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Chair

Mr. Scott Simms

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

As you notice, on the original schedule we had divided our meeting into two hours. At this time of year we don't normally have what we call the "silly season", but we have a silly season where votes are happening throughout the day. The House doesn't open till 10 o'clock, so there's a possibility that between 10 and 10:45 there could be votes.

Rather than have the second group being frozen out of testimony, we decided to have everybody at the beginning, right now. Everybody will do their 10 minutes and then we can have the questions. That way, if the questions run short, so be it, but I didn't want to run the risk of the second group not being heard at all. Some of you come from fairly far away, and poor old Glen had to take a boat just to get here.

Mr. Glen Best (Fish Harvester, Glen and Jerry Fisheries Inc., As an Individual): I only just made it.

The Chair: He only just made it too. See? That's what I'm talking about.

Mr. Glen Best: The bloody thing broke down. It broke down again.

The Chair: It broke down. We have a ferry, folks. It's temperamental at best. That's the Fogo Island ferry.

Nevertheless, before I get myself in trouble, good morning, all. This morning, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we're talking about a study of the Atlantic Canada commercial vessel length and licensing policies, on a motion brought forward by Mr. McDonald from the riding of Avalon, the second most beautiful riding in all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I want to introduce the people we have here. We have Billy Stratton, who is a fisherman, and Roy Careen, a fisherman with CHY Enterprises Limited. Henry Thorne is a fisherman as well. We also have Glen Best, from Glen and Jerry Fisheries, and Jerry is his brother, in case you were wondering. Joining us by video conference, we also have Collin Greenham.

Collin, thanks for coming out. You're in St. John's, right? Can you hear us?

Mr. Collin Greenham (Fish Harvester, As an Individual): Yes, I can hear you fine.

The Chair: Perfect.

Again, just as a reminder, when the questions start, if you have a question for Mr. Greenham, please mention his name and then ask your question. He's on video conference and it's hard for him to know who you're talking to.

Also joining us we have Eldred Woodford, Inshore Council Member, FFAW, but also, of course, a fisherman in his own right and a sealer as well, and President of the Sealers Association, and Keith Smith, who is an Inshore Council Member from the Fish, Food and Allied Workers.

You're speaking on behalf of the FFAW today, correct?

Mr. Keith Smith (Fish Harvester and Inshore Council Member, Fish, Food and Allied Workers): Yes.

The Chair: Okay. We're going to start with Mr. Stratton.

Again, folks, you have up to 10 minutes as far as your testimony is concerned. Don't worry if you don't use the 10 minutes. If you just want to put out a couple of sentences, by all means, but nevertheless, the floor will be yours for up to 10 minutes. I'm going to be a little strict on time because we have many people testifying.

Mr. Stratton, please go ahead.

Mr. Billy Stratton (Fish Harvester, As an Individual): Thank you for having me here today.

I'm a full-time fisherman from Calvert, Newfoundland. The first topic I'd like to talk on is the salmon. I hold a commercial salmon licence. I don't think we're getting a very fair shake with the way the salmon is going. It has been closed now for nearly over 28 years. When it closed, we were told by John Crosbie that it was going to be five years.

I don't think we're getting a very fair shake with the way it's going. It seems like we were blamed for destroying the salmon or whatever when they shut us off, but the statistics show that it wasn't us. They have closed the rivers and closed everywhere for the anglers and whatever. I listened to Gerry Byrne on the radio and the television as he blamed it on the poachers. Where is it going?

In my eyes, I think that if it opens again, we should be allowed to go back at it. It's either that or come up with some kind of a sensible buyout. There are only 43 of us. That's all that's left now out of 105. I can see no reason why they can't up with something to buy us out, to get us out of it if he wants. It's either that or, when he opens it, giving us the same thing they're giving us on the rivers. As far as I'm concerned, they threw us under the bus, and it's time for us now to stand up. I'll be 61 on my birthday, by the way, and I'm the youngest one of the 43 who are left.

The other topic I'd like to talk on is these core and non-core fishing licences. There are people who got caught up in the cracks on that.

This is an example. My father came home from the Second World War and started fishing. He fished that for, say, probably 40 or 50 years, I can't tell you. We fished together. I started when I was 15 years old and I drew a trap berth in Calvert. We all fished, every one of us. My father looked after the money. I was 15 years old and everything else.... Then, when the time came for him to get out of it, he could have sold it for \$33,000. Instead of doing that, my mother's sisters and brothers fished with us. They are still with us and are loading boats today with crab pots while I'm here.

Somewhere along the way—I mean, I can't understand it and I can't get the right of it—he turned it over to him.... All he ever did was fish. He did nothing else, not another thing, only fish. I can't understand how that licence came to be non-core, which if someone could tell you or whatever, or something.... The other side of it is that we're still fishing together. He's in a boat that's 29 feet 11 inches. Now, codfish are coming back on stream. How is he supposed to go out? He had the same quota, the same thing as what the other man had. How is he supposed to go and fish in a 29 foot 11 inch boat, 70 miles or 80 miles out or whatever, against a fellow in a 65-foot or 45-foot boat?

There has to be something done with this system. You're either going to have to let those guys get a bigger boat.... I mean, if we leave to go, I'm towing him around in a 29-foot boat. It's all about safety. That's what they talk about, safety, so if it's all about safety I can't see why it is the way it is.

This year alone, I would say that some of those people are going to be grounded because they've got nothing to go fishing in, and they have the same amount of fish.... If I have 3,000 pounds of fish, on core, to the hills...and every kind of licence you can imagine, I have, right? If I'm allowed 3,000 pounds of fish, he's allowed 3,000 pounds of fish, but he is not allowed a boat to go and catch it. There's something definitely wrong, boy, with the system, whatever it is. I'd like to see something done with that part of it.

I'm going to give you another little scenario before I stop, because I'm an awful man to talk when I get going. I'm good at it, right?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Billy Stratton: I'm going to give you a bit of history on codfish. I drew a trap berth in Calvert when I was 15 years old. There were 11 of us who used to draw. I drew the big one, the big berth. We landed over 6,000 pounds of fish that year in that berth alone down there. That was in 1975. I drew it again.... I'm just giving you statistics now on the way codfish go up and down.

● (0850)

I drew that trap berth again in 1983. How many fish do you think I landed that year, in 1983? I told this to a fellow the other day, and do you know what he said? He said, "I bet you landed a million pounds." Do you know what I landed? Thirty-six thousand pounds. That was a big drop, wasn't it? Yes. My father drew it in either 1989 or 1990, and we landed over 400,000 pounds of fish. That's the reason: because of the codfish. Did we ever get cod that year.

Anyway, that's it for me. Someone else can take over.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stratton. That was well said.

Mr. Careen.

Mr. Roy Careen (Fish Harvester, CHY Enterprises Limited, As an Individual): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I would especially like to thank my member, Mr. Ken McDonald, for giving me the opportunity to speak before you today.

I've been a fisherman since 1979, making me 39 years in the fishing industry. As you can probably see, I'm definitely out of my element here today. I have never spoken in public before. Most times you'll find me on the wharf or in one of my fishing vessels voicing my opinion or having a yarn.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Roy Careen: The standing committee is conducting a study on vessel length as it applies to our Atlantic provinces. Here, I must stress "Atlantic provinces". I will be personally speaking today with regard to the transfer of licences and leasing as it affects me and my family in the fishing industry.

Before I do that, I would like to talk to you about vessel length, as relatives and friends of mine are presently being affected by this regulation. A cousin and good friend of mine is in limbo at present. He is in the process of removing four feet from the vessel he purchased because at present he's awaiting approval or disapproval from DFO on whether he can use this vessel to fish in the upcoming season, which is only days away. In reality, this man only fishes inshore. He has an IQ for cod and crab, so it really should not matter whether his vessel is 30 feet or 50 feet.

As I previously stated, 39 years ago I started fishing as a young boy in a community that was 100% dependent on fishing to survive financially. Today, this community is very different. Years ago, many young people growing up in rural Newfoundland moved away to make a living. There was not enough money to be made in the fishing industry. One of the main reasons for this was that, as a fisherman, you were not permitted to combine licences or have a buddy-up arrangement.

