I'm going to move on to another issue, that of adjacency. I know this is a real issue of late on the west coast. Obviously, it's an issue on the east coast as well. A lot of owner-operator issues certainly are.

Where those fish are processed is critical. As you know, on the west coast we just had a shutdown at Canfishco, which means a loss of over 400 jobs on the west coast and essentially the loss of fish processing in British Columbia.

I don't know if you want to comment on this. Many are calling for a review with respect to adjacency, owner-operator, and processing in this country.

It looks like Mr. Stringer might provide a comment. I have another question as well.

• (1600)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: The principle of adjacency is one that's applied when we deal with access and allocation.

The east coast fishery and the west coast fishery are fundamentally different in terms of how they are managed for access and allocation. I'd be happy to come and talk about this at some point.

On the east coast there are two fundamental policies for the inshore fleet. They involve most of the fishery and most of the fishermen, let's say most of the licence holders. The policies are owner-operator and fleet separation. It is about preserving the independence of the inshore fleet in Canada's Atlantic fisheries. Those adjacent to the resource get access to the resource in that approach.

On the west coast it has been more of a market-based approach, where there is trading of quotas, individual transfer of quotas and such. There has been that history.

We are following and are certainly aware of the cannery in Prince Rupert. We've heard from people. The minister has heard from people on this. Representations have been made to the minister about some of those principles in looking at the west coast. We are talking to the minister about how the fishery is managed on both coasts as he gets settled into his role, but we do need to reflect. There has been a different history in both areas.

I should also point out that processing is provincial jurisdiction, not federal jurisdiction. We can't tell someone they must process in a certain area. Provinces can and some provinces do, but B.C. doesn't, and we can't.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I have another question on DFO science capacity. I'm hearing there is an issue on core funding for fisheries science and also for oceanographic monitoring. We heard testimony earlier about the need to recruit scientists.

I'm wondering how willing the department is to work with civil society. I'm thinking of academics and others who see that gap and are concerned themselves and want to play a role, whether it's as an advisory board. Does the department have any comment on how to invite or engage those folks?

Mr. Tom Rosser: Maybe, Mr. Chair, I'll offer a high-level answer, and my colleague Arran may be better placed to offer some specifics.

As a department, partnership has always been important to our scientific effort. Certainly Minister Tootoo has spoken about this on many occasions, that he sees the way forward on science as being about collaboration.

I had mentioned earlier that he had travelled to British Columbia. He has travelled to all three coasts, all six DFO regions, since being named minister. In those meetings, he has met with a wide variety of stakeholders, including university presidents and vice-presidents, representatives of environmental non-governmental organizations, and others.

His message to them and his message publicly on many occasions and his message to us is that he sees the way to make the most of the available resources we have is through partnership and collaboration with industry, universities, and others.

Ms. Arran McPherson: The only thing I would add to his comments is that we have some great examples of work that we're already doing with the academic community in their research networks that we're involved with on both coasts. That's a model we are definitely interested in pursuing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

We'll now go to the government side for seven minutes.

Mrs. Jordan.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you.

I'm going to focus my questions on marine protection areas. I find it a fascinating topic.

Currently, what percentage of marine coastal areas are protected and where are they?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Thank you for the question.

It depends on how you count, but it's about 1%. The Oceans Act was passed in 1997. The first major marine protected area established was the Gully, off Nova Scotia.

We have eight Oceans Act MPAs. We have a few national marine conservation areas, which are done by Parks Canada. We have a number of national wildlife areas, which are reserved for migratory birds; they're very small areas.

There's a fairly large number, but a grand total of 1%.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: When you mentioned all those other areas—and forgive my ignorance, but you talked about national parks and you talked about other places—do they fall under what we're looking at for marine protected areas?

• (1605)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: They do, and the IUCN, which stands for something—

Mr. Tom Rosser: International Union for Conservation of Nature, I believe.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: —establishes the criteria for what's going to count.

When you say we've set aside this much as a marine protected area, there are international standards to be able to do that. It includes protection for various reasons. Basically, it says it needs to be a geographic area; there needs to be a conservation objective, and there needs to be a management plan. There's also representativeness. There is a set of criteria. It's not just marine protected areas. There are other things that can count.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Currently, you said we're at 1%. The goal is to reach 10% by 2020. That's quite a large goal.

