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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1200)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 15 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, May 26, 2020, Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 25, 2020, the committee is resuming its study of the state of Pacific salmon.

Today's meeting is taking place by video conference. The proceedings are public and are made available via the House of Commons website. So you are aware, the webcast will show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

Regular members know this by now, but for the benefit of our witnesses who are participating in a House of Commons virtual committee meeting for the first time, I will remind you all of a few rules that we like to follow.

Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like it does in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. As you are speaking, if you plan to alternate from one language to the other, you will need to also switch the interpretation channel so that it aligns with the language you are speaking. You may want to allow for a short pause when switching languages.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike.

Should members have a point of order, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order. If a member wishes to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member, I encourage him or her to use the “raise hand” function. To do so, you should click on “participants” at the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you will see, next to your name, that you can pick “raise hand”. This will signal to me, the chair, your interest in speaking and will keep the names in chronological order.

When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. The use of headsets is strongly encouraged. Finally, when speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. That's the one I have trouble with.

Should any technical challenge arise, for example in relation to interpretation or your audio, please advise the chair immediately and a technical team will work to resolve the problem. Please note

that we may need to suspend during these times, as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

Before we get started, can everyone click on their screen in the top right-hand corner and ensure they are on gallery view? With this view, you should be able to see all the participants in a grid view. It will ensure that all video participants can see one another.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. As an individual, we have Dan Edwards, fisher, West Coast Aquatic. He is accompanied by Kathy Scarfo, president, West Coast Trollers Association. From Aero Trading Company Limited, we have Brad Mirau. From Whooshh Innovations, we have Vince Bryan, chief executive officer.

We'll get started now with the presentations from the witnesses.

We'll start with Mr. Edwards. You have six minutes.

Mr. Dan Edwards (Fisher, West Coast Aquatic, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and committee members, for giving me a chance to talk to you.

I'm a non-indigenous, third-generation fisherman living in the small coastal village of Ucluelet on the west coast of Vancouver Island. I spent 40 years trolling for salmon in B.C. out of this community. I spent 15 years as the chair of a salmon enhancement society.

I am the executive director of the Area A Crab Association, the largest crab fishery in B.C., which, thankfully, has seen record abundances in their fishery, although they are presently dealing with very depressed prices for their product, supposedly due to COVID, but due to the lack of transparency in the B.C. market. Who knows what the truth is on that front? I also own a groundfish longline vessel in partnership with my son and continue to be an active fisherman.

I was the executive director of an indigenous/non-indigenous non-profit board built on the principle of a double majority during the 1990s that helped to negotiate an aquatic management board for the west coast of Vancouver Island's Nuu-chah-nulth territory under an interim measures agreement under the mandate of the Oceans Act.

I went on a 59-day hunger strike to try to get help for B.C. fishing communities when the Fraser sockeye collapsed in 1999 and because Wayne Wouters, who was the deputy minister of Fisheries at the time, had suspended the negotiations to build the aquatic management board.

Out of the hunger strike, I got a commitment from Minister Dhaliwal to review the consultative process for salmon in B.C. The review was started by Stephen Owen. His dispute resolution group out of the University of Victoria came up with 49 recommendations to be implemented as a package; they were not to be cherry-picked.

Pacific region implemented four or five of those recommendations and twisted the recommendations so that the final framework for consultation was even worse than when I first got involved in the consultative process back in the 1980s. They completely cut out the community input, and the moment the aquatic management board was brought into reality under the mandate of the Oceans Act in 2001, a senior DFO official, who has since retired, told me that Pacific region senior management in downtown Vancouver stated internally that they now had to find a way to kill it, and they have done a very good job of doing just that. They refuse now to sit on the board as one of the governing parties.

I now live in a coastal community that has lost most of its infrastructure and its fishermen with respect to the salmon fishery. Without the vision of the aquatic management board, which is based on Nuu-chah-nulth principles of respect and that everything is connected, the implementation of the reconciliation agenda of the federal government is creating division and disunity.

As I work on my boat in Ucluelet harbour, first nations and non-first nations fishermen are being set up to fight each other right on the docks in our community over the remaining access to ocean chinook and coho, while the federal government gives the lion's share of the resource to the commercial/ recreational fishery with absolutely no transfer mechanism to deal with the disenfranchisement.

They have published an article in Sumatra that lays out how this a breaking of the human rights of the citizens, both indigenous and non-indigenous fishermen, who are treated this way by their own government.

My longline vessel is tied up this summer after fishing for years for 15% of the landed value of the fish I caught, because of the unregulated market created by ITQ management regimes, of which much is now owned and controlled offshore. I can no longer afford to untie the vessel to go fishing. My daughter did her Ph.D. thesis on the situation with the halibut fishery. We have explained this very clearly to the FOPO committee over the last couple of years, yet Pacific region continues to minimize the concerns we raised about the management regime that has been used in B.C. to kill off the small, independent owner-operator fleet.

I am extremely angry about this situation. It is a management tragedy. The definition of a tragedy is when you learn too late that you should have done things differently.

I did not want to participate in this call when I first got the invitation. I asked Kathy Scarfo to do it. I am too angry and frustrated to speak anymore about a situation that, for 30 years, has been ignored by Pacific region. My head is bloody from beating against that unaccountable, terrible bureaucracy. I am reminded of something that a DFO enforcement person told me when I was occupying a DFO office in Tofino in 1996. He said he woke up every morning ashamed that he worked for this organization.

My advice—which I am sure has never been listened to before, but I'm going to say it again—would be to dismantle the entire organization and start again with proper government and real consultation, not the sham that is presently being used by this government department.

• (1205)

Real governance is needed—there are a myriad of good examples of how this is done in respect of the management of natural resources—and real transparency. Who exactly owns the Canadian resource? This can be done simply by directives from the federal government, and real reconciliation that respects both parties, which is the directive given by the judge in the last Ahousaht et al. judgment.

Taking anyone's livelihood and giving it to someone else without compensation, which is what the government did in respect to my salmon livelihood by giving it to the commercial recreational sports industry, is breaking my human rights. The federal government has stated it will not do the same with the reconciliation process, as it would simply be more of the same bad behaviour that got us into trouble in the first place.

I truly hope they stand by that commitment. They did it once; the door is now open. As Dr. Don Hall, speaking as a representative of the Nuu-chah-nulth, told the court in the Ahousaht et al case, they gave away the resource that was traditionally fished by the commercial troll fishermen to the sports fishermen. Why would they not do the same thing in respect of our court-appointed indigenous fishery?

Thank you, Mr. Chair, those are my opening comments.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Edwards.

We'll now go to Ms. Scarfo for six minutes please.

Ms. Kathy Scarfo (President, West Coast Trollers Association, As an Individual): Hi. I get six minutes to wrap up 30 years' worth of fisheries management, fisheries marketing, buying. I am president of the area G trollers, which are not trawlers. They're the guys who run the single lines through the water, with hooks on them, in different places.

The fleet that I manage, which I have been proud to be a member and president of for 22 years, is a salmon fishery, predominantly chinook, coho and sockeye. We are the equity fishery with the U.S., so our catch is predominantly American. The Alaska fleet takes Canadian fish; we take American fish. We're the equity fleet. We harvest very little Canadian stocks, and that's very important because our impact on Canadian stocks of concern is marginal at best, and at times just about nothing.

The fleet is a small-boat fleet, ma-and-pa operations predominantly, and family operations, fishing five to 25 miles offshore. Over one-third of our fleet is, at the present time, first nations. We fish side by side with the first nations, and we have worked very closely over the years to develop different fisheries regimes and programs.

I think it's important to recognize that when we talk about the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, it is the Department of Fisheries, not just fish. Right now it feels like it's the department of forgone opportunities in fisheries. We have economic opportunities that are being forgone because the department is not managing fisheries as their primary mandate; it is more about juggling who gets to fish. We often hear the statement that there are too many boats catching too few fish.

No doubt about it, we have massive conservation problems. We have climate change, habitat inland that's not being addressed and not being invested in, and salmon enhancement programs that have been gutted. We know all of those things. On top of that, there are still existing opportunities that would enable us to maintain a somewhat viable fishery; but the juggling of who gets access to those fish, and the fact that decisions are not being based on what is absolutely critical in fisheries management—first and foremost, science and biology—is a major issue. Basically it is the department of forgone opportunities, and I can speak directly to that.

This year, with our fishery, our fleet would be having incomes of \$80,000 to \$100,000, had we been able to move forward with the COVID plan that we presented in April. Instead, guys are sitting on the water right now, not making enough income, because the department has put in a lure restriction that basically means that everybody else in British Columbia can use the lures that are catching fish, but we have to use the lures that aren't at this present time.