However, at that time, if you had 50 licences in your community, for example, with four men in each boat, that meant there were 200 fishermen employed in that community. The union and DFO were against combining and buddy-up arrangements at the time, to try to keep employment in the communities of Newfoundland, and at that time they were correct to do so.

Rural Newfoundland, as we know, is not what it was 30 years ago. Times change, and so should the policies, rules, and regulations put forward by DFO and our union. We should be encouraging our young people to come back to the fishery, not preventing them from doing so. As fishermen, we are what we would call a dying breed. Most are born into the fishery and inherit it as part of their family, such I did.

With depleting stocks of most species, such as crab, cod, capelin, and shrimp, soon most fishermen will require more than one licence to make a living for themselves and their families, and also for each of their four or five crew members and their families.

As was previously discussed in the proceedings, how come when fishermen in Newfoundland lease a boat it must remain in their name for 12 months at DFO? A fisherman in Nova Scotia, our neighbouring province, can lease a boat for one month, and that Nova Scotia fisherman is then free to use his vessel after one month to fish other species. A fisherman like me in Newfoundland must wait 12 months to do the same.

I am from a family of seven boys and four girls. We are all involved in the fishery and the industry, holding licences and owning vessels. In my family business, we require four fishing vessels to fish our licences and quotas. I skipper two vessels, and my son skippers the other two, when in reality we should be able to fish two vessels rather than four, like those fishermen in Nova Scotia. Doing this would cut our expenses in half and encourage my son—and young fisher people—to stay in the fishery industry where he can make a decent living for his family.

● (0900)

For example, my son and I purchased two Atlantic white tuna licences about 10 years ago. Each year in September, we steer our two vessels 410 miles across the gulf to Nova Scotia to fish tuna. The tuna fishery is an IQ fishery, and each boat is given a certain number of tuna tags. In 2017 we were each given seven tuna tags on each of our vessels for a total of 14 tags between us both. We knew this in June. As father and son, a family company, we had a total of 14 tags. Why should we have to stay in two vessels—for a total of \$410 each way across the gulf to fish—when we could buddy up or lease for one month using one vessel to catch the tuna, rather than the two that we presently use?

In the meantime, out of these 13 vessels that take part in this tuna fishery, three are Newfoundland vessels, while the other 10 vessels consist of vessels from Conne River and Nova Scotia. These vessels, unlike the three vessels from Newfoundland, are permitted short-term one-month leases, while we require a one-year lease.

As you can see, as time changes, so must we. A changing fishery requires changing rules, regulations, and policies. We need to encourage young people to stay in the fishery, not try to push them

out. Young people will not stay in an industry where they cannot make a fair living.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that DFO and the union should not worry about too much pressure on our fishing stocks. In reality, the majority of our fisher people in rural Newfoundland are over the age of 55, and time will take care of all this. Also, when changing policies, rules, and regulations that are affecting fishermen, make sure that those who are personally affected are involved in decision-making and are not blindsided. When April 1 rolls around, it's time to go fishing.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Careen, and congratulations. You started out by saying you're not in your element. You've proved yourself wrong right off the top. You did a fine job, sir. Thank you.

Mr. Thorne, you have up to 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Henry Thorne (Fish Harvester, As an Individual): Good morning, Mr. Chairman and committee members.

My name is Henry Thorne, and here's a bit about my background. I've been fishing for 38 years now. I'm also a fifth-generation fisherman. My brothers and I started fishing in small inshore boats and have worked hard to build up our business to include a number of small boats and big boats. We have several.

I'd like to speak about an extension of fishing boats. In my opinion, it should be left up to the individual fisher person to determine the size of boat they can use safely and affordably. Considering the amounts in the licences they have, they would make the proper decisions on the size of the boat.

Vessel capacity is another one that I'd like to speak on. Vessel capacity and extensions kind of go hand in hand. This should be left up to the individual fisher person, because they may need a bigger boat to be safer and to catch a better quality of fish. Also, the way the fishery is changing, in the near future we may need to catch different types of fish and a different quality of fish, which our existing boats may not accommodate. We should leave it to the individual to determine this. Therefore, we may need bigger boats. I do think that if a fisher person was left alone they would very quickly determine what size of boat would best suit them.

Now, on offshore and inshore transfers of licences, I believe this could be a very good thing for the fishery. Over the last three weeks I had the opportunity to be in Fortune Bay, a small community on the south coast of Newfoundland. There were five or six 65-foot vessels that OCI had leased to catch an offshore redfish quota. These boats provided a plant with enough product to employ 50 to 60 workers for a number of weeks. Also, the town benefited from fisher persons spending money there in purchasing simple things such as groceries, fuel, and various supplies. I think there should be more of this co-operation between the inshore and the offshore. There are more species that can be harvested this way, which would help more small towns such as Fortune Bay and more of the small inshore fishing vessels.

On the time frame for operator transfers, personally, I think time frames should be left up to a fisher person to decide. If a fisher person wants to transfer something, let him or her tell DFO what it is that he or she wants and let them determine the time frame. I don't even think that there should be a certain number of days on it. Let them determine it. Some of them may want something for a number of months, or maybe just a few simple days would look after it. I'm going off my subject a little bit now, but certainly, the time frame we have today, our 12-month one, doesn't work. It's too restrictive. Fisher people have a business to run and need some space to do so.

I'll give you an example. We had a 65-foot boat at the marine centre a couple of years ago for repairs and upgrades. Before we could get the work completed, a fisherman from Nova Scotia wanted to purchase our boat. At that time, we had no intention of selling, but he made a very generous offer, so we had to consider it. After careful consideration, we decided to sell and then build a new boat. This was in October, and the only problem we thought we had was how we were going to catch our fish next season. There was no way that we could have a boat built fast enough for the next fishing season. We explained this problem to the Nova Scotia fisherman, and we strategized a plan.

The plan was for the Nova Scotia fisherman to fish during the winter months, November to March, and bring the boat back to Newfoundland so we could fish during the summer months, from April to September. Then we would deliver the boat back to him in the fall and everybody would be happy. Off we went to DFO with our contracts in place, which included financing for a new boat, the sale and agreement of the existing 65-footer, and an agreement between both parties for usage of this 65-footer. We passed the application on to DFO and, surprisingly, it was turned down. After endless appeals and our almost losing the deal to sell our boat, DFO finally agreed. It was ridiculous.

On combining, in my opinion, it's one of the best policies that DFO has in place to help fisher people. With some small changes, we can make it even better. There are some good points about it. It provides a way for fisher people to expand their fishing enterprise. It provides a way for fisher people to retire with dignity. It also doesn't cost taxpayers any money; it's cheap on government. Also, over time, it will reduce the number of fishermen and provide the remaining ones with a better living.

● (0905)

One of the bad points about combining, one thing I see wrong, is that it doesn't go far enough. It states that there's a certain amount of licences that a person can have in his enterprise. This is the issue I have with it: it prevents a fisher person who wants the opportunity to acquire more licences from doing so. Then that person sits on the sidelines and watches processors buy licences that the fisher person could have bought. If we were allowed to combine more licences, it would prevent processors from acquiring more licences, but because of the limitations stated in the policy, it opens the door for processors, instead of the fisher people, to acquire these licences.

In closing, I would like to say thank you to everyone for listening. I'll close with the following remarks.

Let us fish our enterprises and run them like businesses. Please remove some of those stupid roadblocks so we can fish and be prosperous.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thorne.

Moving right along with our harvesters, Mr. Best, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Glen Best: Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members. I would like to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to speak here. I think I met some of you guys back in 2016 when you were at the beautiful Fogo Island Inn back on Fogo Island. Do you remember that? Anyway, it's good to see you again.

My name is Glen Best, as you've heard, and I'm a fish harvester from Fogo Island on the northeast coast of Newfoundland. My brother and I, and my father, now to a lesser degree, operate a multi-species fishing business, and I stress the word "business", because fishing has become an industry that takes substantial money to operate, to be viable, and to create good well-paid jobs for the owners and the crew members. Our family has invested in the vicinity of \$5 million to \$7 million in capital to build our business, acquiring vessels, licences, and gear, a great accomplishment and one to be proud of, I think.