What challenges do you foresee DFO facing in expanding that network of MPAs?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Thank you for that question.

There are enormous challenges. The minister has said this is very ambitious, but achievable.

You asked as to what challenges DFO faces. One of our objectives is that it's not a DFO issue. It's a whole of government issue, a federal-provincial issue, and we are also working with environmental groups, indigenous groups. To be able to do this will take an all-in effort.

It also means a different approach from what we've done. We tend to look at very small areas that need protecting and do small protection, but that means working with the fishing industry and other industries out there.

We're very excited, and were a bit terrified when we saw that item in the minister's mandate, but we're really mostly excited. It's a huge opportunity.

The minister has been talking to environmental groups, establishing a task group with the provinces, meeting with indigenous groups, meeting with the fishing industry about ensuring that we continue to have a robust fishing industry, meeting with land claims groups who are partners in this. It will be a huge effort.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: In a short way, I guess, can you take me through the process of how you determine what these marine protected areas are? How do you decide where they will be, and how do you move forward?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: We need to look at a number of objectives. I'll make this short, but I'd be happy to come back and take longer on it.

For us, for the Oceans Act MPAs, it starts with science and with understanding what needs protection. We have done work that identifies ecologically and biologically significant areas. These include corals, sponges, rearing areas, and spawning areas, the types of things that need protection for one reason or another. They're important habitat; they're important areas for part of the life cycle of a species, or those types of things.

It starts with the science and it ends with a management plan. You've identified the area. You've identified what activities can take place. Some people think they should be no-take areas. Others say you can have some things take place. But in between there's an enormous amount of consultation with users, with environmental groups, with local indigenous groups, and with provinces and territories.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: You said there was lots of consultation. Would community organizations be affected by that?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Yes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: This is for you particularly, because I notice that your mandate is quite huge with regard to the areas you cover. How do you assess the value of the ecosystems?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: That's a loaded question—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kevin Stringer: —and it's an excellent one.

We can come back and talk for ages on that, but I would point again to the science. We've looked at the science, and we need to do more. We've looked at large areas of the oceans and identified where the corals and sponges are and where the protected areas are.

We actually identify vulnerable marine ecosystems, and that's kind of been the approach: what ecosystems really need protection to enable the broader ecosystem to function effectively. That's really been the approach with the ecologically and biologically significant areas, or EBSAs.

I would also say that an ecosystems approach with respect to fisheries and oceans management is probably something we've been better at talking about than doing, but we are, with more and more science, getting into that world. This work that we're doing now on protected areas will help us get there as well.

It is a huge challenge to be able to manage species one at a time. It is a gigantic challenge to be able to manage an ecosystem and understand the relationships between the trophic levels and the relationships between the various species. That is a work in progress and something that we're committed to moving forward on.

• (1610)

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I have a final quick question.

Now, 10% takes in more than just the ocean, obviously; it's a broader range. You said it's taking in national parks and things like that. Is there a collaborative effort with other departments to make sure we meet that target?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Yes. Our main two partners in the federal system are DFO and Parks Canada. Environment Canada is also important.

When we talk about national marine conservation areas that Parks Canada does, these are in marine areas. They're often contiguous to parks. If you have a park that is on land, and you can establish a marine conservation area—they've done some really important areas—Parks will actually look at representative areas. We look at protection for vulnerable marine ecosystems.

We have different objectives, but at the end of the day, they are protected areas. We work very closely with them. Particularly since we've all seen the same mandate letters, we've been working together to make sure we will meet these objectives together.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jordan and Mr. Stringer.

That concludes the first round.

May I safely assume that we'll just go into the second round without delay, as we did last time.

Mr. Strahl, you're up next. You have five minutes.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I will thank the witnesses for coming.

I am looking forward to hearing but haven't heard any update yet on when we will have the minister as a witness. We invited him a while back. I was encouraged to hear Mr. Rosser say that he'll be coming on the main estimates as well. We haven't even asked for that yet, but I'm excited that he will be here on two occasions in the very near future to answer our questions.