If we are looking at solutions to moving forward, the first thing to do is to recognize that the situation in British Columbia is a disaster, and we need that disaster relief. We need somebody to call it for what it is, and it is a disaster: 90% of the fleet is not going to survive; they're being forced into bankruptcy. I think, in this situation, we need that disaster relief and recognition because then we can start to address the real problem.

The other thing we need to recognize is that salmon are not caught on the east coast. This is a four-year cycle. This is something that can be rebuilt and can have a future. What we need, rather than lip service from the ministry and the department, is an actual sense of leadership and governance that is...to manage fisheries, and to try to do their best.

In the Pacific region that governance model, as Dan says, needs to be addressed. The senior management of the Pacific region do not believe in ocean fisheries. Yet everything we hear, and every piece of documentation and every response that you get to your recommendations from the minister, talk about economically viable and sustainable fisheries. There is no impetus and no sense of interest from senior management in moving forward on those opportunities.

Years ago we had a new government come in and say that they were going to allow the unmuzzling of our scientists. Well, they may have unmuzzled them, but now senior management are giving directives to the biology staff to not do very critical pieces of work that are absolutely essential to managing fisheries. We cannot have access to the biological staff and stock assessment staff. For example, this year, when we put in a fishing plan in the first week of April and only had a fishing plan at the end of July, with absolutely

no background or conversations with stock assessment staff. Here we are, in season, trying to deal with that.

● (1215)

We need a department that is based on principles, some of which need to be fair and equitable, and on a transfer mechanism that is actually being used, because otherwise we are pitting user groups against each other to basically fight over the crumbs of what is left for opportunities.

There is an unlicensed expansion in the charter boat fishery, which is not a public fishery. These are people with a lot of money who can fly in and fly back out. They've been given priority. In our region, they harvest more fish than my first nations fleets and my commercial fleets combined in any given year, yet they don't live in the area and don't provide jobs for our local community.

Social scientists have taken over and are now running the department, without any guidance from the federal government as to what the vision of a fishery looks like. Are there too many boats, not enough fish? Absolutely. However, it's not too many boats in the commercial fishing industry directly. It's too many interest groups, which have competing interests, that cannot all be satisfied to the level the department is trying to satisfy them.

The department is in a conflict of interest. They are managing buybacks at the same time as managing opportunities, which means, basically, that you bankrupt a fleet and then offer them the lowest amount of money they're willing to take because they're forced into bankruptcy.

Transfer mechanisms, such as PICFI and ATP, are being ignored at this point, and fish are being removed from existing stakeholders. That's not reconciliation. Reconciliation is not borne on the backs of individual families and fishermen who are neighbours to the people they're trying to reconcile with. As Dan says, this is causing an emergency situation within our communities.

As we—

The Chair: I'll have to stop you there, Ms. Scarfo. You've gone way over the six-minute mark. Anything else will hopefully come out in the lines of questioning.

We invite all witnesses to send us a copy of their presentation. The committee will be able to look at that as well.

We'll now go to Mr. Mirau, for six minutes.

Mr. Brad Mirau (President and Chief Executive Officer, Aero Trading Co. Ltd.): Thank you.

I appreciate the passion of the witnesses who just spoke.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. Greetings from Prince Rupert. My name is Brad Mirau, and I am the president and CEO of Aero Trading, a diversified seafood company operating in B.C.

I grew up in the commercial fishing industry in Prince Rupert. I started working on my father's salmon boat when I was eight years old, some 48 years ago. I was a deckhand and a skipper prior to starting work in the processing sector 35 years ago.

We're a fish processor of B.C. wild seafood, with two CFIA-regulated plants, one here that I'm speaking from in Port Edward, and the other one on the Fraser River in Vancouver. We participate in many fisheries, including salmon, but most of the other fisheries on the coast also. For some context, I believe we probably have the largest independent small-boat fleet in B.C.

As a processor, we exist as our fishermen do by having reliable access to a healthy and sustainable resource. We live or die by this simple access. The fishing industry may seem basic on the surface, catching fish and feeding people, but there are so many factors, some within our control and some outside our control, that make our industry complex and difficult to manage or predict. I don't think anybody in the commercial industry expects access when true conservation is on the line. I've sat at many tables over the years and I've never heard the commercial fishermen or companies demand access when we have real conservation problems.

Issues such as climate, ocean nutrients, habitat, fish farms, weak stock management, predators, past overfishing and perhaps even under-fishing are just a few of the challenges the industry faces now. The only way to make sure that fish stocks remain healthy is if there is an adequate long-term plan, safeguards in place such as proper and robust science, stock assessment and a transparent management policy that is fair to all user groups.

In speaking to you today about the state of the salmon, I'd like to tell you some of the major changes I've seen during my career.

We built our Port Edward plant in 1986. We experienced rapid growth in production and for years we operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We employed more than 150 people, 80% from the indigenous communities surrounding Prince Rupert, from Lax Kw'laams, Metlakatla and Kitkatla. Today we employ fewer than half that number.

Many jobs have already been lost within the salmon sector, and I suspect many more will be lost if our salmon catches continue to decline. The consequences of this are very dire for our entire infrastructure that has been built over the years on the coast. Many of the fishermen and companies exist because they're geared for a multi-fishery existence. Removing one fishery is like removing a leg of a chair, and eventually you will have a collapse. We've already experienced many plant closures in B.C., and I suspect we will see more of these. Unfortunately the hardest hit areas will be the smaller coastal communities, where there are already fewer employment opportunities.

Throughout these former exciting times in the fishing business, there was this undeniable sense of optimism, accomplishment and camaraderie that was a joy to have experienced. Those same feelings even extended to DFO and all their staff way back then. In short, the industry was much more predictable and cohesive, and very fun to be a part of. Today, sadly, those relationships in our industry are strained, and the trust has decreased measurably.

I'd like to mention also that throughout this long period of decline of salmon and access in B.C., I have made so many trips to southeast Alaska to visit friends who operate plants there. There were so many similarities to our operations and catches and, in fact, we do share many common stocks of fish since we are so close ge-

ographically. Fast-forward to today, and the similarities are mostly gone.

Walking the docks in Prince Rupert or other coastal communities in B.C., you will find fewer fishing boats and many of these vessels are in a state of disrepair. There is not enough money being earned to maintain vessels adequately. You will also encounter many salmon fishermen who are increasingly jaded, feeling beaten down by years of struggling to survive. They feel disconnected now from the decision-making and basic communication from DFO.

Yet, only a few kilometres north in Ketchikan, Alaska, you will find a large fleet of beautifully maintained salmon boats with hundreds of young fishermen who are enthusiastic about their future. Many government or government-backed programs exist for them to buy vessels and licences, or to upgrade their equipment.

● (1220)

It should also be noted that many of these boats you see tied up in Alaska are actual Canadian fishing vessels that have been sold to American fishermen because fishermen here have been unable to make a living.

Thirty years ago we thought we could rival Alaska in salmon production, but today we're just a shadow of what we once were. The question is, why? Why have we ended up here now in B.C., faced with declining salmon runs and reduced access, while Alaska continues to experience billions of dollars in economic prosperity from its fisheries and, more importantly, its fish stocks appear more healthy and sustainable than ours? I can't say that I know the answer, but could it be that they spend more on stock assessment and science, have a more transparent management regime, have no salmon farms and have higher harvest rates on salmon runs? These are just a few points we must consider when trying to formulate a plan for our future.

I don't wish to beat up only on DFO. In fairness to them, they have a lot on their plate. A lot of their employees work very hard, but over the years they've taken on too many responsibilities that are political in nature, and they do have a conflict of interest. The fishing fleet feels this.

In closing, I'd like to offer a couple of suggestions.

Our industry, sadly, may have to acknowledge that, in the short term, we simply may have too many salmon vessels chasing diminished stocks or diminished access. The necessary time required to rebuild may simply be too long for fishermen to hang on. In this case, the federal government should offer a fair price to fishermen to retire their salmon licence. However, do not make them bid against one another to see who is the most desperate. Allow them to retire with some dignity. These are the government's own words.

I'd also like to see control in the populations of predators, such as seals and sea lions. I realize this is a controversial subject, but I have seen reports that they consume more seafood than the entire commercial sector combined.

I'd like to see more salmon enhancement programs like Alaska has. It doesn't make sense to me that we don't enhance our stocks. I'd like to at least see a good study of this.

I do have aspirations and hope for our salmon fisheries in the longer term. I hope that one day we can walk our docks and see a vibrant, young crop of fishermen, and can have a great salmon fishery again. It's been done elsewhere in the world. The fishing industry is a can-do industry. We should be able to rebuild and put things back on track.

Thank you.

• (1225)

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Bryan for six minutes.

Mr. Vince Bryan (Chief Executive Officer, Whooshh Innovations): Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today.