The one common feeling that I get throughout the industry and with all the fishermen I speak to is the feeling of frustration, and that's frustration with a capital F. You heard that frustration from the witnesses who already spoke. Everyone is frustrated, and that frustration grows every year. Every year, there are new rules that restrict us in how we run our fishing operation, whether it be less quota, leasing rules, season dates, trip amounts, or catch rules, and the list goes on. I could go on for an hour.

There's one common thing that I hear amongst harvesters, which is that we need flexibility in running our business. We can't put more fish in the ocean, but we can work together to try to help one another with the limited resource we have. By that, I'm referring to buddy-up, in which one fisher can go aboard with another fisher, and together they can catch one another's fish. That keeps costs down, therefore putting more money in the hands of the harvester.

For example, I'll give you our own personal experience. It's similar to the experiences you've heard about. My brother had a 55-foot longliner. He made a decision to sell it in 2016 and replace it with a better boat. Shortly after the agreement to sell was finalized, the shrimp quota got cut by 40%, in 2016. You have to realize that shrimp was our biggest money-maker at that time. DFO gave him a year to start building a new vessel.

Fast-forward to 2017. Shrimp was cut another 62%. Another 16% is forecast for 2018. From 2015 to 2017, he went from approximately 400,000 pounds of shrimp to 88,000 pounds, so you can imagine that taking that much product and revenue out of your business is devastating. Shrimp was our biggest revenue generator. How can you replace a boat with such a loss in revenue?

Since we already have two vessels.... At one point we had four, and we did some combining and got down to three, and then sold a boat, and now we're at two, because you have rationalize our business. Since we already have two vessels that are underutilized and sit at the dock for approximately nine months of the year, I think we should be able to buddy up and catch his quota on the two other boats we have. That would give us flexibility to divide the resource challenges.

He can combine his quota, and that's fine. He can combine it with me and probably split it with me and my dad. But why should he, after a lifetime of fishing, lose his core enterprise and be forced to sell it or combine it? By that means, he'll also lose his cod shares, his core status, his groundfish. Maybe down the road he'll want to re-enter the fishery as things change. Why can't we at least try buddy-up for a period of time to see how it works out? There have to be options.

There are a lot of other cases out there where fishers want to work together, be they brothers, family operators, or strangers. I know of a father who was one of the most aggressive fisherman on the northeast coast. He caught one hell of a lot of fish, probably the most fish on the northeast coast down our way. He had to sell his enterprise because he couldn't give it to his son to catch.... His son had a 65-footer. He was a young fellow in the fishery and he wanted to go on. He had maxed out his combining; he couldn't take that product and grow his business. His father ended up selling his business, selling out. That was a detriment to that young fellow who wanted to be in this million-dollar industry.

Today, we're at a very sad place in the fishery—some might say desperate—where most stocks are in trouble. Capelin are down 70%, says the latest stock status report. Shrimp in Area 6 are at an all-time low in the time series. For turbot, we have a very small quota, with foreign vessels getting the biggest portion of the quota. With the high participation rate in the Canadian fishery for our portion of the quota, that means the people who participate get a very low share, maybe 50,000 pounds maximum. Cod is showing a 30% decrease in biomass this year, when everybody was pushing with the hope of a renewed cod fishery to replace dwindling shellfish stocks. Now more than ever, we need flexibility to run our businesses. We need to be able to work together.

• (0910)

Should a fisher be forced to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars, or even millions, when it doesn't make sense to do so?

Should five brothers—or strangers, for that matter—be forced to invest in a boat to catch 3,000 pounds of cod a week when they could buddy up and put more dollars in their pockets? Should we overcapitalize this industry to a point where it puts more pressure on the resource, so that the fish must fit the people instead of the people fitting the fish? I think we have a history of already doing that. What suffers? The fish.

The fishing industry in Newfoundland has serious problems. The high price of crab right now is the only thing that keeps the fleets viable. If you took two bucks a pound off crab this year, we would have vessels that would not untie from the dock. If people want to combine and take on more debt, that's fine. I'm all for combining. Fill your boots. Go ahead, but I think we need more options, and one of those is buddying up. We have done that. We have combined. We have spent millions of dollars combining. Still, give people the option to buddy up and have the flexibility besides combining alone.

The fishing has changed and the licensing rules have to change also. There are options in short-term leasing. I'll repeat what Mr. Careen said. Some groups in Newfoundland, I understand, can lease for one day. In Nova Scotia, you can lease for 30 days. A guy from Nova Scotia can come to Newfoundland and fish on a short-term lease, finish fishing in Newfoundland, and go back home to Nova Scotia to fish. In Newfoundland, we have to do a 12-month change of registration. If we had had that changed, we could have worked that scenario for ourselves instead of being forced to sell our enterprises or combining up.

On the issue of vessel capacity, I don't know if there is a truly competitive fishery out there anymore. Crab has IQs, and capelin, herring, shrimp, and turbot are all on trip or cap limits. Vessel size and capacity don't really play into it as a big factor. If a guy has the ability to get that bigger boat for his reasons, be they safety, efficiency, or otherwise, it should be his decision if it doesn't ultimately hurt the resource.

I feel that the industry in Newfoundland has come to a point where everybody must be managed down to one common denominator. There's no incentive for a person to be aggressive or grow. This was backed by a DFO official at your committee meeting on February 15, 2018. It was said that even in an IQ fishery, a larger vessel would have a competitive advantage over a smaller boat on preferential fishing grounds. I always thought DFO's mandate was to manage the fish and the stocks, not control competition.

I understand that fishing has a social aspect to it too. I agree that we should try to keep independence in the industry so that a few don't control the wealth. That said, we must have the ability to make a good living with the resources we have and to work together. A lot of the rules that are supposed to keep us independent are actually doing the opposite. If you're forced to sell your licence or buy a licence to combine with your own, which in turn causes you to have a high debt level that's not sustainable, is that making you more independent? I don't think so.

In closing, I would say to Minister LeBlanc that changes in the Fisheries Act are supposed to strengthen the owner/operator policy. That policy only works if we have something to catch.

Almost all stocks, if not all, are in states of decline. Capelin, cod, and shrimp are examples. Science says that we're not fishing a large part of the biomass, so what's happening in the ocean? We have to consider the fact that there are seven to eight million harp seals alone out there in the environment right now, by DFO estimates. If seven million seals eat just one pound of fish a day—and I'm being very conservative—for 365 days, that would equate to 1,161,000 tonnes of fish. That's one pound for one animal each day. That's 1,161,000 tonnes of something that lives in the ocean, whether it be capelin, cod, shrimp, or herring. The list goes on. The question has to be asked: if the ecosystem is so out of balance, can those species ever rebuild themselves?

Then there's the issue of seismic testing. What is that doing to the species that live in the ocean, to the larvae, to the phytoplankton? We have new MPAs that have just been announced under the Fisheries Act, which are supposed to protect habitat and in turn help fish species thrive. In those same areas, the oil and gas industry still operates with no change. Seismic work carries on now more than ever. These are the issues we face today.

• (0915)

In the meantime, it comes back to my earlier comments. We have serious resource problems. How do we work with what we have so we can have the strongest viable enterprise possible that can attract young people and eliminate the negativity associated with fishing? I'm sad to say that I've probably been part of that negativity, because one day I said to my son, who is 20 years old, "Would you be interested in going fishing?" He said, "Dad, why would I when all I've heard is negativity?" It sort of sticks a knife in you.

In my opinion, we need flexibility. The way we're operating now is not good enough. When you guys were on Fogo Island last time on September 28, 2016, a committee member asked me, after I spoke, what the committee could do to help us. I'm asking you to pass on to the minister the fact that we need a change in licensing rules in the industry, because the status quo is not working.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Best. I have just a quick clarification.