I was also glad to hear that, as per Mr. Sopuck's suggestion, we'll be able to have scientists here to discuss their work at our request. We'll look forward to making those requests during future committee business, perhaps. That is a good sign.

I want to go back briefly to Mr. Donnelly's questions on the Cohen commission. The minister was very clear yesterday in the House in response to a Liberal lob question that several of the Cohen commission recommendations had already been enacted, I assume under the previous government. I would like to request that if you have an analysis, which I'm sure there is somewhere in the department, as to which of the 75 recommendations have already been implemented, and the list of the others, perhaps, if they're partially implemented, showing why they haven't been implemented, if there is such a list, attached to it, I'd like to also know what the cost of implementing each of them one time annually would be.

Perhaps I'll just ask for that to be tabled at a later time.

On marine protected areas, I met with a number of stakeholders who are very concerned about what this will mean for them. Their advice, hopefully, if the minister is consulting with industry groups, is that first you need to determine what you're protecting and why you are protecting it.

In your view, can you protect, for instance, sponge reefs on the bottom and still fish above them and have that considered to be part of a marine protected area, or are we talking about fishing at all depths? You mentioned that some want it to be closed. I've heard, even from the shipping industry, that some want there to be no passage, even, over these areas, which I think is a very scary prospect for many of our coastal industries.

Perhaps you could give me a quick indication whether it's possible under the IUCN qualifications that you can still perhaps have a productive ocean at the same time that you have a protected ocean.

• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Thanks for the question.

There are two points. One is, the minister has met with the fishing industry on this. He met with people on all three coasts who have expressed this concern and has given assurances that they will be involved as we go forward.

With respect to the example you used—a very good one in terms of there being corals and sponges to protect—as to whether, if you're

not impacting them, you can continue your activity as long as you're not impacting them, the answer is that you can. There are some views from some stakeholders who would say that when you establish a marine protected area it should be as a matter of course a no-take zone, but it is not required in our current Oceans Act. The Oceans Act MPAs don't require it. The Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act, the act under which the marine conservation areas for Parks Canada fall, requires that part of it be a no-take area. It doesn't say how much. It could be 1%, 2%, or it could be 80%. But there is no specific requirement to make them no-take zones.

At the end of the day, for us and certainly for the IUCN, a marine protected area doesn't need to be a no-take zone. It needs to be a specific area. It needs to have conservation objectives. It needs to have a management plan that speaks to how you're going to meet them.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Another concern I've heard is that Canada has a very well-managed fishery, well-managed oceans, that we are a leader in conservation and protection and fishing standards, and that if you are creating marine protected areas in Canada, it's a very integrated industry and the world is going to get its protein from somewhere. The concern is that if you close off large portions of the Canadian well-managed fishery, you will essentially be sending fishing fleets elsewhere, or even that domestically you'll more heavily fish the non-protected areas, which would perhaps have a neutral effect or a net negative effect.

Can you explain to me how you prevent additional stress in other areas when you are closing off sections under the MPA?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: First of all, in terms of some of the types of protection for corals, sponges, reefs, and those sorts of things, if you're destroying those areas with certain types of fishing or any type of activity, it's not good for the fishery. There's absolutely no question. I think all stakeholders would agree with that.

With respect to having specific areas set aside and then increasing the pressure in other areas, in neighbouring areas, the theory—and there are different views on this—is that by protecting a certain area you're really going to allow it to grow and it's going to populate, because fish tend to move around. It's going to populate those other areas, and there's going to be a benefit from that. MPAs are fairly new. For some, there's documentation that shows it does work. Others are saying that if it's a well-managed fishery, it doesn't make that big a difference.

We are going to have to keep all of those things in mind to ensure that there is an ongoing robust fishery in Canada, but that we are applying the proper protection. It's not an easy thing.

Tom, did you want add something?

The Chair: Please be brief.

Thank you.

Mr. Tom Rosser: I was just going to say that in addition to the consultations and things that Kevin described, in the regulatory process to establish a marine protected area, there's a requirement that a cost-benefit analysis be done, so any costs associated with the establishment of a marine protected area would be explicitly analyzed and considered as part of the normal process.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rosser.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Finnigan, go ahead for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you to DFO. It was great that you talked to us about the good work you do.