We understand that you invited us here because of our work with salmon, including at the site of the Big Bar slide on the Fraser River. We want to speak to that as an example of the innovative solutions available to the Pacific salmon conservation and recovery efforts.

With the state of our iconic Pacific salmon, they need our help, and it feels right that the U.S. and Canada have partnered and are working for the recovery of salmon and fisheries in the west, including the Fraser River, historically one of the great Pacific salmon rivers in all the world.

We have been working exclusively on fish passage solutions for 10 years all around the world. We believe that improved passage is the single most important thing we can do today to assure the fish's future everywhere in the world. Our mission at Whooshh is to provide fisheries managers worldwide an entirely new toolset that more affordably addresses fish passage, recognizes the impact of changing climate conditions, accommodates highly variable water levels and acknowledges that the traditional options available simply have not worked well enough, and are not easily changed, to give the native fish species their best and fastest chance for spawning success.

The importance of the Fraser River to the ecosystem of the west's Salish Sea, the resident orcas in its waters, the first nations on both sides of the border and those sport and commercial fishermen who rely on robust returns for their livelihoods reminds us daily of the importance of our mission. As a company, we are tackling

not only a problem of enormous complexity but also a problem that must be solved quickly for all of humanity. Big Bar highlights what can be done and how quickly it can happen when decisions are made, new technologies are adopted, resources are made available, and stakeholders and contractors come together to ensure that there is safe, timely, efficient and effective fish passage.

Whooshh Innovations' headquarters are located in Seattle, Washington, on the waters of Puget Sound about a five and a half hour drive from the Big Bar landslide in British Columbia. DFO contracted with Whooshh on April 15, 2020, to provide passage for four species of salmonids, with our passage portal to enable them to continue their upstream migration in June 2020.

Our Whooshh passage portal allows for volitional and more natural migration without handling or energy-sapping ladder steps causing stress prior to reaching their spawning grounds and impacting their fecundity. It is not our original salmon cannon, which requires one to hand-load fish into the system, but a more elegant and automated solution.

The passage portal also collects data about every fish that passes through the system, including 18 images of every fish taken from three different angles. Our fish recognition technologies are capable of measuring and sorting fish automatically within a fraction of a second. It allows the selected fish to migrate past the barriers, whether natural or man-made, regardless of their height.

The system at Big Bar includes six tubes of five different sizes to accommodate all sizes of the four species of salmonids. Each tube is about 150 metres long. The passage portal capacity can enable passage of tens of thousands of fish per day, or approximately 30 fish per minute. While the system requested and deployed at Big Bar is seasonal, annual, long term and permanent deployments are often recommended.

The magnitude of the challenge at Big Bar cannot be overstated. The rapids you see in the photos might look to be a manageable two- to three-feet high, but when you are on site you realize that those rapids are 10- to 15-foot tall and that the water is moving faster than you have ever seen water move before. When water runs like this it becomes immediately clear that natural fish passage is not an option. The burst swimming is simply not enough.

For those who are working on site, the Canadians can be proud of all the work that the long days, the co-operation and the foresight shown by the project partners there. The rockslide at Big Bar is an enormous slice of a 200-foot cliff that slid into and fell across the 180-foot width of the river at that point. It is technically a more difficult problem than Hell's Gate that requires the latest technology solutions and innovative thinking. The goal of everyone is to provide passage this year and then every year to come.

We hope that Whooshh passage portal changes the map, allowing for real-time fisheries management decision-making. It is intended to future-proof fish passage against the impacts of changing climates such as warmer water and variable water levels from floods or drought; prevent the spread of invasive fish species through selective fish passage; and offer a SMARTer solution with more comprehensive and current data to make fisheries management decisions, such as seeing when pinniped injuries are impacting the fish travelling upstream.

Why do all of this? Because the impact of not deploying such solutions quickly is felt for decades, if not for centuries. If we have learned nothing else in this age of COVID, we can take away this much. It is far less costly to act early and aggressively, and to capture near real-time data than to delay and be faced with a doubtful future and no certain solutions. At Whooshh, we envisioned a better outcome for native fish species years ago, and we are happy to help bring cutting-edge technology solutions to Big Bar today.

Thank you.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bryan.

We'll now go to committee members for a round of questioning. We will remind members that the last half hour is for committee business.

We now go to Mr. Arnold for six minutes or less please.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being available today.

Mr. Edwards, you talked about a pilot program for co-operative aquatic management with the federal, provincial, Nuu-chah-nulth and local governments. Can you tell us how, when and why the program seems to have been abandoned?

Mr. Dan Edwards: We created the board back in 2001, after 10 years of work with the communities, the Nuu-chah-nulth, and the federal and provincial governments. The federal government spent a couple of years putting a large budget together to negotiate that board into existence.

As I said in my opening comments, there was never any support from the central agency for this board. They stated very specifically to me five years later that they in fact decided to try to kill it, particularly because it didn't fit the central management model that they still have in place in B.C.

That board is still in existence—I'm still a part of it—but it's lost its budget. The federal government has refused to put any money into it and they refused to sit at it. We've asked them several times to reinvigorate their commitment to it. They refuse. The board is now moribund. It's almost non-existent.

Mr. Mel Arnold: What were the goals of that board with the groups involved?

Mr. Dan Edwards: The goal was to be a part of the management strategy for the marine resources for the Nuu-chah-nulth region, which is most of the west coast of Vancouver Island, to work in partnership with other regions and with the central government to

properly manage both the biological side of the resources in the region as well as the socio-economic objectives that were really critical. This was particularly in light of the fact that we were seeing at that time, back in the 1990s, as Brad has stated, a drop in the value and the access to the salmon.

We tried very hard to put principles in place saying that we were going to engage in the management side of it for both socio-economic and biological scientific rational reasons for dealing with the fish, the salmon, and other resources in the area.

That was the point. That was the management strategy.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I guess the next question here is for Mr. Edwards, Ms. Scarfo and Mr. Mirau.

You've all talked about what appears to be a broken system. Some of you have mentioned that consultation seems to be a sham. We've heard this from east coast fishers as well.

Is the consultation process working as it used to, or where are the roadblocks? What do you see as the challenges?

• (1235)

Mr. Dan Edwards: Kathy or Brad, you go ahead. I've already said what I've said about this situation.

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: I can go if you want.

Basically, there is no real consultation. I think that's across all sectors that have been mentioned.

We actually had an emergency meeting with the first nations in our region yesterday. Dan was involved and we discussed the fact that the aquatic management board is no longer functional because of pulling [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. The stakeholders in the region still believe in the guiding principles and that maybe we'll just pick them and run with them ourselves.

The consultation process has been a sham. Basically, you sit through a process where I've seen managers sit and read a newspaper because they know how useless it all is. It doesn't matter what recommendations go forward. Once it gets into senior management's hands it's already a predetermined fact.

On this year's COVID plan that we put forward in April, we worked with first nations, local communities and buyers, and we said, given the situation that we're facing with world markets and getting people in and out of these communities, how can we do it? This was COVID-related. We got nothing—absolutely nothing.

Even in the last few weeks I've had to phone the minister's office, MPs and MLAs, everyone, just to get a discussion with our local managers because our guys are out there using the wrong lures and they won't let them change.

You have to recognize some of these things. The fishing industry here has lost a lot of its participation already. The fleet—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I'd like to hear from Mr. Mirau on this as well.

Mr. Brad Mirau: I wouldn't want to tar every advisory process with the same brush, but I'll describe it this way. In the north 10, 15 or 20 years ago, DFO and the fishing industry would get together for breakfast. We would sit around a table, in no particular order, and we would have an exchange of ideas and formulate plans.

Skip forward to within the last five years, and they no longer are allowed to have a coffee with us. We have to go into their office. They sit on one side of the table, we sit on the other, and it's much more confrontational. But there's a clear line: they are them and we are us.

The complaint I hear most often from my colleagues, as well as fishermen, is that DFO people do not return their phone calls, emails or texts. They don't make announcements when they say they're going to. There's just a sense of a disconnect, and I get it that they want things to be the way they were, but—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): I'm sorry, Mr. Chair; I did not mean to interrupt, but I have not been receiving the interpretation for almost a minute.

[English]

The Chair: I'm not getting any translation.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: So we are not receiving the interpretation because of the quality of the sound. I'm not sure whether it's possible to stabilize the sound so that it's easier for the interpreter.

[English]

The Chair: Let's try going forward, because that six minutes were over anyway when we had that point of order.

We will continue on.

Madame Gill, if it's still not working, please let us know as quickly as you can, and we will try to have it corrected.