First of all, before I do that, Mr. Greenham, you can still hear us, right? You're hearing all of this?

Mr. Collin Greenham: Yes, I can.

The Chair: We'll get to you after Mr. Woodford.

In the meantime, I have just a quick clarification, Mr. Best. You said that in order to combine or buddy up with your brother, you would lose your other species licence.

Mr. Glen Best: That's the way it works. He can split it up and combine it with the other two boats. He's been fishing his whole life, since he was 15 years old, since he was old enough to get seasick. He can take his enterprise—he can split up his crab and shrimp—and he can put it on other vessels. But he has three cod shares that he would lose—he can bank for 24 months—that have to be passed on to somebody else. Now, with the news on cod, maybe nobody will want them and they will have no value.

The Chair: Yes, I understand that. I was just wondering about the fact that you can't combine everything. That's what I'm saying. I just want to get clarification.

Mr. Glen Best: You can't combine everything, no. Some things, he's going to lose. He's going to lose his core status, his cod shares, and maybe some other small licences, and I don't think that's fair.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We're now on to our next harvester.

Mr. Woodford, go ahead, please, for up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Eldred Woodford (Fish Harvester, As an Individual): Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you here today.

My name is Eldred Woodford. I'm here representing the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union of Newfoundland and Labrador. I represent the fish harvesters in my region on the Fish, Food and Allied Workers inshore council.

I live in Herring Neck, a small rural community on the northeast coast of Newfoundland. I've been fishing 30 years. I started out as a crew member in the inshore. For the last 25 years, I've been the owner-operator of a multi-species 50-foot enterprise, primarily fishing snow crab. Almost all of the fisheries we prosecute today are competitive ones of some sort, with the exception of snow crab, which since 1996 has been an IQ fishery. Generally speaking, most of my fishing occurs offshore.

I am pleased to be here today to talk about vessel length. There is no doubt that vessel length policies are a frequent topic of discussion in the fishery. My goal here today is to share the perspective held by the majority of fish harvesters in my area. Some people would want to use this opportunity to tell you something that would personally benefit only themselves, but I would be doing a disservice to the fishery and the majority of fish harvesters in our province if I did that. I'm here today speaking on behalf of the fish harvesters who elected me to represent them in my region. These are their perspectives, not ones that I've cherry-picked to cater to the interests of one or two individuals.

As the committee is likely aware, the fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador has gone through many changes in the past 30 years. We went from a fishery based on cod and groundfish to one that was shellfish-dominated. Now we are transitioning once again. As a result of these changes in the ecosystem, many fishing enterprises in the province are multi-species enterprises.

Previous presenters to the committee have talked about safety. They've talked about competitiveness in the fishery. To be clear, snow crab is an individual quota in Newfoundland. So is 3Ps cod on the south coast. But many fisheries are still competitive, and it's because of this that changing vessel length restrictions could result in increased safety issues in the fishery.

It's true that fishing is one of the most dangerous occupations in the world, but a larger boat does not always guarantee safety. Safety is a mindset. It's the decisions you make as an enterprise owner and the steps you take on board your vessel, regardless of length, that contribute to safety. As I said, most enterprises in Newfoundland are multi-species, and the majority of harvesters in the province participate in a competitive fishery, whether it's shrimp, turbot, cod, capelin, mackerel, herring, or seals. Allowing for increases in vessel length may satisfy the demands of a few harvesters who own multiple enterprises, but for the many more harvesters who can't afford to buy the larger vessels, it will force them to try to make more trips and go out in dangerous conditions in order to compete with the larger vessels. This will do nothing to increase safety in the industry.

In 1995 DFO began issuing snow crab permits to the inshore less-than-35-foot vessels in our area. At that time, about half of the supplementary snow crab fleet was fishing inside the line, basically within the bays. The other half of the supplementary fleet was fishing outside the line, or offshore. As more less-than-35-foot vessels entered into this new inshore crab fleet, those of us in the larger supplementary fleet, who traditionally fished inshore, were forced to move outside or offshore. DFO practically doubled their IQs to compensate them for moving out of the bays or the inshore areas. Because of these increased quotas and the increased number of larger vessels that were fishing outside of this line, or outside the bays, or offshore, however you refer to it, this resource was overfished. Along with changing environmental conditions, the stock has since declined.

In 1997 DFO changed the licensing policy with respect to vessel length for the supplementary and full-time fleets. As a result, most of the supplementary, who were operating smaller vessels, were permitted to acquire larger vessels. At that time, the resource was strong. It allowed the fleet to harvest their allocations with little difficulty. Currently, these fleet vessels range from 40 feet to 70 feet. At present, even though the snow crab is an IQ fishery, because it is a declining resource there's an element of competition in that fishery. In my fleet, prior to policy changes made in 1997, there was only a handful of 65-foot vessels. There were no issues with crab resource abundance.

• (0920)

After the change, the number of boats over 65 feet practically tripled. Now, the resource has declined. Smaller vessels that can carry only 300 crab pots are at a competitive disadvantage to the

larger 65-foot fleet that can carry 800 pots. This has forced some fish harvesters operating in smaller vessels to fish in poor weather and compete with the larger vessels, thus negatively affecting safety. I've used this as an example of how changes made to policy can have negative impacts on some.

Before I turn things over to my colleague, I want to speak on the issue of consultation. Based on previous presentations to the committee, you might have the perception that the opinion of the majority of fish harvesters in our province is being ignored by DFO or our union. This is simply not true.

The reality here is that changes to vessel length policy are not supported by the majority of harvesters in our fleet. In fact, at recent crab consultations in Gander, I spoke to several harvester representatives, in both fleets, who raised concerns about the committee's ongoing study. What I heard from the majority of those harvesters or those representatives is that they were not concerned with this issue and they were not in support of changing the existing policy.

If that policy is changed to allow fewer fish harvesters to use vessels of up to 45 feet in the inshore, it will create more pressure on the harvesters operating under the currently existing policy, many of whom have already spent thousands of dollars to modify their vessels under the existing policy. This policy change will force some either to buy larger vessels or to fish in poor weather in order to compete with the larger ones within their fleet. This policy change will do absolutely nothing to improve safety within that fleet. It will increase the harvest, and it will also increase the harvesting capacity in the turbot fishery, thus decreasing the viability of existing turbot-fishing enterprises.

No one here would disagree with you that consultation is key when it comes to how our fishery decisions are made, but we must be careful not to make changes to our fishery based on the views of a minority. We have a democratic structure within our organization and our fleets that allows for significant debate on the issue, and time and time again the majority of harvesters have come to the conclusion that they are satisfied with the existing policy with regard to vessel length.

These are the views that representatives like me bring forward to DFO. When the time comes that the views of the majority of harvesters change, then I will bring those recommendations forward, but we cannot bend to the demands of a few individuals who hold many multiple enterprises and who want to push out those who can't afford to compete with the larger vessels. This is not in the best interests of our harvesters or our communities.

I'll now turn things over to my colleague, Keith Smith, who will share his views. I look forward to answering any questions.

Thank you very much.

• (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Woodford.

Before we do that, I want to beg Mr. Greenham's forgiveness. I mentioned that we were going to him next, but Mr. Woodford spoke, obviously on behalf of FFAW, and we are going to go to Mr. Smith now for his comments.

We'll end on a high note, Mr. Greenham, and you'll be the last one. We'll be with you in just a few minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Smith.

Mr. Keith Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chair and representatives, for letting me speak here today.

I represent the under-35 fleet in Trinity Bay.

A voice: Under 40 feet.

Mr. Keith Smith: Under 40? I always considered it 34 feet 11 inches, but under 40. I'm crab committee chair of that fleet.

This question arose when I was asked about it by a representative. He wanted the question asked to see how people felt about it two years ago. I let it go down to the floor. Discussion happened. Everybody put in their views. At the end of it, overwhelmingly, over 90% voted to leave it like it was. They didn't want to compete with the bigger individuals and be plant controlled.