I'm from the Miramichi area in New Brunswick on the east coast, where of course salmon is constantly a big issue. In February last year, a ministerial advisory committee for Atlantic salmon was established. They finished their report in July. I don't know if you've had a chance to look at it, or if you plan to implement some or most of the recommendations that came out of that committee.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Thank you for the question.

Atlantic salmon is an enormously important issue. It's an iconic species and a driver for the economy, and Miramichi is certainly a key area. We are seeing challenges. In the U.S., it's endangered. Some say it's pretty much gone. It's doing much better in Labrador and northern Newfoundland, less well the further south you go, and almost gone in the U.S., so it is a challenge.

That ministerial advisory committee tabled a report on, I think, July 31, so the department has had an opportunity to look at it. We are going forward to the minister with some advice about the implementation of various of the recommendations. I've forgotten exactly how many.

There weren't as many as in Cohen, but they weren't that dissimilar. They actually recommended that we look at the wild salmon policy on the east coast as well as the one on the west coast. It's something we're looking at very carefully and will be going forward to the minister with advice on.

• (1620)

Mr. Pat Finnigan: As a follow-up to my question, if the salmon were just in the Miramichi, we could probably manage it, but of course it has a migratory route that takes it all the way to Greenland, with all kinds of obstacles on the way up and on the way down. I'm not an expert on salmon, but to me, one of the big barriers or obstacles in rebuilding the stock is the commercial harvesting in Greenland, which almost doubled last year.

How involved is Canada in trying to let them know that this salmon is really not that abundant? We're stocking the rivers every year. We're trying to do what we can here, yet on the other coast.... I'm not saying that it's the only thing; I know that the seals, the cormorants, the bass, and everything have their feast on the way.

Could you elaborate on what we're doing internationally to protect the species?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Thanks for your question.

Actually, on your last point, this is a really important issue. There are habitat issues, predation issues, and at-sea mortality issues. There are many, many issues, and the Greenland issue is certainly one of them.

The way we address that is through NASCO, which stands for North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization. In any case, there's us, the U.S., some European countries, and Greenland. All of us have been talking to Greenland about that. Greenland did make some changes in the last year to put more monitoring and management in place to restrict the harvest, which has been helpful.

We continue to be concerned about the commercial take in Greenland. There was not a commercial take a few years ago, and they started, but in the last couple of years, it seems to have actually reduced.

We continue to be concerned and we continue to put pressure on. It's largely through NASCO, but it's also something that the minister would raise with the EU and with others on a regular basis. It is one of the issues, and we're continuing to put on the pressure.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Taking it closer to home, I've had discussions with some people about the Miramichi River and the Tabusintac River specifically, where we were talking about resources being cut. I talked directly to the people who live on the river and the DFO officers, who told us that they absolutely could not monitor the river where they should. There are lots of illegal catches, lots of nets across the river, and it's been worse in the last few years.

Could you comment?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: There are always challenges. One of the challenges with Atlantic salmon, as with Pacific salmon, is that there are hundreds of rivers, streams, and areas where these fish go. It's a question of having sufficient compliance officers, conservation and protection officers, fisheries officers. It is a constant challenge.

People were talking about partnerships before. We have good partnerships. There are watershed groups such as the Atlantic Salmon Federation and local associations. They are partners, and they actually help us on the science, the compliance, and the education. The advisory committee did similar work in bringing those groups together. Doing better in those areas really helps. But of course, science funding would absolutely help improve the situation.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Now to Mr. Arnold.

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

I want to thank you for being here today to take questions.

In the mandate letter to the minister, it says that your deputy minister will brief you on issues that require decisions to be made quickly. Have there been any situations like that since the fall? Have there been decisions that needed to be made quickly?

• (1625)

Mr. Tom Rosser: I guess it's just the nature of our business, with DFO and the Coast Guard, that there are decisions. Some of them are on an annual cycle, I believe. I think we manage 155 separate commercial fisheries, and each has openings and closings and other decisions to be made.

On the Coast Guard side of the operation, with environmental response and marine search and rescue, things happen very quickly. I think that is what was intended by the language there.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: The minister was appointed in November, and we have a fishery that started at the end of November. It was going to start, so we had to get in quickly. Before we explained how this fishery works, there were a number of operational matters. That's the nature of DFO.