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

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

Over our deliberations, we have heard a lot of conflicting evidence, not just in this study but in other ones. We hear on the one hand that fish stocks are low, that catches are miserable, but at the same time, every time there's some management of the catch, then we hear that the ocean is practically teeming with fish.

We heard this particularly with respect to the hatchery fish out of Washington state down off the mouth of the Fraser River and down into Puget Sound.

Dan, from your observation as a fisher, what's the state of the stock out there? Are you able to catch fish if you're allowed to?

Mr. Dan Edwards: I haven't fished salmon for 15 years now after doing it for 40 years. I fish other fish. Some of them are in good shape, and in some ways they are managed fairly effectively.

The salmon issue, from the fishermen I know who do fish salmon—and this has been the case, as Kathy's mentioned—are targeting out here 80% or more American-bound fish. A lot of those fish are being enhanced in the southern U.S. There are all kinds of those fish in the water. A proper management strategy, which would have been an abundant-based model that would allow Canadians access through the treaty, would allow us significant access to that.

● (1240)

Mr. Ken Hardie: We will go through the access issue, which, of course, has been the focus of a lot of our discussions in the past, but I'm interested in the health of the fish.

Mr. Mirau, are the fish that are being caught healthy looking? Are they bigger or smaller? What does the quality of the fish look like that are coming into your plants?

Mr. Brad Mirau: Generally speaking, from the quality of the fish, the size, the look, they are healthy. There's no doubt about that. The trend of the amount of fish stocks is, obviously, low in some areas, but there are many different runs of salmon on many different parts of the coast, and there are always good runs in some areas and bad runs in some areas, and the fact that we may not catch much fish sometimes doesn't mean they are not there. Sometimes it means there's an allocation issue. Sometimes it means the commercial fishery is open after the fish has swum past the area.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Chair, I apologize again, but there is no more interpretation. The interpreter says that the sound quality is bad. However, I can hear it very well. Could we check what the technical difficulty is between Mr. Mirau and the interpretation?

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): Would you like to suspend for a few seconds, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Ken Hardie: I can hear Mr. Mirau quite well, although your sound quality isn't good, sir, and that is a problem for the interpreter.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, could you suspend for a few seconds?

The Chair: Yes. We will suspend for a few seconds to see if we can correct the issue.

• (1240) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1240)

The Chair: We will resume. What I will say to the witnesses is that part of this is due possibly to the Internet connection, not necessarily the mike or anything causing a problem. I would say, if we're asking questions and we can't hear the answer, perhaps the witness could answer in writing and send it in to the committee.

I would ask people who are asking questions to please do it slowly so the witnesses may get a chance to even jot down the question in case we have to interrupt again because of quality. We can at least get it done, and the committee will be able to see the answer in writing versus trying to hear it, whether it's translated in English or in French.

We will move forward. I did stop the timer.

We will go back again to Mr. Hardie and Mr. Mirau.

• (1245)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Ms. Scarfo, you talked about science. Is the science being done and ignored, or is the science not being done?

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: With regard to this year as an example, the science is not being done. We used to have the science. We have a wealth of information within the department. We don't need to create our own science branch within fisheries.

If we have access to that information, we can justify fisheries in certain ways at certain times. Without access to that information, we can't do anything. This year as an example, when we asked for the science, the background of what the impacts of those fisheries would be so that we could maybe model the fisheries differently, we found out that the science had not been done. The staff have been instructed over the last two years not to do the work.

Mr. Ken Hardie: There seems to be a conflict between what we're told is the state of the stocks and what we hear from you. We hear that there's fish out there that you're not allowed to catch. We hear on the other hand that the stocks are all in decline, or many of them are, and they are simply not the fish that should be caught because of the health of the stocks.

Is that a conflict?

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: No. Don't misinterpret it. There is a massive decline in salmon and it is a disaster.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay.

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: There are small pockets of opportunity for the remaining commercial sector, but I'm going to say this. We had 1,800 trollers originally fishing the west coast of Vancouver Island. This week, I have 25 to 35 trollers. When I say there's opportunity for the commercial sector, I'm talking about a very minute fishery compared to—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you for that. I'm going to have to move on in the time I have left.

Mr. Bryan, we've heard a lot about the Whooshh technology, particularly in the context of Big Bar .

I want to ask what you know about flood mitigation technology perhaps being used on the Columbia River. We've heard that old technology is also a problem for some of the salmon stocks along the Fraser.

Mr. Vince Bryan: I probably don't have too much to add, other than that the Columbia River has many dams on it, of course, which help to control the flood events. In those kinds of situations, there is more opportunity to control the water. Here on the Fraser River, there is usually 24 hours or less notice, and you might have a variation of water levels of 10 to 20 feet.

Mr. Ken Hardie: All right, thank you for that.

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

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I would like to thank the interpreters, because I know very well that their work is difficult and that they have to adapt to all sorts of conditions during COVID-19. Earlier, I may have misspoken, but I was concerned about what we ourselves are providing to the interpreters, who have to do their work. I wasn't listening passively, but I understand that it was difficult.

Having said that, I would like to ask Mr. Edwards a few questions. I was interested in the subject of his daughter's doctoral thesis.

Of course, I understand the difficulties facing the fishing industry in western Canada. I'm in eastern Quebec and I hear similar comments.

I would like to know whether he would be willing to talk about his daughter's thesis to shed some light on the matter in terms of salmon. I would be very grateful.

[English]

Mr. Dan Edwards: The thesis was done through UBC. It's finished. She now has a doctor of philosophy from UBC. That thesis is available. It specifically relates to the management issues that arise around creating situations with individual transferable quota fisheries that have led to fishermen having to rent fishing quotas at very high lease rates. It gives solutions, both management and biological, social and economic, which are very much in line with the FOPO recommendations that were done by this committee over the last couple of years.

There are solutions available in the conclusions of that thesis. I would suggest linking into the UBC school of fisheries and getting that thesis. There's a summary of it as well that I could send.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you.

I would now like to turn to Ms. Scarfo. She said that six minutes is very short. I would like her to elaborate on what she earlier called missed opportunities in the department.

[English]

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: I will follow up with that question, actually, because it does follow up on Ken Hardie's question, are there a lot of fish out there? There are not a lot of fish out there, but there are also very few commercial fishermen. The forgone opportunities are for the remaining small number of commercial fisheries. We're basically at that tipping point where we are losing the infrastructure that is absolutely critical, not just to maintaining the commercial fishery, the first nations fisheries, but also, in many times, in many of these remote communities...such as fuel, docks and floats.

The lack of management to encourage when there is a small fishery that's available, like this year, which would make such a big difference to sustaining the remaining fishermen, needs to be a priority for management, not putting it aside to the last minute and ignoring it. I think, maybe, that's answering your question a little bit.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Yes, thank you.

You talked about missed opportunities, the catastrophic situation and the help that had to be requested. You may not have time to go into all the help that would be needed, but can you tell us in general terms how we could support the fishers, in terms of salmon or what you were talking about?

[English]

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: I think the first thing is to declare what it is, which is a disaster. That follows up on how there is not enough salmon to go around for all of the increased participants that the federal government has added over the last number of years, the increased charter business, the increased participation by first nations. You can't continue to add participants on a declining resource that was already fully allocated. Therefore, you run into a problem there.

The help that we need is a vision of what the future is going to look like. Are we going to have commercial fisheries in the future? If so, what are they going to look like? There's no sense in saying we support commercial fishing. We know we're not going back to the fisheries of 1,800 boats, but can we not sustain a fishery of 35 commercial boats on the west coast of Vancouver Island, a small, independent owner-operator fleet, in conjunction with the other fleets that then maintain the infrastructure?

The Canada-U.S. agreement provided \$30 million to mitigate the 50% catch reduction on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The government has sat on that money for 12 years now. We still haven't allocated that to the fishermen. Basically, more of that money has gone to people in different regions than to the people who are actually affected, who are the first nations and the commercial troll fleet on the west coast.

We need help. We need to tell you what we need rather than having it imposed upon us, which is the normal process. The reverse-bid buyback is basically driving everyone into bankruptcy and then telling them, "Take as little as you can." Then we end up with this massive derelict boat problem, which costs us all.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Ms. Scarfo.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Gill.

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

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you to all the witnesses for their important testimony.

I'll start with Ms. Scarfo. You talked about the disaster of the salmon on the west coast. Do you believe that the government should be declaring this a salmon emergency right now?

• (1255)

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: Absolutely. I can't see how you could avoid doing that. Between Big Bar and all of the other elements that we face, and the conflicting interests among user groups, if you don't declare it an emergency, you're basically just pitting the last of the users out here against each other and creating disharmony, and not helping with reconciliation in any way, shape or form.

Mr. Gord Johns: If the government were to declare a salmon emergency, what would you like to see come with that?