Most of the fishermen I speak for are definitely not plant or corporation owned. They are themselves. They do not want to have the expense and have to compete in unsafe conditions against the bigger boats. Most of the boats are from 30 feet to 36 feet. We've been doing pretty good. Their opinions are that if we go bigger we will need more resource. As everybody has said clearly here today, the resource is declining. I hope everybody takes that into consideration.

I've been in this industry since 1979. I started by myself. My brother joined me the next year. I fished all the species that I could possibly get a licence for. I've never been tied to a plant, a company, or even a bank. I have always done it on my own, on our own, and have built a good livelihood. I've always spoke as.... My partner here goes back a good many years. We're on the board of directors for the Sealers Association. I always speak as the majority, as each one of you does here in your job: it's the majority.

That's the biggest concern I have. We have a few outspoken individuals who are looking at their own agenda—or even companies pushing them for an agenda—to change these policies to their benefit. They don't look at the overall picture. The vote in 2017 in my two meetings, in the 206 pieces of pie that I represent, was still an overwhelming 90%. I hope you take into consideration how these people feel about this.

How do you pay for individuals...? Most of us are my age. We have a few younger guys, but not very many. I think the average age in my fleet is around 58. That's for the owners. These younger guys who have committed don't want to be forced to have a bigger boat to

compete in the competitive fisheries such as capelin and cod. It is a competitive fishery, even the crab. It's IQ, yes, but it's still competitive within your zone. It's a big concern. I hope you all look at it and say that the majority should have the biggest say here, not the minority. That's a big part of this.

Look at this fishery. Some people are looking to get out and to just try to spend their last few years there. When that thing came out on the lobster, that V-notching, I was one of the first guys who started voluntarily doing it. I tried to persuade my fishermen in the area to look at the future, for the future of people, so that we could leave more resources in the water than when we started. I think that should be taken into consideration. I don't know about having the same numbers, but we need to have people actively involved in the fishery. If we all go bigger, I'll tell you, there are definitely not enough resources there for everybody. That's a huge concern from my perspective overall.

I think this is a major way of getting rid of the small guy. I think that's the way the finger is pointed. I'm very upset over it, honest to God. I wouldn't be here today if I didn't feel this way, and it comes from inside, not from writing the damn cheques. I hope that everybody can see where this is going. I can, Eldred can, and so can some of the other fishermen.

Thank you.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Smith.

The average age is 58. Did I get that correct?

Mr. Keith Smith: Yes., I think that's the correct number for the licence owners. Most of them are not owned, operated, or driven by companies. If that is lifted to 44 feet 11 inches, they feel that we will be forced to be tied to a plant and we're very uncomfortable with that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Smith. We appreciate that.

Last, but by no means least, we have Mr. Greenham. You have up to 10 minutes, please. Go ahead.

Mr. Collin Greenham: Thank you.

Hello. My name is Collin Greenham. I am an inshore fisherman from Pacquet, which is located on the northeast coast of the Island of Newfoundland. I am the owner of an inshore fishing enterprise and operate a 39-foot vessel to harvest my quotas. I have a fishing master fourth class and 25 years' experience fishing.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for providing a platform for my voice to be heard. My presentation will put forward my views of the commercial fishing vessel extension regulations, combining quotas, and commercial fishing capacity.

First, the commercial fishing vessel extension regulations must be amended to allow inshore fish harvesters the right to increase the length of their vessel to enhance safety for all those on board: family members, crew members, owners, and captains. It is my view that the restriction of vessel length at 39 feet 11 inches, should be amended to allow a minimum vessel length of 44 feet 11 inches. The implementation of new regulations a few short years ago forced inshore harvesters to travel further out into the open, unprotected, and dangerous waters of the North Atlantic, approximately 200 miles offshore, to harvest turbot. This has been my experience for the last three years of fishing turbot: at one time, you could fish turbot near shore, but now, like I said, through regulation changes and so on, we have to go out to the continental shelf.

As you are aware, Newfoundland and Labrador is the most easterly province in Canada, and the island portion of the province, located far out in the North Atlantic Ocean, provides fish harvesters with no shelter within minutes of leaving its rugged shores. Yet our western neighbours in the province of Nova Scotia, attached to the mainland, who primarily fish with shelter from the islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, have regulations that permit their inshore fleet to reach 44 feet 11 inches. I ask you to help me understand why this could be: the most easterly province in Canada does not have the same regulations as our western neighbour regarding inshore fishing vessel length.

Should you be thinking of increased competition in the fishery as per such a regulation amendment, I say that nothing could be further from the truth. I have three IQs, which include snow crab. I have two capelin IQs. I have the toad crab IQ. When I go after turbot, I have a trip limit quota, the same as every other vessel. This is a decision not about competition but rather safety—the safety of those putting their lives on the line each time they leave port to steam out into the open North Atlantic to put food on our kitchen tables.

My other points are about combining quotas and commercial fishing vessel capacities.

My view on combining licences is that it would be a positive step for the industry, a step in the right direction. With the amount of outmigration from rural areas becoming more apparent year after year, the combining of quotas could assist with efforts to curb this trend. It could provide crew members with the necessary income to survive and thrive, not to mention the added benefit for enterprise owners like me to be able to retain properly trained crew members, who otherwise would collect a paycheque and migrate to better prospects once the season has ended.

Combining quotas would also offset the financial burden for enterprise owners who bought quotas based on prices and quotas in previous years to find out that a third of their quota has been cut the following year.

In terms of commercial fishing capacity, all key species are on either IQs or trip limits. Like I said, in 2007, the changes in regulations granted offshore harvesters an overall increase of up to 25 feet, while inshore harvesters were given only five feet. I don't think that was fair, and I think vessel length should be between me and Transport Canada. I can understand it for some guys who like fishing in the bottom of the bays in a 20-foot speedboat, yes. I mean, they're landlocked, or they're on a small vessel.

● (0935)

When I leave my port, I'm open to the ocean, the North Atlantic, one of the most dangerous oceans in the world. I travel every year. For the last three years, I've been going to the continental shelf to fish turbot. That's not going to change; I'm still going to do it. I just want a bigger vessel, the gold 44 feet 11 inches, so I can make it safe for myself, my crew, and my family. Like I said, before now, we could fish turbot closer to shore, but DFO regulations stopped us from doing that.

I acquired my licences from my father, my mother, and my father-in-law. I bought them out when they retired. This goes back generations of fishermen in my family. Originally from the Horse Islands, my family is. Like I said, I think it's a big safety issue. We should be able to go to 44 feet 11 inches. That's my biggest concern.

Once again, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the chair and the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for providing this platform for dialogue. I hope we can move forward in a unified approach to strengthen the oldest traditions so they continue for generations to come.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Greenham.

Before I go to the questions, I have a very quick question and clarification. You said you're fishing turbot and you're going to the continental shelf. Just to give the committee an idea of how far that is in miles, how far would you steam out to catch turbot on average?

● (0940)

Mr. Collin Greenham: Last year I travelled and I was in 2J. I was 225 miles from La Scie, and I've been travelling to that area now for the last three years. I went up to 3L. I fished two years up in 3L. That's about 130 miles off Cape Bonavista.

The Chair: The most is just over 200 nautical miles from the port where you live?

Mr. Collin Greenham: Yes, that's right.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Now we go to questions, folks. Votes are still possible, so we have at least four questions.

We're going to start with the mover of the motion, Mr. McDonald.

You have seven minutes, please.

I remind the committee members to please identify who the question is for, because we have a lot of witnesses here.

Mr. McDonald.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for appearing today.

I just want to let the committee know, because Mr. Stratton mentioned that I invited him and Mr. Careen, that I actually invited five fishermen to come here because I wanted the committee members to hear what I hear on a daily basis, whether I'm in Calvert, Point Lance, or Harbour Grace, and to give them a chance to tell their story.

I do believe that the five fishermen who I invited to be witnesses are not owned by a company. They're individual company owners. They own their own enterprises, but some of them—and probably all of them—have a lot of money invested in their enterprise. They're not owned by anybody. They might be owned by a bank—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ken McDonald: —but as long as they keep making their payments, they're in control. I just wanted to state that.

