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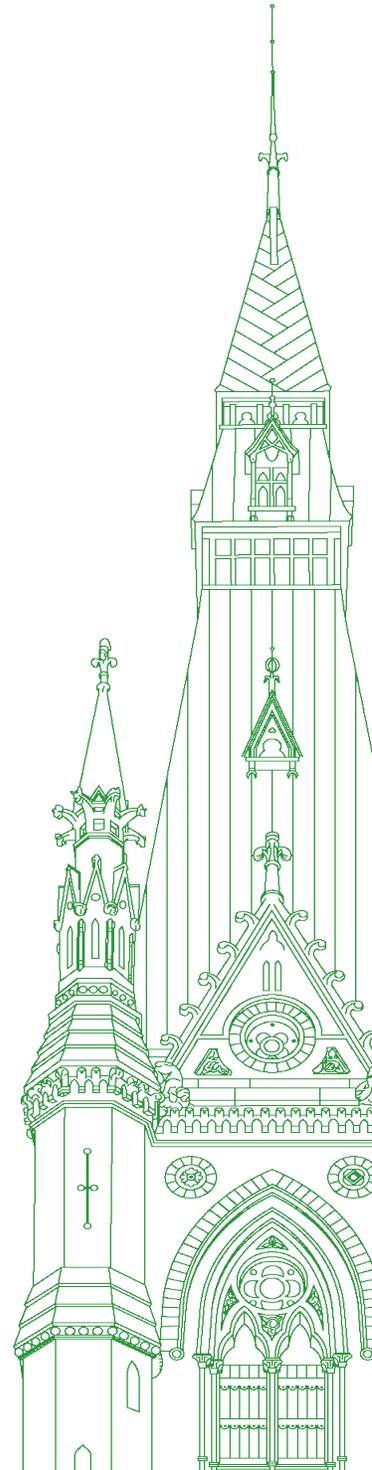
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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1105)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 25 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on February 1, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of science at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

This meeting of course is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021.

As per the directives of the Board of Internal Economy on March 10, 2022, all those attending the meeting in person must wear a mask, except for members who are at their place during proceedings.

For those participating by video conference, when you are ready to speak, click on the icon to activate your mike. Please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. For interpretation, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French audio.

I'll remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

I will let everyone know that right now we have two witnesses from Bait Masters Incorporated who haven't been able to join because they have a power outage. If it gets remedied or if they get to a spot where they can, they will join along the way.

We have, from the BC Seafood Alliance, Christina Burridge, executive director; from the Fish, Food and Allied Workers—Unifor, Keith Sullivan, president; from the Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance, Aidan Fisher, biologist; from the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, Melanie Giffin, marine biologist and program planner; and from the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, Jean Côté, scientific director.

We'll begin with opening remarks from Christina Burridge for five minutes or less, please.

Ms. Christina Burridge (Executive Director, BC Seafood Alliance): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The BC Seafood Alliance is an umbrella organization whose 30 members represent fisheries accounting for about 90% of the value of wild seafood from Canada's Pacific coast.

This study is one of the most important the committee has undertaken, and I want to give you my perspective on what works and what does not.

First, the CSAS process can and should be improved, but it provides a critical peer-review process for science advice to fisheries management. It incorporates new knowledge, data and updated stock assessment analyses consistent with the precautionary approach and accepted principles and standards of fisheries sustainability.

Second, DFO science in support of fish harvest management has long been starved of resources.

Third, when ministers ignore the science in favour of their own views, we are on dangerous ground.

The current process for peer-reviewed science advice is fundamental. It starts with a request for science advice, usually from fish management. CSAS identifies the lead scientists who will develop a response and pull together available data and research. A working group then assists the lead scientists in their review of the data, the validity of assumptions, and the development of assessment models. A draft research paper or assessment is produced for peer review by DFO scientists, academics, professional fisheries analysts and other interested parties. Independent peer review is provided by three expert reviewers, two external to DFO. Revisions may be recommended and provided for further review. The advice is then provided as a science advisory report to fisheries management, where it will be considered, along with social, cultural, economic and operational information, in the development of sustainable harvest advice.