The groundfish fishery off Nova Scotia opened on January 1, and these were the sorts of things that we needed to make sure we could get up and running quickly.

Mr. Mel Arnold: So those were questions at the ministerial level, but nothing of an urgent matter. It was not typical of a normal year.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I think it really was, because we're an operational department. These were things we really needed to be able to do. We had to make some urgent decisions, whether they were controversial or not, because the fisheries were opening.

Mr. Mel Arnold: The other one I have, being from British Columbia, is that we have migrational fish. My experience is that there is a lot of jurisdictional confusion over fish stocks. Steelhead is the prime example. There's also water usage and inland habitat.

Can you explain how you work around those issues, or are there other issues that we should perhaps be looking at?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It is a really interesting question. It's not specific and unique to B.C., but it is different in B.C. in this instance.

The Constitution says that the minister is responsible for coastal and inland fisheries. Inland fisheries, for the most part, have devolved to the provinces. Devolved is not the right word, but there have been arrangements with the provinces that they manage inland fisheries. What about salmon? Salmon begins inland and spends a lot of its time swimming down that river and then spends time in the marine area and then comes back. How do we divide that up? The way we've done that is that DFO is responsible. DFO manages salmon, but the province has some responsibilities around habitat and those types of things. For some reason, which I hope you won't ask me, they have responsibility for steelhead, which is very salmon-like, but we have responsibility for the five species of salmon: coho, chinook, sockeye, chum, and pink. We work closely with the province on that. We try to make sure that when they're establishing an opening in an area for steelhead, it's not in the way of our opening. We do work closely with them.

With respect to the habitat side, we have a responsibility for fisheries habitat protection in inland areas, but the provinces have responsibilities around riparian areas, and they have a number of responsibilities as well. We actually have joint committees to try to work those things out. They work reasonably well, but there are always challenges. Again, there is that unique challenge around some species in B.C. that's a little bit different because anadromous fish spend their time in inland areas, in fresh water and in salt water.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Invasive species are a big concern in our area because of the value of the anadromous fish, the salmon species that spends a lot of the time in our bigger lakes in the interior.

I'm wondering if you have plans on that one moving forward. So far we've seen successful barring of the Asian carp into the Great Lakes—at least they've been able to apparently keep them out. The zebra and quagga mussels are definitely a bigger challenge, it seems.

Do you have any direction on that?

• (1630)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: They may be the emerging issues in the management of fisheries protection. You know, 25 years ago we didn't hear about this that much. Perhaps it's because of increased vessel traffic, changing waters, changing temperatures, etc. Maybe we owe it to Asian carp's jumping into people's boats having made it more of a public issue. It certainly is an emerging issue. We do have an important Asian carp program. We have a really important sea lamprey program that's been operating since 1955 that most people don't know about.

Perhaps more significantly on aquatic invasive species, we did pass a regulation last year on aquatic invasive species that basically gives our minister—but also provincial ministers because it's another shared jurisdiction area—some tools to deal with eradication when they need to. Also, it prohibits the import, transport, and sale of aquatic invasive species, whereas before it wasn't prohibited. It's becoming a more significant issue and one that we understand we need to be focusing on more and more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stringer.

Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Hardie, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): I appreciate your being here. This is a big country, and you have a very big mandate. It must be terrifying sometimes, especially when you have to navigate the rocks and shoals of politically charged questions. I'm going to try to avoid that for you.

Having said that, there is an issue of public confidence that rubs off on DFO where it seems that commercial interests have made science a subservient issue and where the precautionary principle of looking after the wild stocks has maybe taken a back seat because you've been tied to things like aquaculture. Like the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, they've been designated as clients.

I don't expect you to comment on that because that's not your thing to fix. Having said that, though, I'll go to the Cohen commission. It's very clear that there are some outstanding issues there. I'll give you a simple one first. Justice Cohen called for the creation of an associate regional director general to implement the wild salmon policy. Is that position now in place?

Mr. Tom Rosser: The short answer is no, it is not.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay.

Is it in the books, online?

Mr. Tom Rosser: I can't really comment other than to say that I mentioned in response to earlier testimony that the minister is committed and indeed it is one of the mandated priorities to move forward on Cohen. Part of that is to assess all outstanding Cohen recommendations in consultation with interested parties and find a way forward.