Mr. Woodford, you stated that the majority of people are against increasing the size of the vessels from the current limit of 39 feet 11 inches to 44 feet and 11 inches. For the committee, what size of vessel do you fish in?

Mr. Eldred Woodford: I operate a 50-foot vessel, sir.

Mr. Ken McDonald: A 50-foot? Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Thorne, I've met you a couple of times. You mentioned you were building a new boat last year and you had problems with the one that got leased or purchased in Nova Scotia.

On the deck of that boat one day when we were having a chat, you made a statement that stayed with me, and that's kind of why I invited you to appear at the committee. Your statement went something like this. "People talk doom and gloom in the fishery," you said, "and there's no doom and gloom in the fishery if the bureaucrats would just get out of our way and let us fish." Could you explain what you meant by that statement?

Mr. Henry Thorne: I'll try.

Every time you turn on the radio or TV, especially back in Newfoundland, back home—I don't know about up here, because it's new to me—it's always doom and gloom. You see fellows going around in all kinds of different small rigs. You never see the people who put a lot of money into it, and God love the ones who don't put the money in it—it's up to themselves. I'm not trying to make bad friends here.

I started off with a small boat and worked my way up. We built a new 80-footer. We have a 55-footer and we have two 40-footers. No company owns us. I can guarantee that, boys. Everything we've got is owned, and we'd own a lot more if the companies would get out of the way or you people would let us.

For me, sitting back here now, I want to buy more licences. They can say what they like about it. A good many of us want to buy licences, but we're too limited, three and combining, and I have to sit back now and let Mr. Quinlan and the rest of the plants buy up stuff and give to those people. If our combining was changed, I'd go four,

five, or six in each one of the boats so Mr. Quinlan can't get so many. Then you have way better jobs and more men employed, and then doom and gloom wouldn't be there.

If a plant owns it, he can tell you to go and fish. You get one licence, you go do this, you go do that, and you do that. There is a nice bit of that. A lot of it is our fault for sitting around the table and letting that happen. That's where I think the doom and gloom would come into it. If a plant owned me, I'd go this way.... I wouldn't be able to afford the licence that we have because he wouldn't go along with it. He'd send me off fishing. When we're independent, we can buy our licences.

We don't want money from anybody. We can go to the bank and get our own money and do our own thing. Over the years, we've done very well. Let us do that, and we can turn stuff around a nice bit, in my opinion. We have 13 of us on our boats now making very good livings. Leave us alone and we'll make 26 very good livings. That's about as good as I can tell you.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Thank you for that. As I said, I did see the new vessel you built at Harbour Grace Ocean Enterprises, and you didn't buy that for a dollar, I guarantee you.

Mr. Henry Thorne: No.

Mr. Ken McDonald: You have millions of dollars invested in your enterprise, for sure.

Mr. Careen, you mentioned having to own four boats and fish two at a time. How frustrating is this as an enterprise owner to know that in order to fish what you have in quotas, you've got to have four boats and you've got to have a certain size? How frustrating is that for you and for your enterprise?

Mr. Roy Careen: It's very frustrating because, first of all, it doubles your expenses. Then you have boats to maintain. There's a lot of stuff involved in it. As Mr. Smith said about their communities, most of the people are 58 years of age, so in seven or eight years' time, they won't have any worries about pressure on the stocks. They're all going to be out of the fishery.

My opinion about this is that we do live in Canada, a great country, and that everybody is supposed to be.... I'm fortunate, you know. I have a couple of 50-foot boats. What about the guy who has a boat that's 39 feet 11 inches? Why can't he be on an equal playing field with me and have the 50-foot boat with me if he chooses to? We're fishing the same species. It's all IQs. I don't know where those gentlemen got that the fishery is not IQ.... I'd like to know because I like to get involved. I'm a competitive fisherman.

Voices: Oh, oh!

● (0945)

The Chair: You still have over two minutes left, Mr. McDonald. You go right ahead.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Stratton, you mentioned the non-core cod fishery and how people were limited. It's my understanding that in the non-core cod fishery the maximum you can have is a 28-foot vessel.

Mr. Billy Stratton: Yes.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Once you stop fishing and while you're fishing, you can't sell that particular quota to Mr. Careen, Mr. Thorne, or Mr. Woodford. That quota dies when you decide not to fish it. Can you explain that to the members of the committee, please?

Mr. Billy Stratton: Yes. You're right in what you're saying there. What's been done to a lot of those people who've slipped through the cracks is wrong; they didn't know where the people were to get core. What's happened is ridiculous.

Up in my area, a man died about a month ago. His wife works in a fish plant. His son fished with him. He fished all his life. That's all he ever did. Right now he can't turn it over to his son and his wife can't sell it. It's automatically going back to DFO. What's going on with this non-core, which is non-core against core, is ridiculous, as far as I can see. We're all in a little community. We know each other. We're not here in Halifax; this is the first time ever in my life that I was here. I have a job to walk up the street because I'm running into people and everything, right?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Billy Stratton: What they're doing is not sustainable. We all have the same quota for codfish. How's a fellow going to compete in a 29-foot boat against a fellow in a 65-foot boat like those boys? They're going to have to change the rules on those boat regulations.

The other thing I'm going to speak on now while I'm at it, is that we're running a company. If I wanted to get a boat, 44 feet 11 inches, say, or if I wanted to scale it down one foot, that should be up to me. If I say that I have to go where this man just told you here at the time on the screen...that's where we're heading. Crab is failing desperately in our area so we're in cod now and turbot. I have the same licence as those boys have, the same thing. They're going to be able to go comfortably, and I'm going to have to go in nothing. I'll be grounded. It's all about safety. What they're doing is very wrong. Anyway, that's my answer.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Woodford, I'll give you a very quick reply. I have to go to the next question, but go ahead.

Mr. Eldred Woodford: I'm a little dissatisfied here this morning with the way this is. I thought the issue was vessel length policy. We've gone into many issues that are using up a lot of valuable time here, because we can explain some stuff with regard to vessel length policies that could probably better inform your members, Mr. Chair. I'm very disappointed in this.

You've questioned me, Mr. McDonald, with regard to the size of vessel that I operate. It's a 50-foot vessel. It's outside of the parameters of what this policy changes and what you're contemplating there now. It is a prime example of how policy change affects others after it's done. I went through, witnessed, and experienced the change in 1997 after the supplementary crab fleets and the full-time

crab fleets were allowed to increase their vessels and go up to 65 feet.

At the time, there was no resource issue. We were out there fishing, and whether you fished in April or I fished in June, there was a lot of resource there and everyone got their quotas. Right now, I have an IQ on crab. I'm going to go fishing now in two weeks' time and I'm going to carry 300 pots on my vessel, maybe more, to try to compete with the larger vessels that can now carry 800 to 900 pots.

Once these regulations change.... You have to understand that you might say today that you're satisfied with something. At the time when the offshore crab fleets were allowed to increase their vessel length, we were using 300 pots. Everyone was using 300 pots. Now we're using 800 pots, and those guys have a complete advantage. Under the policy of 1997, by increasing your size at that time, you were not supposed to have any competitive advantage. That changed with some other policies that fell through after that.

•(0950)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Woodford. I have to end it right there because someone else has to ask a question.

Regarding clarification on your point about the subject matter, at this committee it is normal for us to give the floor for seven minutes to the questioner and the witness. They can talk about whatever they wish, really.

Mr. Eldred Woodford: Well....

The Chair: We could make a ruling if it comes from one of the witnesses that we've gone off track, but we normally give people a lot of leeway in these types of hearings.

Mr. Arnold, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

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

First, I want to thank our witnesses this morning for taking the time out of their busy lives to come in and testify before us today, but I'm going to use my time a little differently this morning, Mr. Chair.

During the course of the three meetings we've had on this study, the committee has received testimony from 20 witnesses. In the testimony, the committee has received evidence describing the federal government's misaligned processes, administered by multiple levels of federal government entities, for licensing of commercial fishing vessels.

At times, the evidence, including that from federal departmental officials, has been contradictory. Evidence has described a process administered by multiple federal entities that is inconsistent in a way that fails to ensure the safety or regulatory certainty for commercial vessels in Atlantic Canada.