The CSAS process provides a sound foundation, but would benefit from improvements to standardized procedures and the provision of formal reviewers. Other international jurisdictions compensate external reviewers so they can reliably obtain the services of subject matter experts, who are key to the integrity of the system. You get what you pay for. In our experience, qualified industry experts have an essential role to play. Not for someone like me, but our members and professional analysts bring an understanding of fisheries and survey data, assessment methodologies, evaluation, and the management context that scientists may not have. My members believe that good science is critical for fisheries sustainability and, therefore, invest in fisheries science and monitoring to the tune of almost \$10 million annually. That's for groundfish and shellfish alone. Independent peer review of fisheries science, in support of management via CSAS, needs shoring up and strengthening, not tearing down.

Generally, resources for fisheries science have not grown with the demand for harvest advice. The Species at Risk Act, the sustainable fisheries framework, the fish stock provisions, and external demands for recognition of sustainability and good management—such as marine stewardship certification—put a huge burden on a very small number of highly qualified personnel on this coast. For example, our groundfish fishery has fully integrated over more than 60 different stocks, some of which have never had a stock assessment. Others have not had one for more than 30 years.

DFO has the resources to do only about two domestic west coast groundfish assessments a year, even when supported by professional analysts. In the absence of timely stock assessments, TACs may be more precautionary than necessary, meaning benefits to Canadians are constrained.

Lastly, I must mention the minister's December 2021 decision on Pacific herring, including cutting the TAC for Strait of Georgia herring in half. Pacific herring stocks have excellent long-term datasets and a thoroughly reviewed assessment and management approach. Herring stocks are surveyed and assessed annually, and there are no other valid estimates of their status. In particular, the Strait of Georgia herring population is estimated to be in the healthy zone, and has been above the limit reference point for decades. A harvest control rule is in place, which will reduce catches and cease commercial activity before the stock declines to a critical level. An arbitrary 50% cut by the minister ignores this information and discredits the work of DFO science and the CSAS process.

• (1110)

I hope the committee's recommendations will include providing resources to reinforce stock assessment, ensuring scientific peer review by an improved CSAS, improving effective monitoring and enforcement, and reducing political interference. These changes are important to fisheries on the west coast.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Burrige.

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

Mr. Keith Sullivan (President, Fish, Food and Allied Workers - Unifor): On behalf of 13,000 members from Newfoundland and Labrador, thanks for the opportunity.

The FFAW represents inshore harvesters in our province, encompassing 10,000 owner-operators and crew. Our scope of membership also includes hundreds of workers in fish processing.

I am here today to explain the essential role fish harvesters play in sustainable fisheries management and the concerning way their knowledge and expertise have been excluded from science and management.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the value of the inshore fishery cannot be overstated. It is not an industry that can simply be replaced through theoretical green jobs or tech industry development, nor does it need to be. It requires support and investment. It is an industry that can be sustainably maintained for generations to come through sound scientific advice, diversification and putting people and communities first when making decisions.

Ensuring that the fishery remains vibrant into the future is a pillar of the work our union undertakes. A critical component of that is ensuring that harvesters' knowledge and voices are heard and valued by DFO, in particular. In the three decades since the devastation of the cod moratorium, our organization has been a trailblazer for improving marine science by initiating dozens of surveys and other scientific projects, bringing quantifiable information from harvesters to the scientific assessment table.

The demand for robust science has expanded in recent years. Our union has invested greatly in building a competent science team with full-time scientists and other staff. We know that much of the science has filled gaps left by the federal government. Each year, over 1,000 individuals volunteer their time and knowledge, making meaningful contributions to science.

Despite all of this, harvesters still do not have a valued seat at the table, and DFO continues to disregard harvesters and their contributions.

The blue economy must begin with independent harvesters, who are most impacted by the changes in our marine environment. These Canadians and their families have the most to lose. The decisions relating to science and the management of fisheries and oceans have very real impacts on their lives, yet they are usually the last to be considered.

Fewer invitations for harvester participation during the science and management process, less support from DFO and a broad sentiment of disrespect toward harvesters and the fishing industry have brought me here today. By ignoring the valuable observations of harvesters and by refusing to conduct adequate scientific assessments, the government is eroding the inshore fishery in our province. There is concern from harvesters that their voices are being replaced by influential special interest groups that lobby, and that the impact of those groups on government decisions is hurting our communities, our economy and our ability to work toward healthy communities.

Recent changes to the Fisheries Act have prioritized the sustainable fisheries framework, including the precautionary approach. While this is very well-intentioned, it forces rigid frameworks on fisheries that are not supported by adequate science.