Mr. Ken Hardie: The first part of the question obviously falls to somebody else, but that last one would appear to be at least your capability to do.

I want to talk about infectious salmon anemia. Clearly, there are strong suspicions but an absence of science to show whether or not that's having an impact on the fish runs, especially the sockeye fish runs on the Fraser River.

Has there been an uptick in resources to study ISA, specifically access to farmed salmon that aren't already dead in the fish market, for purposes of testing and research?

Ms. Arran McPherson: That's a broad question, and thank you for it.

I'll start by saying I don't know the details of how much money we spent on ISA versus other elements of our aquaculture programs. But I will say that we are just poised to launch an initiative looking at a series of different diseases and viruses on the west coast, ISA being one them, in partnership with Genome Canada and a number of other federal partners on the west coast.

I believe they're at the stage of collecting their salmon at this point. The forward-looking plan would be to undertake genetic testing and develop markers that would allow us to evaluate very rapidly and at a broad level what types of pathogens might be out there in the environment.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Good to hear.

Thank you.

•(1635)

The Chair: We have two minutes left in your questions. Did you wish to split your time?

Mr. Morrissey.

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

I want to pick up on your comment earlier about your harbour authorities. While they were very controversial when they were introduced and there was a lot of opposition, I do agree they have been an excellent management tool for small craft harbours, especially on the east coast.

You commented on a national online licensing system. One of the issues that I constantly hear from fishers is the inability to deal with personnel, one on one, when they have an issue that's confronting them on short notice.

Could you respond to that? That seems extremely frustrating when they're just referred to online. They can go to the local DFO office, and they're told, "We cannot deal with it; you have to go online." Am I accurate on this?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Yes, often that is the case.

There are a couple of things. One, we did move to an online licensing system, I think two or three years ago, so fishers can get their licence online.

I would say in the first six months we had a lot of "This doesn't work. We want to go to the office and get our licence, thanks very much." I would not say that it is now a beautifully functioning system where nobody has any issues. But we have always had a 1-800 number where you can receive online help. We've always had people available to engage directly when we need to.

What we don't have is a licence officer sitting in the local DFO office who is actually able to write out the licence. That we generally don't do. We have some exceptions where we will do that.

It has been a transition. In terms of cost, it has worked well. I'll say one other thing, and that is, we talked about the harbour authorities being really good partners. Fisheries organizations have been enormously helpful. To be candid, they've stepped in and helped fishers to make it work in terms of the online licensing system. They've been good partners for us as well.

We're aware of challenges. We've tried to deal with some of the challenges. We try to make sure there is a live human available when we can. The excitement happens when you have an opening of a fishery, with 1,000 licence holders who all decide at the last day that they should really go and get their licence. Then the system crashes for a little while, and some of us get pretty excited. We try to keep those to a minimum.

We appreciate that you hear some of this. It's useful for us to hear it as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It was much more fun hearing about it when I was a candidate.

Do I have a moment left?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey. No, not in these here parts you don't.

Mr. Donnelly, you have three minutes.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Three minutes is not a lot of time, Mr. Chair, so I'll make a few comments and then ask a question.

Many people have spoken to me about topics such as the status of fish habitat protection, Fisheries Act changes, the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, implications of the Ahousaht decision, labelling and genetically modified fish in Canada, illegal fishing and organized crime in Canadian waters, and monitoring and enforcement. I'm sure you're aware...I'll add that I've just introduced my private member's bill on moving to closed containment. In the last Parliament this standing committee looked at closed containment technologies.

Mr. Stringer, you mentioned that you're excited and slightly terrified on MPAs. We had a pretty good discussion here on that, and you provided some good information. I would add that some of the concerns I've heard about trying to meet the targets are regional concerns, for instance, looking at the Arctic as major possibilities at the expense of the Pacific and Atlantic coasts.

My question is about the issue of SARA and species at risk. We have beluga whales and we have resident killer whales on the Pacific coast. In terms of the killer whales, this has been in the courts as we know, and I've been approached on the question of whether the department has put the necessary funds in the budget to deal with this, and specifically with this endangered species, the Pacific killer whale.