It's reasonable for this committee to believe that risk to human life on board commercial fishing vessels can greatly be reduced in the process for licensing commercial fishing vessels if it is rationalized and harmonized among federal entities.

Rather than see this study derailed, in light of what's been taking place recently and the time allocation vote on Bill C-68, the Fisheries Act, which will be coming before this committee and which would disrupt this committee's activities for probably six or more meetings, I'd like to move the following motion so that action can be taken before further risk to life and the certainty of commercial and family fishing operations is put further at risk.

Therefore, I move: that, within 48 hours of passing this motion, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans send to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Minister of Transport a letter and attach to the letter the evidence received by the committee during meetings 87, 90 and 91; and that the letter respectfully request that the two ministers meet by April 10, 2018, within two weeks, to discuss the process of licensing commercial fishing vessels, and the applicable factors of vessel length, as administered by their respective departments; and in that letter respectfully request the ministers direct the appropriate representatives of their departments to meet to identify steps to resolve the apparent inconsistencies of the licensing process by April 24, 2018, within 4 weeks; and in that letter respectfully request that representatives of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Department of Transport invite all holders of licences for commercial vessels issued by federal entities in Atlantic Canada to attend consultation sessions or submit input in writing so that all licence holders may provide input for improving the licensing process; and respectfully request that by June 5, 2018, within 10 weeks, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Minister of Transport provide the committee a written summary of input received and steps identified by the ministers and their departmental representatives to harmonize and rationalize the process used by federal entities to license commercial vessels and increase safety of those operating and working on those vessels; and respectfully request that the appropriate minister, or both ministers, initiate the regulatory and legislative changes required to implement the steps identified to harmonize and rationalize the process used by federal entities to license commercial vessels and increase the safety of those operating and working on those vessels.

• (0955)

The Chair: Everybody has read and understood...?

We have a motion on the floor, gentlemen, and we have to deal with that first.

Mr. McDonald, do you care to comment?

Mr. Ken McDonald: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the member for putting forward his motion, but right now we're kind of past the midway point of this study on vessel length and regulations. I'm not prepared to wipe the slate clean and do this. I want to see this finished. We have the rest of today—an hour or whatever it is—to hear from these witnesses. We have again on Thursday I believe scheduled the departmental officials to come back, the same ones who presented at the first meeting. Then we will be able to put forward recommendations that we want to see included in this study.

That's the path that I would like to see. I'm not going to shortchange it now and require the minister or two ministers to meet to discuss what we're talking about, because we're not finished. I

won't be supporting the motion. I want to hear from the witnesses today and again on Thursday.

The Chair: Is there any further comment?

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Certainly, Mr. Chair. I by no means meant that this study should be over, but I can see the potential delays because of having to deal with Bill C-68 within committee. As we know, legislative business takes precedence over committee studies, so this process could be delayed by weeks or months, or possibly into the fall, because of the process of dealing with legislative business in the committee.

I certainly by no means wanted to imply that we were going to end this process, but I see an urgency and a necessity to address the inconsistencies between two federal departments that are causing great strife in Atlantic Canada, with fishermen, their families, and their communities. Those two ministries need to meet to start to resolve these issues sooner rather than later.

The Chair: Mr. Miller, and then Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

I certainly support what Mr. Arnold is trying to accomplish here, and I think he should have just satisfied Mr. McDonald's concern about the study ending. The last thing we should want is that.

With regard to the testimony I've heard today, I have never heard of a federal law, or any other law, that is so bizarre and totally incomprehensible at times. I'm still trying to get my head around it. With this motion that Mr. Arnold has put forward, if it's followed to the letter, things will actually get done on this. In the meantime, we can still talk about it and hear witnesses. I'm looking forward to my questioning as well, when the time comes. I think it's a potential solution. It doesn't mean that we can't add to it at some point.

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): I think Mr. Miller brings up a good point when he talks about the intent of the motion if it's followed. The question is—and I wonder if Mr. McDonald realizes it—what could happen if this isn't passed. Perhaps I'd ask our clerk to clarify in that event.

Mr. Chair, as you know, several times I've brought up Bill C-68 coming to this committee. You've said we can't speculate. Fair enough, and we're still dealing with hypotheticals, but in the event that Bill C-68 does come to this committee, does that supersede the current studies? Maybe you or the clerk could give some clarification as to whether that's actually the case. The Conservatives have a good point.

The Chair: When we receive an order of reference about legislation, it takes precedence, period. That's it.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: If the vote happens on Wednesday, it will come on Thursday. I ask the Liberals if they understand that, because that's the point being made by Mr. Arnold. That comes to committee and, depending on how many witnesses we see and how long that takes, it could go right through the summer.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you may go ahead.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I completely agree with what my colleague is proposing in his motion. There is uncertainty in the industry, so we need to move quickly in order to bring clarity to the process. We need to be mindful of fishers, and the motion establishes a reasonable time frame for the ministers to respond and put measures in place. This will help bring about an effective system in which fishers know what to expect.

● (1000)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mel's motion makes a lot of sense, but it calls for some rationalization, some simplification, some sorting things out between the two ministries. From listening to these folks from the east coast—and I'm from the west coast, so conditions are a little different—I get the impression that there's something really fundamental here that needs to be looked at a bit more closely. This isn't just a matter of getting two ministries in sync. There are some fundamental decisions that need to be looked at a little more closely.

What problems are we trying to solve through the rules that are in place right now? Are there different ways of solving those problems? I get the sense that there are. The coordination between the two ministries might just simply be putting patches on an old boat. We actually need to take a step back and really ask ourselves some more fundamental questions before we send a couple of ministries down this rabbit hole.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the comments from the others around the room.

We've heard testimony in the first three meetings on how fishermen's lives and investments have been put at risk. They're risking by fishing on vessels that have been modified and later finding out they weren't modified. They're having to spend incredible sums to remodify their modifications. I can't understand why the committee members would not support moving forward on this motion and not ending the study entirely...but let's get going so that lives and investments aren't put further at risk by further delay. We know that it's inevitably going to come because of the time allocation on Bill C-68....

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Chair, I'm seeking clarification, and I think you've provided some. Let's say this motion passes and then Bill C-68 is forwarded to this committee. What happens?

The Chair: Bill C-68.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Even if we pass the motion, we can't implement or exercise this.

The Chair: Technically we can continue on with what we're doing. However, it's been the practice of committee...and of course we primarily go by convention in many cases. We would go to Bill C-68 given the fact of prioritization when we receive the order of reference from the House on that particular bill. I hope that provides more clarification for you.

Ms. Jordan.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I don't want to belabour this point because I really wanted to question some of these witnesses today.

This needs more discussion. It's actually a very good motion, but there could be some changes to it. Unfortunately, we can't do that. I can't support it as is right now. I really want to go to these witnesses who came a long way to testify today.

Would Mr. Arnold, who put the motion forward, be willing to table it Thursday, when we can discuss it during committee business?

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Can we be assured that it will be on committee business and not disrupted by votes or other business?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Order. You of course do realize that the situation you paint is not one I can predict, nor am I willing to. You can put the motion forward on Thursday if you so desire. Do you want to proceed with the vote right now?

Mr. Mel Arnold: I would rather proceed with the vote right now.

The Chair: Mr. Miller?

Mr. Larry Miller: I'd ask for a recorded vote, please.

The Chair: Yes. We'll go to the vote on the motion in front of you by Mr. Arnold.

(Motion negated [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The motion is defeated, and according to the clock we have a few minutes left for the Conservatives.

You chewed up a lot of that with the motion, not that there's anything wrong with that—don't get me wrong. You have a couple of minutes left before we go to Mr. Donnelly.

● (1005)

Mr. Larry Miller: Is this the last part of Mr. Arnold's time?

The Chair: Pretty much. You have about two minutes, sir.

Mr. Larry Miller: Thank you very much.