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: Well, I would like to see enough funds, first and foremost, to help the fishermen and the infrastructure that we need to support the industry into the future.

We need a discussion on what the goal in managing fisheries on the west coast is, which has some guiding principles and engages, in an honest way, a real consultation with not just the industry participants who remain but with the coastal communities, and within the region, the people who are affected by the declining fishery.

Create that vision so that we can then move forward. You can't move forward if you don't have a vision. Right now we don't have that vision of what's expected because, basically, what we hear is the vision is dishonest because it's not achievable.

Mr. Gord Johns: Sure, and we hear about the vision with Canada and the U.S. and the Pacific Salmon Treaty. You talked about how decades ago that money was set aside, that \$30 million. Can you speak about what has happened with that money, about what that money was supposed to be for and where it's at today?

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: Well, the catch reduction was that rather than reduce the catch in Alaska completely or pull more dams on the Columbia, Canada took a catch reduction to accommodate the U.S., and in exchange, they provided \$30 million U.S. to mitigate the impacts.

There was only one fleet that actually lost any fish or took the impacts, and that was the west coast troll fleet. The expectation was that we would be provided these funds. In conjunction with the first nations, through the aquatic management board that Dan has spoken of, we presented a comprehensive plan 10 or 12 years ago as to how to spend that money, and how not to just dissolve the licences once they were bought back. You would actually bank them in the expectation that we do see a future and that we could maybe reissue these licences. There was money for enhancements, for science and for all sorts of things.

Instead of listening to the region, the department asked users who were not affected, which would be like asking P.E.I. what they should do with money that the South Shore fishermen in Nova Scotia are entitled to. That's what they did, and that's what they're doing again. They're asking fishermen from other areas what they should do with this money, who of course are saying "give it to us", because everybody needs it.

We need a comprehensive plan, we need a vision and then we need to make those investments, particularly in promoting the Fisheries Act as the number one environmental act and that doesn't just deal with in-river habitat but with ocean conditions.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Mr. Edwards, can you speak about the injustice of the Pacific Salmon Treaty and what's been done with that money and also a little bit more in depth about the West Coast Aquatic Management Board and the importance of local management boards, both to managing stocks and also to reconciliation? What needs to happen at those boards in terms of resources from the federal government?

Mr. Dan Edwards: That's going to be hard in a couple of minutes, but I'll try.

Basically, the board process, the idea of working together at a community level between first nations and the community fishermen and non-indigenous communities, is the heart of the idea of developing that board, in order to make sure that there's a proper management structure that would provide socio-economic benefits to the community.

On the money that Kathy has mentioned, we used the aquatic management board to put a very comprehensive plan in place. We met five times with Minister Shea at the time. Then we found out through a court case by the area G troll fishermen—when the money wasn't given to who it should have been given to—that the department had already made a decision before it even started the consultative process. It had already decided to give the money to other interests and to not use it to mitigate the damage on the west coast.

We're asking right now for the aquatic management board to hold that money in trust for the commercial fishermen and the communities out here on the west coast. We've asked the cabinet to consider that. We've said that this is critical in order to support these communities that are in a position, as Kathy said, of disaster.

On that issue of disaster relief, that's what I did back in 1999. I spent three months trying to get disaster relief funding for the collapse of the Fraser sockeye in 1999. They just refused to do it, which led to a 59-day hunger strike, which then led to a consulta-

tive review. I've been down this road before, and it's very frustrating to see it happening again and again here.

We have resources and we have the opportunity. It's just being completely denied by the existing power structure within the Pacific region.

● (1300)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to our five-minute round. We'll start off with Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Let me begin by challenging Mr. Hardie's suggestion that there was a lot of conflicting evidence from our witnesses on the problems with the wild salmon fishery. That simply is not the case. In fact, there's been a great deal of consistent testimony. Indeed, except for allocation of fisheries and perhaps access to the different fisheries, there's remarkable consistency in testimony. We've heard consistently about a dysfunctional DFO. We've heard about a lack of stock assessments, failure to base decisions on science, lack of consultation with stakeholders and broken governance models. Much of that has been reaffirmed today at this meeting.

Mr. Edwards, you said that we need to dismantle the entire organization. I just want to be clear about what organization you are referring to. Are you referring to DFO's Pacific region or the regional aquatic management board or some other organization?

Mr. Dan Edwards: I was talking about the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, specifically Pacific region.

Hon. Ed Fast: That is, of course, consistent with testimony we've heard at other meetings where we're reviewing the decline in salmon stocks.

Could you tell us what that dismantlement would look like in practice? If you dismantle, you have to replace it with something that's going to be effective. Be as brief as possible, because I have one other question.

Mr. Dan Edwards: That's a very important point.

The Government of Canada has done all kinds of reorganization. It did it with INAC recently. There are all kinds of ways to do it. Significant study has been done on proper governance models that can be utilized by government in order to put proper consultative and governance frameworks together.

B.C. has a lot of thinkers who have done that over the years. I worked with one for years, Craig Darling, who has done all kinds of work for government on how to properly re-engage government with its stakeholders and with first nations. That work needs to be done.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you. If you could expand on that and send that to us in writing, we'd be glad to review that as well. I know you don't have a lot of time to expand on it, but we'd be glad to receive something in writing from you.

I have a question for Ms. Scarfo and Mr. Mirau.

Both of you have referenced the U.S. experience. Ms. Scarfo, you talked about the fact that you're taking mostly U.S. fish. Mr. Mirau, you talked about the U.S. experience and what the Americans did to protect and restore salmon stocks.

If you could both perhaps respond, what is it that we haven't done in Canada specifically that the U.S. has done successfully to ensure that its salmon stocks remain healthy, whether it's in Washington state or up in Alaska?

• (1305)

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: I think they've made it a priority and they've made the investment. They're removing dams on the Columbia. They put money into enhancement and mass hatchery programs in Alaska. Salmon has been recognized as a social and cultural driver and has taken priority over many other interests, until recently. I think Pebble Mine is a major concern in the U.S. with the present government.

I think overall, historically the Americans have had owner-operator type policies in their fisheries and they've recognized that small community-based fisheries are a large part of what keeps a location like Alaska alive. It's basically a commitment and an investment.

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Mirau.

Mr. Brad Mirau: You could answer that yourself by going to the DFO website and then looking at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game website. There's much more transparency, predictability about run size, communication with fishermen and communication with industry. Industry knows beforehand what the plan is and what the allocation process is.

In B.C. here, we are increasingly in the dark. Sometimes DFO officials tell us they're not allowed to tell us because of court decisions or reconciliation discussions. It's a lack of information, a lack of proper stock assessment and a lack of data, culminating.... You may know that B.C. no longer has marine stewardship certification on our salmon. Yes, we suspended it as an industry, but it's because DFO has not followed up on its end of the bargain to provide stock assessment and data required for us to hold it.

You can see it by looking at the websites. It will become clear to you.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you.

Ms. Scarfo, you suggested that there has to be disaster relief for your industry. We know that the commercial processors and harvesters have a special fund or special funds that address the impact of COVID on their industries. The disaster relief you're referring to is much broader than just COVID, I assume.

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: Yes, absolutely.

There's no doubt about it. COVID has an impact on everyone. It has an impact on our industry. It has an impact on how we can fish, how we can deliver fish and where we move fish to. Our buyers are

not wanting to deliver to the States if they don't have to, and I don't blame them. We don't have the infrastructure and the capacity in some of these regions to even handle the fishery.

We knew that this year with COVID there were going to be impacts. The program that was put out, which basically is a maximum of \$10,000, doesn't cover your annual fixed costs of moorage insurance and maintenance on your boat. It's not going to do much. It doesn't provide enough on top of the relief that is needed because we have had previous years of hardship. Basically, COVID is like the last straw on top of everything else. I think the disaster relief that's needed is much more comprehensive and broader reaching.

Hon. Ed Fast: You said that the social sciences—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Fast. We've gone way over time. Hopefully, you'll get in some more questions.

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

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

Dan and Kathy, talk to us about foreign fishing and illegal unregulated fishing. Do you see that as also affecting the health of our stocks?

Let's start with Dan.

Mr. Dan Edwards: I'm not an expert on illegal fisheries. I don't think that illegal fishing at the Canadian level within the 200-mile limit is necessarily a problem here in Canada.

Foreign ownership is definitely an issue that has been raised repeatedly and has been raised in the FOPO discussions. We've asked for very simple tracking. All you have to do to start that—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Dan, I'm sorry. I'm talking about foreign vessels catching fish. We see pictures of these large factory vessels scooping up everything that's alive, and probably a bunch that isn't. Do you see that as a problem?