• (1640)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Thanks for the question.

I'm going to touch on the MPA thing. You talked about the three coasts, and the Arctic, and all that. There is no question...and the question before was about what areas. I know I said "excited, but terrified", but "ambitious but achievable", as the minister says, is a far better way to say it. There will need to be different approaches on the three coasts. A different amount of work has been done. You can do more through fisheries closures in one area. MPA network planning has been done in other areas. Land claims agreements need to be respected, and we need to make sure we're taking the appropriate approach in the north. We're aware of all of that. It is interesting and exciting times.

On species at risk, I can't speak to what's in the budget. What I can point out is in mandate letters, and certainly the mandate letter for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change speaks to ensuring that the species at risk issues are upheld. Our minister is the responsible minister for aquatic invasive species. We've had the opportunity to speak to him about those things, and we've also spoken about critical habitat issues around killer whales, around understanding that, and the recovery plan that exists there.

We're mindful of our responsibilities there, and we will ensure we're carrying out our legislative responsibilities.

The Chair: Sorry. I would love to give you more time, but I'm sure Mr. Morrissey would be quite upset if I did.

That concludes our testimony. I want to say thank you to our guests for coming in from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Ms. McPherson, Mr. Rosser, Mr. Stringer, on behalf of the committee, thank you for joining us today. We appreciate it.

At this stage we'll take a break of a couple of minutes, and we'll come back and discuss committee business. We have a few items and we have that motion to discuss as well.

• (1640)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1640)

The Chair: Folks, we have several items here to look at.

As you know we've had two motions passed already, and one pertaining to a study that we've been talking about: the MCTS on the west coast. We have some witnesses that we have to discuss. We also need to have the timing done. In addition to that, we have to talk

about the supplementaries. We're now in receipt of both supplementaries and the main estimates. Supplementaries have to be reported by, I think you said, the 21st.

• (1645)

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. David Chandonnet): It would be March 21 at the latest.

The Chair: That means we have two days, March 8 and 10.

There are three things for two days, I'm afraid. There would be the supplementary estimates. Then there would be a discussion on committee business and agenda setting, because we just said we'd bring in departmental people from the Coast Guard and DFO, so we need to have a discussion about a meeting. Also, then, we would have the beginning of this Comox study.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: We also need to have the minister.

The Chair: Then there's the minister, which we all said was the first motion we passed. Bringing the minister in around that time could also go with the supplementary estimates. That's the other point, isn't it?

• (1650)

Mr. Mark Strahl: That motion's passed.

The Chair: Okay.

Can we talk about the Comox study first? There are a couple of points we have to make about the Comox study.

Ms. Jordan, go ahead.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Are we going to talk about witnesses for the Comox study now ?

The Chair: I hope to, yes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Because some of the witnesses have not been contacted, and because they may not want their names put forward, can we go in camera for this part?

The Chair: Are you making a motion to go in camera?

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Yes, please.

The Chair: Then let's have that motion right away, since it's dilatory.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Seeing a vote of 5-4, we'll now go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (1650)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1715)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

The Chair: Mr. McDonald, you have a motion. The motion reads:

That the Standing committee on Fisheries and Oceans commence a study of the Northern Cod Stock and its relevance to associated species. This study would evaluate the replenishment of the stock and what other species are affected by it in the region. The study would also look at sustainable harvesting technologies for the future of the cod fishery.

Mr. McDonald, would you like to speak to it?

Mr. Ken McDonald: Mr. Chair, I so move.

This study is very important because depending on who you talk to, at least in Newfoundland today, you get different versions of where they think the cod fishery is, where the stock is, and whether there should be a commercial fishery, and even if there should be what we commonly call a recreational food fishery.

I'd like the committee to look at it and come back with some firm evidence as to where the stock is, as well as its affect on other species. We heard this week that the shrimp are down in some areas, up in others. Is the resurgence of the cod having an effect on that species? Is it affecting the snow crab species? Why is the stock high in one place and low in another? Again, with the food fishery involved as well, I'd like to see what effect that has on it.