I want to really thank our witnesses here today. I do a bit of recreational fishing, but my background is beef farming. I've had a lot of strange stuff under my fingernails like you guys have, and I admire that. I also know that those of us in business, whatever it is, would sooner be at home looking after business than doing what you're doing, but it's important that you're here. Thanks for that.

I come from Ontario around the Great Lakes. While we have commercial fishing, it's not nearly to the extent that you guys have out there. I cannot get my head around this vessel length stuff. It should be about choice and I'm going to use it.... I hunt deer and I hunt moose. I have a licence to hunt both, and bear if I want, or whatever. It doesn't matter if I go out with my .308 rifle, a .22, or a damn club, I can only kill one of them.

Can somebody enlighten me on why it shouldn't be up to individuals to decide on their own what length of boat they use? Can somebody explain that? I only have a few minutes, so please keep it as brief as possible.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Woodford.

Mr. Eldred Woodford: With regard to the length of the vessel, it always pertained to the fishery, I guess, that you were involved in. It was separated by fleet. The size of the vessel determined what fleet you were in.

Under the existing policy here now, we have a less-than-40-foot fleet and we have an over-40-foot fleet in Newfoundland. Prior to the last policy change, there was a less-than-35-foot fleet and an over-35-foot fleet. Many in the fleet that I represent....

I'm sorry to say "the fleet that I represent", because actually I represent both fleets, over and under. I'm an elected representative on the inshore council, representing the less-than-40-foot and the over-40-foot.

It was basically a length that just separated the fleets in the category of practicable licences that you had and the quantity of fish that you had to catch. There was a separation there between the over and the under with regard to basically inshore and offshore. Prior to this committee's ongoing work with regard to the policy change to increase up to 44 feet 11 inches, a large number of enterprise owners within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador realized the policy change, understood the policy change, and worked within the existing policy to modify vessels to increase their sizes from 30 feet or 32 feet up to 39 feet, 11 inches. Some individuals on the island purchased vessels far in excess of that length policy and tried to modify them—some successfully, some not so successfully. That was an individual's decision.

A large number of vessels—I'll say again, a large number—were modified under the existing policy. Guys spent thousands and thousands of dollars to do that. If this committee does promote and advise a policy for the larger 44 feet and 11 inches, what will we do with all these vast majorities of individuals who have already spent thousands of dollars? Are we going to force them to spend more thousands to increase their size again? I mean, the size the vessel basically separated the fleets. That was it, right?

• (1010)

The Chair: Mr. Woodford, thank you for that.

The bells have rung, folks, calling for votes. We can extend by five minutes, if you wish, for Mr. Donnelly. That requires unanimous consent, as required under Standing Order 115(5).

Does anybody object to the five minutes extra? I'm looking for objections.

Seeing none, Mr. Donnelly, you have five minutes.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our fishermen, our witnesses, for being here today.

I come from the west coast. We have ITQs. We don't have owner-operator fleet separation, so we don't enjoy what you do on the east coast.

One thing I can't understand, and it's been brought up, is why Newfoundland is different from Atlantic Canada. Can anyone explain why that happens to be for Newfoundland only?

I don't know if anyone wants to raise their hand.

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly, do you want to point someone out to answer the question?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Woodford, do you want to give it a shot?

Mr. Eldred Woodford: I'll give it a try. I'm not sure...because I don't do much fishing in the rest of Atlantic Canada. I have very little activity there. It's my understanding, though, from a friend in Nova Scotia who fishes up there, that in Atlantic Canada, and Nova Scotia per se, there was the same policy as in Newfoundland up until a few years ago, when their industry, because of the size of the vessels, requested to go to a larger vessel for carrying lobster traps.

That's my understanding. You can correct me if I'm wrong, but prior to that last change in Atlantic Canada, they were onside with the same policy as in Newfoundland.

Let me be clear here. I've been fishing 30 years. A lot of people have fished longer than I have. We have to be aware of that, sitting around this table. But let me be clear that from my knowledge of the fishery, when there's a want and a need for the policy to change, and the majority supports it, we have had little trouble over the years getting DFO to come onside with this. I mean, there's plenty of evidence supporting that. The trouble here is that with this proposal that you're working on, it's not supported by the majority. There are only a select few. I can probably name them all on one hand—maybe two hands, at most. We're talking in the hundreds and hundreds of fish harvesters who are quite satisfied with the policy the way it is. So I sit here a little confused on the issue.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I have a second question, but do you want to jump in, Mr. Best?

Mr. Glen Best: I have to disagree with Mr. Woodford on what he's saying about how everybody is not in agreement with this. I come from Fogo Island. I went to a good many meetings. I went to shrimp, and I'm part of the shrimp fleet. I go to the groundfish cod meetings, and at every meeting I've gone to go we've had overwhelming support for the relaxation of rules, buddy-up combined, so—

Mr. Eldred Woodford: It's a different issue.

Mr. Glen Best: It's not a different issue. You can count—

Mr. Eldred Woodford: Yes, it is—

Mr. Glen Best —on one hand—

The Chair: Okay—

Mr. Glen Best: I've been to meetings on cod—I go up from Fogo—and everybody in that room wanted a change in buddy-up and also on vessel length.

Mr. Eldred Woodford: It's different.

Mr. Glen Best: You're talking about how the change is not wanted. Change is wanted. There is a movement of people who want change because the status quo doesn't work. We have an old industry. There are old people in this industry. I shouldn't say “old people”, but older.... The people who participate are older now and we have no young people coming.

If you think everything is working so fine, where is the end result? The end result is that we have no young people coming to this industry. If change doesn't come in one way or another, we are in big trouble.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Smith, I think you wanted to jump in.

Mr. Keith Smith: I wanted to add to Mr. Woodford's comment.

I represent 206 pieces of the pie in Trinity Bay: that's the less-than-40-foot. This is not a new thing for me. This came to my attention by being chair of the crab committee two years ago, when I clearly stated overwhelmingly, over 90%, both times, and everybody discussed it.

Listen, everybody is saying that they need that 44 feet 11 inches. Well, when I started in 1979, there were two 50-footers in Heart's Content. The capacity they could carry was at 45,000 pounds maximum. We have the 39 feet and 11 inches boats in Trinity Bay now that can carry well over 100,000 pounds of stuff, and huge

boats.... I don't see the need, and I'm only representing the majority. Like I said, I've never come to anything with a personal agenda. I represent those 206 people or—there are some combined—the 206 pieces of the pie, and they clearly stated that this needs to stay where it's at.

● (1015)

The Chair: A very quick question, Mr. Donnelly. We have little time.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I don't have time for my second question. I was just going to see if Mr. Greenham wanted to jump in with any final words.

Mr. Collin Greenham: Yes, I'd like to say something there, Mr. Chair.

Those new 39 feet 11 inches ones they're building now that are 28 feet wide, or whatever they are, they're like boxes. The fuel consumption in those boats is unreal. It's like 25 gallons per hour. They're really expensive to operate. We have an abundance of those 44 feet 11 inches boats around the island that were too small to fish shrimp. When they had the vessel changes before, those guys with the 44 feet 11 inches got their shrimp licences and moved up to 65-footers. But there's an abundance of those 44 feet 11 inches ones around Newfoundland now, tied up, that already meet CSI requirements, and you can get them for a fraction of the price.

You can pick up a fibreglass boat that's ready to go fishing and meets CSI Transport Canada standards for \$100,000. That would be a lot safer vessel to go out in. I mean, we all have the same groundfish licences there, the inshore and the offshore—2J3KL. We have the same groundfish licence. I'm allowed to go out and get turbot. There is nothing wrong with it. Why not give me the boat to make it a bit safer? Allow me to get one that's 44 feet 11 inches so I can go out there and fish it. I've fished it for the last three years. Nothing is changing.

The Chair: Mr. Greenham, thank you very much for your comments.

Folks, I hate to do this, but this has to be shut down because of votes in the House. I sincerely apologize, but we did hear your testimony and it will be counted. I thank you for coming a long way. It was a very good discussion.

This will come to an end. The vote is in 15 or 20 minutes, and we have to shut it down. Thank you, everyone. We're adjourned.

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