Mr. Dan Edwards: If you read a book called *The Outlaw Ocean*, you will see that there's been an increase overall on water fishing, but it's not evident here specifically within the 200-mile limit. Where there are examples of it impacting our salmon as they travel well offshore, that may possibly be a problem. There are people looking into that right now, actually, and there have been some studies on it.

• (1310)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Ms. Scarfo, do you have any comments?

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: I don't think I could really comment. There is no foreign ownership in the existing fleet. As for whether there are illegal fleets within the 200-mile limit, I would tend to think that we probably have decent enforcement.

What we have seen in the last 20 years is a massive increase in the drag trawl fleet offshore. That obviously has an impact on salmon. Whether that ownership within the hake and that is foreign, I couldn't say, but I think that is a concern. We've gone from the small boat fleet to an increasingly large vessel fleet.

Mr. Ken Hardie: This is going back to the exchange I have had indirectly with Ed. A lot of the discussion we've had really has a lot to do with who gets access to a finite resource, and a resource that now everybody agrees has been shrinking. What do we do?

What is your advice, as somebody who has a material interest in the health of the fishing industry? What do we do to build the stocks, right? Rather than argue over who gets to catch what's left, what do we do to actually build the stocks?

If anybody has a point of view, an opinion or a thought on that, just raise your hand, and I'll go to you.

Go ahead please, Brad.

Mr. Brad Mirau: You said to rebuild the stocks, but you started by asking about allocation, and I would say that I would like to have a broader fix to this. I think that if the federal government views itself somewhat as an employer of fishermen, in the sense that they've set policy over the years that has given fishermen jobs and licences, policies have changed. Allocation policies have changed. Reconciliation has changed—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Brad, I'm sorry, but that's not where I'm going with the question. What do we do to rebuild stocks so that we don't need to have this discussion about who gets access to what's left?

Mr. Brad Mirau: More stock assessment, hatcheries and stock enhancement and control of predators would be a good start.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay, good.

Is there anybody else with a comment there?

Mr. Dan Edwards: Yes.

I spent 15 years as the head of the salmon enhancement society here in Ucluelet. At the same time, in southeast Alaska, a similar situation happened back in 1979.

In Juneau, Alaska, they have a hatchery that produces, I think 50 million pinks, 10 million chum and five million coho and chinook. In the community where I live, they reluctantly allow us to raise 50,000 chinook. It's a complete lack of vision around how to actually rebuild. That's been a real problem in B.C. for years.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Kathy, you were saying that with the Alaskan runs, you catch Alaskan fish and the Alaskans catch Canadian fish. The Alaskans seem to be doing well and we are not. There seems to be a disconnect here.

Are you saying that the Alaskan runs in fact are poor and the Canadian runs aren't? Tell us a little bit more about that.

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: The fish go from Alaska down to Washington, Oregon and California. Those are the stocks that we're harvest-

ing. We're not harvesting Alaskan fish. Alaskans are harvesting Canadian fish that would come to us within our area, so we reciprocate and harvest some of theirs as they go by.

Alaska is doing well. In Washington and Oregon, there are definitely stocks of concern. There's no denying that there are problems everywhere. However, they're seeing massive hatchery programs, massive investment and good opportunities on those fisheries for their fleets.

I think when you talk about rebuilding, you have to have a strategy to rebuild and you have to have a commitment and an investment. We've gutted those programs over the years.

Going to area licensing, we were supposed to increase the number of stakeholders in a given area, but we've abolished that, by not allowing people to feel that they have a future in the industry and make commitments as volunteers in many of those areas. In certain cases, we weren't even allowed to feed the brood stock we had because they would then be hatchery fish and not wild. There's a dispute between the wild salmon policy....

I think you have to deal with allocation in the meantime, because you're not going to rebuild salmon within a four-year cycle. It's going to take longer than that.

There are the allocation issues, and expectations that some groups have that they can continue to expand, such as the recreational fishery, which has grown exponentially time and time again over the last decade. There are expectations within the first nations that by reconciliation they will be seeing economically viable opportunities. We can tell within the commercial industry that economic viability is not something we're seeing for very many people within the industry. It's hit-and-miss, and it's going to be a problem as we go along.

• (1315)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

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

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Scarfo, you mentioned that the trolling fleet catches primarily American fish. The United States, I believe marks 100% of its hatchery fish.

Do you see a price difference between a fish that's marked as a hatchery fish and a natural spawned fish? Do you get a price differential on that at all?

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: The simple answer is no.

Even at this present time, when I talk about forgone opportunity, we're not allowed to retain coho on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Even though biological staff over the years have said there is an opportunity, with a very marginal impact on Canadian endangered stocks. If we had a fishery that harvested, say, 20,000 coho on the west coast of Vancouver Island, it would maybe harvest one or two Fraser-bound coho that would be considered endangered, and usually there's some flexibility in that number when we manage other fisheries.

The situation right now is so absurd that we are being forced to throw back American hatchery coho in our fishery. We're landing coho in our chinook fishery that are hatchery marked and bound for the U.S., which we know are not an endangered species. That would provide some cushion in the diversification of opportunities, and we're having to throw them back. It just seems absolutely absurd.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Depending on the nature of the hatchery, whether it's a conservation hatchery or it's a hatchery that's designed to put more fish into the ocean, what you're saying is that we're returning some of those fish that were meant to be captured.

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: Absolutely.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I have a question for Ms. Scarfo, and maybe Mr. Mirau. There has been a lot of discussion about investments and how the department and the governments of the day invest their money. There's a litany of investments—some small, some large—on the Department of Fisheries and Oceans website, announcements made by local MPs and/or the minister. Many of these I look at and go, "I don't see these as being issues directly related to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans or the enhancement of fisheries at all. These seem to be tangential issues meant more to appease special interest groups."

Would any of you care to talk about whether or not you think the department is actually investing in things that will make a consequential difference?

Mr. Brad Mirau: I can speak on that briefly. I'm sure that the larger the government, the worse some of the spending is, but I would like to see more spending on the counting of the fish because you can't catch what you can't see.

I will give you an example about the Alaskan fish being caught. Southeast Alaska will catch the chum that we won't catch. We're not allowed to catch them because the stock assessment is not there. Our DFO will not let us catch American chum in the Prince Rupert area because they have insufficient stock assessment.

We need more and better stock assessment on the grounds, counting of the fish, and monitoring of the fish, for sure.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you.

I'm going to move over now to Mr. Bryan and his Whooshh system. It's a very interesting technology. You said that you capture about 18 images of a fish that goes through and that with the six tubes you could move about 30 fish per minute. That's a lot of technology you have at your disposal.

Are you able to detect whether or not a fish has a coded wire tag in it when it goes through your equipment?

Mr. Vince Bryan: Yes. We are seeing that and other tagging techniques that are being used on the Fraser.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: If you're able to capture that kind of information, then you must be able to determine whether or not a fish has gone through your system twice. Can you tell this committee anything about how many of the fish you send over the Big Bar slide return back through the slide and go through your system again? What is that percentage, if any?

Mr. Vince Bryan: We don't have that information yet. We are currently in a situation where we cannot get the data directly as a real-time feed to us, so it has to be transferred physically. We're a couple of weeks behind, so we don't have that information yet, but everybody's working on that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Is that data collection at risk? Who will have access to that raw data when you're done with it? Do you hand it directly over to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or are you allowed to keep it with your own firm and disclose it publicly?

● (1320)

Mr. Vince Bryan: We are required to give it to the DFO.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: How many fish to date have you seen? Can you give the committee any indication of how many fish to date have you moved from below the slide to above?

Mr. Vince Bryan: As of a couple of days ago, about 5,000 have gone through the Whooshh system and have been transported above.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Is that specifically one species or all species?

Mr. Vince Bryan: We have seen chinook and sockeye. Those are primarily sockeye.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I would be very curious to find out what that data is, Mr. Chair. I will use a little bit of this time to make a request that we send a letter to the minister requesting updates on the number of fish that this system is moving in a timely manner and reporting back to the committee. There is no reason that this information shouldn't be available to this committee.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Your time is up.

Mr. Calkins, are you making that as a formal motion or just asking for agreement of the committee to request that information?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Chair, I'm not making a formal motion. I would be surprised if anybody on the committee would say no to it, but if we want to have that discussion later, I would be more than happy to entertain that.

Mr. Vince Bryan: There is a current count that is provided on the DFO website. That's provided daily, but not by species.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you.

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes or less, please.

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

My questions are directed to Mr. Mirau, primarily, and probably to Ms. Scarfo.

There has been a lot of discussion in this particular meeting and in past FOPO meetings of the analysis between B.C. management of the salmon fishery and the Alaskan management. Alaska is doing it well.

Mr. Mirau, you referred to the need for proper and robust signs. How is Alaska competing with us in that particular area?