Overall, it's not just to evaluate the state of the stock. When and if the stock is ready to be harvested commercially, it comes down to a lot of lead time, because the fish plants that were once dependent on the cod fishery don't exist anymore for the most part. For any plants that want to start production of the product from the raw material, it is going to take a while for them to gear up and get ready for it. If we could find some way to show them evidence that if not this year, two years down the road we expect the cod fishery to be a viable commercial fishery....

• (1720)

The Chair: Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Certainly, we are supportive in general of the study. It says what other species are affected by it. We would want to include as well what other species are affecting it. Perhaps that's implied in a study of this nature.

I don't know. I would seek the guidance of the chair to determine whether we need to indicate that Mr. McDonald would like to host us if we came to the region in the motion, but certainly, we would want to authorize travel. Perhaps that's in the budgeting phase, but we will want to go to speak to the people that have been most directly affected in their communities.

The Chair: If it comes to travelling to the affected areas with respect to northern cod, and it's a great idea, we have to develop a budget, and pass that budget. That's really what we would have to do.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Does it have to be part of the motion?

The Chair: Here's what I recommend.

We pass the motion as is. If we decide we want to travel as a committee, we can amend it as such or put something in front of the committee to travel in order to do this.

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I'm just seeking clarification. We're in favour of looking at this study as well, but I'd like to clarify a couple of points.

Mr. McDonald mentioned snow crab and others. I'm sure he's aware that we did an extensive study on the snow crab in the previous Parliament. We travelled and presented a major report.

He also mentioned shrimp. Is that something you wanted to include in this study, the impacts on shrimp? Mr. Strahl had mentioned not only the relevance of associated species that are affected but that are affecting.

I'm looking for clarification, because I would ask if that's maybe a friendly amendment to include the words "including shrimp" at the end and its relevance to associated species, or is that implied?

The second clarification is, when was the last northern cod stock study done by this committee, if there has been one? Five years ago?

The Chair: No, I think it was in 2005.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: In 2005.

The Chair: Before I go to Mr. Arnold, Mr. McDonald, do you want to address that?

Mr. Ken McDonald: Yes.

On the other species, it would include shrimp. If the cod are eating the shrimp, or if we suspect they're eating the shrimp, it obviously does have an effect on that species. I'd like to know if that's why the stock is going down. Area 6 in the shrimp fishery is the one they're having a problem with. Is it because there's a resurgence of cod in that area? A lot of environmentalists will say no, that the water temperature is affecting both the return of the cod and the depleting of the shrimp, but hopefully the study will show us if the cod are the main factor.

• (1725)

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Yes, thank you.

Thank you for the clarification on that. I think that helps me clarify who the witnesses are that could be invited, so this is great.

The Chair: We're getting short on time, folks.

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I don't want to confuse things, but if we want to make sure everything is included in this, I would offer that we could amend it to state that the study would evaluate the replenishment of the cod stock and what conditions and species are affecting or are affected by it.

The Chair: Give us one moment while we get that down.

Okay, Ms. Jordan, you go ahead while we're getting that down. I'm trying to be judicious with time here.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I think the motion as it reads addresses those issues. I think the motion is fine the way it is.

The Chair: You can vote against it if you wish. That's basically how it goes.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Unless it's accepted as a friendly amendment, I think we'll....

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I think we should vote.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I think what Mel's suggesting is that if Ken would consider that friendly....

The Chair: The other issue, as a friendly recommendation from your chair, is that we're also omitting the words "report to the House". Would anybody like to...?

Mr. Ken McDonald: Add "and report its conclusions to the House".

The Chair: Add "and report its conclusions to the House".

Now we have to deal with Mr. Arnold's amendment.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I was assisting the clerk, so I didn't hear the discussion as I stepped over.

If you're fine with it as is, yes.

The Chair: Are you withdrawing?

Mr. Mel Arnold: I'll withdraw my amendment.

The Chair: Okay. What about "report its conclusions to the House"? I can't move it, so perhaps—

Mr. Ken McDonald: Yes, I'll move that.

The Chair: Mr. McDonald, you'd like to move the amendment to add "report its findings to the House"?

Mr. Ken McDonald: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, so we have two votes.

We have to vote on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: It has been amended. Now we have to vote on the main motion, which states all that was said before, plus it now includes "report its conclusions to the House".

(Motion as amended agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: It's unanimous.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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