Mr. Brad Mirau: To put it simply, you cannot catch what you don't count, you can't count what you don't see and you can't see what you don't look for. Alaska is identifying its fish stocks. They have more boots on the ground, with people walking streams, and drones and boats looking.

Quite often in northern B.C., our fish get identified by commercial fishermen. They tell DFO, and then DFO struggles to have a budget to get a boat out to look. The stock assessment here is bad—

The Clerk: I am sorry, Mr. Mirau. Would it be possible for you to move the microphone a bit?

Mr. Brad Mirau: Yes. I'm sorry about that.

Our stock assessment on the grounds is really pathetic in British Columbia, compared to Alaska's. They have more boots on the ground, more assets and more of a priority to look for the fish and count the fish.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Just for clarification, nobody referenced this, but in comparison to B.C., is there no salmon farming done in Alaska? Is the same type of fish farming done in Alaska?

Mr. Dan Edwards: There is none.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. At an earlier—

Mr. Brad Mirau: It's not allowed, actually.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: At an earlier committee meeting, a witness referenced—and nobody really spoke to it today—that salmon farms are one of the single biggest issues harming natural salmon stocks. Would the witnesses today agree with that, Madam Scarfo or Mr. Mirau?

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: I would say that there's been ample evidence from the Cohen inquiry all the way through that fish farms are a significant problem. If you have a significant problem that you know exists, the precautionary approach would dictate that you don't allow them to continue, just as you don't allow fisheries to take place if you are posing a significant risk. I think there's been evidence that there's significant risk at this point.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: We do seem to be coming to a consensus that Alaska is managing the salmon fishery better than Canada is in B.C. Is that a fair statement?

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: I would say so. Also, I would follow up on what my colleague mentioned, in that if you don't have boots on the ground, you don't have the information. Without the information, you can't manage, basically, so you abdicate management if you don't go out and get that information.

We had an example just this week. We know that the Fraser River run is an absolute disaster. The only way we know what's happening on the Fraser River before the fish actually arrive at the riv-

er is through the test fisheries. You send out commercial boats, and in a pattern that's evolved over a century, you basically compare catches in certain gauntlet areas to determine whether or not there are more fish coming, and if so, what part of the run you're starting to see. You DNA-sample them and you go to coded wire tag fish.

If you don't have test fisheries, you can't manage a fishery. They shut down the test fishery on Fraser River early this year, where we know that there is a significant problem, and now we have no eyes on the water. Also, the pink fisheries have been abolished in certain areas. We used to send in a small fleet and say that if there were fish, we'd continue to fish; otherwise, you're closed and that's it. Those are abolished.

As for test fishing going out, in our fishery, chinook is a different beast than sockeye is. It's a six-year cycle, so the datasets that we establish within our commercial fleet are very critical. The recreational fleet now harvests more than the first nations and the commercial combined, yet they have a voluntary compliance on letting us know how many fish they caught at the dock or in sampling. Our dataset that we're relying on is coming from a smaller portion of the fishery at any given time, and basically from the commercial fleet and from historical data when we actually had large fisheries.

• (1325)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey. You have about three seconds left. I don't think you'll get to say much in the way of a question in that length of time.

We'll now go to Madam Gill for two and a half minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Mirau, Ms. Scarfo or Mr. Edwards.

In your introduction, you mentioned—I can't remember who did, but I know that Mr. Mirau mentioned it—the issue of conflict of interest at Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Could one of you elaborate on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Mirau: I can answer that. One potential massive conflict would be DFO managing fish farms as well as wild fisheries. If there is a question and the science isn't settled about the safety of fish farms, then I think there's at least the perception of a conflict of interest there. In all of the allocation agreements, there is a conflict if the fish managers are actually in the discussion and they're the ones making the decision. I think it's a conflict—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Chair, since there is no interpretation, probably because of the difficulties we experienced earlier, may I ask Mr. Mirau directly to speak a little more slowly?

I understand English, of course, but there is no interpretation at the moment. He could also send me a written answer, if that is possible.

Excuse me, Mr. Mirau, please continue.

[English]

Mr. Brad Mirau: I'm happy to reply in writing also.

I mentioned the example of DFO being responsible for fish farms as well as wild-capture fisheries. I believe there is the potential for massive conflict on decision-making with those two files.

Mr. Dan Edwards: There's another major conflict as well, and it has to do with the federal government's fiduciary responsibility to first nations. It's been very clear, in court cases here in British Columbia, that because of that conflict, when discussing the management and the allocation of resources within the fishing industry, the stakeholder interests need to be at the table. Otherwise, the Government of Canada and its bureaucracy cannot, without being in a conflict, actually represent our interests. That's a conflict.

Ms. Kathy Scarfo: I would like to follow up on that.

Yes, fish farms are definitely a conflict. Maybe they should be in the agriculture ministry and allow fisheries to be managed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. I think the buying of licences, the transfer programs where DFO manages opportunity and then tries to manage buying licences at best value for dollar, is a major conflict of interest. They basically starve you out and then offer to buy your licence in a reverse bid where you compete with each other. That's just unquestionably a conflict of interest. As well, I think DFO being the lead in negotiations on reconciliation and also providing fishing opportunities and allocation should be removed from the department.

Just to follow up on that, I said something before about social engineering. Who, where, when and how fish are caught determines the cultural and coastal community quality of life in so many ways. If the department is now engaged in who, where, when and how to the degree that they are, more than, "There are fishing opportunities, and therefore let's figure out how to harvest them", then you've changed the role of the department and they are in conflict with their primary mandate.

• (1330)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gill.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes or less, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Mr. Mirau and Ms. Scarfo, you talked about Alaska and the U.S. and how much they've invested in their fisheries, whether it be in restoration enhancement or particularly in monitoring and assessment. Can you talk about the scale of that? What does it look like? What's their investment compared with Canadian investment? Do

either of you want to touch on that, or do you have any idea of what that looks like?

Mr. Brad Mirau: I can provide something in writing later, but for the scale of stock assessment, I can tell you that almost every river system in Alaska is counted and monitored. You can see on their websites, for very minute streams and rivers, the counts for coho and chinook and pink and chum. You just don't see that in British Columbia.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Edwards, we've talked about reconciliation. Even with the Nuu-chah-nulth court case, the judge said that the government went to the table knowingly empty-handed, with no intention of resourcing an agreement. Can you talk about what is necessary for reconciliation and the resources that are needed to follow through with true reconciliation?

Mr. Dan Edwards: Those are good questions, but the reality is that the government has had a mechanism for transfer for years, and has had principles around that for years. Back in the 1990s, those principles were reiterated very clearly that they enter into a buying-up of existing access. It would also include a transfer to first nations in order to make sure that the Canadian government, the Canadian people, was paying for reconciliation, and not individual businesses or enterprises, which would be unfair to those enterprises.

When the court case came about, the lawyers for the first nations were very clear in saying that there's a win here for their ability to catch fish, but they have to work within the framework of transferring properly from the existing resource to their fishery. They've been doing that to some degree, but in some instances, with chinook, the federal government in fact has transferred 5,000 chinook from the area G troll fishery without the requisite buying-up of the area G licences that justify that, which is exactly what they've done with the commercial sport fishery here in B.C.

When you do that, you undermine the existing fisheries of people who've had 40 or 50 years of capital, social, and financial engagement in a fishery. They've just ripped their livelihood away from them with no compensation. The need to do it properly is really critical, and because it's a court-appointed fishery, the Canadian government has to make sure that it actually satisfies the needs that were recognized by that court case.

The Chair: Thank you, Gord. That closes up our questioning today with our witnesses.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing today, and providing us with some valued information for the committee members when it comes to the writing of this report, and getting it finally completed later on.

I will give a moment now for the witnesses to sign off, so that we can go directly to committee business.

Again, thank you, everyone. Enjoy the rest of your day.

• (1330) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1335)

The Chair: We do know that today is the last meeting that was planned for our July and August meetings under the order of a vote, late in June. Basically, where do we go from here?

Right now, everybody may be under an assumption that the House will sit again on September 21, until we hear otherwise. We don't know if that will happen or not. We certainly haven't been told what the plan is. We don't know if we will be back to a normal committee schedule when that time arrives, or if we will have to find a time slot, going forward.

We don't know if we'll be able to do it twice a week, as we normally would, when the House will be sitting. We do know that it's limited time and limited availability of staff and resources to do this virtually as we have done twice in July and twice in August.

As well, we have to know what we start when we meet again. Do we continue with the salmon study, and get that done before we get into something else? My personal preference is to finish what we're doing. It seems to be a broad study, and we're hearing some great testimony.

I'd really like to see this one completed and presented to the House sooner rather than later, rather than skipping it, and going to something else and then coming back to this. I'd like to see it go that way, but I want to hear from the committee members to know what their wishes are.

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We're looking at the witness lists that have been put forward to see whether, in fact, we have people we need to hear from, and sectors we need to hear from. Based on what we've seen so far, we would probably need two more meetings with witnesses plus one session with the officials, and perhaps we could work drafting instructions in at the end of the session with the officials. That would be a total of three meetings.

Mel and Gord, you also have your shopping list of people you wanted to hear from. If we haven't heard from them yet, we've gone this far, and we need to invest the time to make sure that it's done coherently and thoroughly.

The Chair: Mel.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Looking at who we've heard from so far, I would agree that we need two to three more meetings after today. We have heard from one side on the salmon aquaculture issue; we haven't yet heard from the aquaculture farmers themselves in this study. We have some science that we haven't heard about.

I agree that I'd rather finish this study before we move on to another one. We need to finish this one so that it's rounded out. If we don't and we don't bring in a well-rounded committee list, we risk the chance of the report being dismissed as incomplete by some of the other stakeholders we haven't heard from.

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast: I agree with Mel. If we issue a report in which key stakeholders have not participated and they come back and crit-

icize the report and say they weren't consulted so how can these recommendations have any real weight or credibility, we will have failed. This promises to be a major report and set of recommendation that will hopefully move the protection and enhancement of our wild salmon stocks forward.

Again, I would think we would want to have at least three more meetings with witnesses.

Obviously our team will get back to you, Mr. Chair, with additional witnesses we hope will fill the gaps in testimony that still exist. Then perhaps, there would be one more meeting for drafting instructions.

• (1340)

The Chair: Thanks for that, Ed.

There are still a lot of witnesses who have been put forward and haven't been heard from yet and aren't scheduled. I think you're right on who we need to hear from and how broad this should be.

Gord.

Mr. Gord Johns: I support what Ed was saying in terms of three more meetings and then one more with staff coming back to us. We are in agreement with that.

The Chair: I see people nodding their heads.

Madam Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I just want to add my voice to that of the other party representatives.

Clearly, in terms of representation, I absolutely agree that all stakeholders from the different sectors should be able to express themselves so that this seems to be a complete and proper study. For the sake of consistency, the number of sessions we will need in order to be able to fully hear from each of the witnesses from the different sectors will be fine with me.

[*English*]

The Chair: I don't see any more hands raised.

I am hearing consensus on continuing with the salmon study to get it finished, with maybe three or possibly four more meetings, including the officials. I like the option of bringing the officials back after we've heard from all the witnesses, because then we can maybe counteract what they said at the beginning or hit them with what we've heard thus far, before we do the actual writing of the report.

The only thing I would suggest, probably for timelines, is keeping an eye on when we can get our meeting set on the schedule. Once we find out what's going on with the House, we'll get our request in early before other committees. That way, we might get on the docket earlier rather than later. We'll keep the committee members informed as we go forward of anything we hear on the option of when we can do our meetings, and the time slots available, to get a consensus of what suits everybody.

Is everybody okay with looking at it in that manner?

With the witnesses, we'll see who's available and when they're available once we see what meeting slots we can fit in. As I said, if we need three more meetings, four more meetings, let's queue this one up before we get into something else. I think if we leave it too long, we'll probably lose the flavour of some of the recommendations we'd like to see going forward to the department.

Mel.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you for looking into getting us in early if possible. I think we see a situation on the west coast that's very dire right now with regard to the salmon. These people need help. For the industry, the economy and the indigenous and non-indigenous, it's a big issue, so I think we need to carry on with this, get it wrapped up and get those recommendations in.

Thank you.

The Chair: Terry, do you have your hand up?

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): No, I didn't, but it's nice to see everybody. The last couple of days have been very informative.

The Chair: They have been. I think this entire study has been eye-opening, if nothing else, and I would like to see a real good report presented to go back to the House, the ministry or whoever is going to answer to it and try to do something.

I will go back to Mr. Donnelly's comments of the other day. We have the opportunity of doing a good report, making good recommendations and parking the political stripes at the door or outside the room, whether we're doing this virtually or in the House. I look forward to that and to a good report.

Gord.

Mr. Gord Johns: When do we meet next?

The Chair: We don't know yet, Gord. The number of meetings was passed in an earlier motion, the number that we were supposed to do in July and August. For September, I'm sure there are ongoing discussions, I would think, as to whether or not the House is going to open on September 21. There will be discussions, I guess, on how often and at what times committees can meet. As we know, at the beginning of this, we were limited on the times we could meet because other committees were meeting. We could only do so many of these virtual meetings at one time.

I think we have to try to get this in as soon as possible. The 22nd, 24th and 29th are probably options for us to start meeting, but that would depend on what happens with the discussion on whether it's everybody back in Ottawa or everybody the way we are right now. I think we need to try to that out first before we can nail down the actual dates, but at least we can get our request in for those particular days to try to make sure that we're early on the list.

• (1345)

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, would you want some clarifications from me?

The Chair: Yes, if you can. That would be great.

The Clerk: Just to make sure that procedurally you have all the correct information, the committee is now meeting by video confer-

ence on Zoom, according to the motion that was adopted by the House on May 26. That motion does not prevent the committee from meeting again in August or September.

It has not been scheduled yet because the motion adopted by the committee on June 1 was to meet specifically in July and August. If it is the will of the members, they can talk to their whips, and they can try to meet sooner, or to wait until after the 21st. Procedurally speaking, nothing is preventing the committee from requesting more meetings.

The Chair: Okay. You mentioned, Nancy, talking to the various party whips about that. Do we need the permission of the various party whips in order to meet again, whether it be in August or early in September?

The Clerk: If the committee were to say today that they want to meet sooner—because from what I hear, this committee would want to discuss the Pacific salmon sooner than later—then the committee can definitely discuss adding more meetings anywhere between now and later in early September before the House resumes. That would have to be a decision of the committee. If the committee decides to have them, then the suggestion would be to send that to the whips of the parties with a date, and we would try to find a place for the meetings.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Nancy.

You've all heard this. I shouldn't have to explain it. The option is here if we decide we want to meet earlier and put in some meetings before the House is actually scheduled to sit. Of course, that would require a motion from somebody and a discussion and a vote. I don't know if anybody has looked at a calendar and has decided on that today or if you want to put forward suggestions that we can send out to everybody. If it has to come to a vote, we'll have to get the committee together.

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Chair, I think you mentioned September 22, 24 and 29, when we'll probably be back to a little bit more normal, whatever that looks like. I suggest we stick with that rather than trying to shoehorn in additional meetings now, before Parliament comes back. I think we need to obviously respect the work that has to be done to get the witnesses all lined up. It would give us a little time, too, to digest what we've heard so far and really be primed for the next round of questioning that we'll be putting out there.

The Chair: Madam Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Chair, please correct me if I am wrong.

During our last discussions, it was mentioned a few times that the issues of salmon and Big Bar were urgent. There have been a lot of delays in our study.

So would it be possible to schedule meetings to properly complete the study and make our recommendations more quickly, given the importance and urgency of this issue?

[English]

The Chair: Anybody else? No.

Do we have a comment on Madam Gill's view to do it earlier or even on Mr. Hardie's view of September 22, 24 and 29?

Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

• (1350)

Mr. Mel Arnold: If we can...not make the decision today, so that we can consult with our teams and whips before we move forward, but certainly be prepared for September 21, when the House is set to resume.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): I agree with Ken Hardie on September 22 as a starting point. I think it gives us time to digest this, to make sure we're prepared and to get good witnesses to follow through on this. We're all looking at a very unsure time as well, when we're sending our kids back to school and there's talk of a second wave. Let's see how that settles before we start getting into taking things on too early.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I agree.

The Chair: Thanks, everyone.

I think we'll go ahead, Mel, as you mentioned, and plan on September 22, 24 and 29. That will give us a chance to talk to the

various leadership teams and whatnot to see whether it will be suitable and whether we can get those dates. If we want to add some along the way, we can. As somebody said, it will give us a chance to recharge, I guess, and review some of what we've already heard before we hear from more witnesses again or get in any names that we want to put on that witness list.

Hearing nothing else, we'll leave it at that.

Nancy, we will try to get a request in to make sure we get time allotted for September 22, 24 and 29— virtually, if necessary; we won't know that, I guess, until everybody finalizes what Parliament will look like on September 21, when it comes back. Hopefully, if by chance it's with everybody in Ottawa, fine, but if not, we'll have our request already in for September 22, 24 and 29. I will leave it at that.

Does anyone else have any other comment?

Hearing none, I will bid farewell to everyone. There was great participation from all.

Thank you to Nancy, the analysts and the interpreters for another great job.

Thanks, everyone. We'll be in touch.

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