Oftentimes, the precautionary approach attempts to rebuild fisheries to the highest point in a time series for that species. The result is several independent approaches attempting to build all species back to historic highs. This may be impossible for an ecosystem.

One issue that has been ignored for decades is the impact seal populations are having on fish stocks. Species like capelin and cod, which are often scrutinized by conservation groups, have low harvest rates. We see that DFO in 2008 said that harp seals ate 4.2 million tonnes of prey. To put this into perspective, the fishery in Atlantic Canada probably takes 560,000 tonnes in a year. It feeds millions of people and has generated more than \$3 billion.

Recently, the minister made a decision on gulf shrimp that completely deviated from the PA, making more aggressive cuts to the resource. This PA was developed in consultation with fish harvesters, scientists and management, yet the decision discarded this work.

I ask you, when decisions like this are repeatedly made, how can harvesters trust DFO?

I'm here to ask you to consider the following recommendations.

We ask that you immediately consider recommendations to increase independent inshore fish harvesters' contributions to the scientific and management processes for all fisheries, such as through CSAS or the advisory process.

- (1115)

As science gets more complex, the Fisheries Act dictates that it will become more rigid, unless meaningful measures are taken to ensure fish harvester knowledge is given weight. We ask the federal government to undertake an initiative to ensure that fish harvester knowledge be incorporated in all science and management decisions. Both natural and socio-economic sciences are critical components of fishery sustainability and should be treated with equal weight.

Finally, we ask the Government of Canada to explicitly state that the independent inshore harvesters and those who live in and depend upon the marine environment adjacent to them will be prioritized in the blue economy strategy.

Thank you for the time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sullivan.

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

Mr. Aidan Fisher (Biologist, Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance): *Éy latelh.* Good morning. My name is Aidan Fisher. I'm a band member of Tzeachten First Nation in Chilliwack, B.C., which is part of the Stó:lo Nation. I'm speaking to all of you who are meeting on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people from the unceded S'ólh Téméxw territory of the Stó:lo people.

I'm here today through my day job as a fisheries biologist for the Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance, an indigenous technical organization that works to support the collective interests of 23 first nations along the lower Fraser River for fish, fisheries and fish habitat that have supported our people since time immemorial.

Over the past seven years, I have participated in numerous DFO Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat review processes at multiple levels. I have also worked with many DFO staff members in different departments on science and technical items related to the Fraser salmon, eulachon and sturgeon fisheries.

My colleagues and I are frequently frustrated by the inconsistency and lack of transparency with which we see scientific information being applied to support management decisions at the decision-making tables. While some management actions benefit from extensive technical discussion with rights holders and stakeholders, other important decisions are presented with little or no technical justification. When organizations like ours request data and analysis from DFO staff to support and justify these decisions, we are often left waiting for long periods of time and, in some cases, do not receive any technical information at all.

Even throughout DFO's annual integrated fisheries management planning processes, in which actions are usually justified with some degree of technical information, the level of detail of that information varies greatly, depending on which species or fishery is under review.

The way in which areas of study are prioritized by DFO also lacks transparency. Economically important species seem to be prioritized over stocks for which there is greater conservation concern. Economically important species include typical commercial fisheries and recreational fisheries that support lucrative industries all along the coast. Stocks and species that contribute only to first nations fisheries are simply not prioritized for study, so there is usually insufficient or no support for scientific projects and investigation.

It's also important to note that resourcing is not provided for external participants like me to engage in CSAS peer-review processes. My participation on CSAS reviews takes time away from other projects and studies the LFFA is advocating for, and I do this only because the LFFA and its member nations consider peer-reviewed technical processes to be vitally important to understanding the management decision-making process.

Our people have a wealth of knowledge, passed down since time immemorial, for maintaining and supporting robust fish populations and fisheries. Indigenous knowledge and application stand distinct from and complementary to western science, yet they are routinely incorporated as a small part of the scientific peer-review process. If DFO and Canada are serious about reconciliation, a small step could be the development of a robust indigenous knowledge and application program on our terms. While some DFO processes, like COSEWIC and SARA, identify the inclusion of indigenous knowledge, it's included in a way that inherently contradicts the extent and capacity of the understanding. Indigenous knowledge is overwhelmingly not applied in the final recommendations, because the information doesn't fit within the western science framework. For example, it is labelled too complex, not specific enough, too specific, not relevant or not contained in a published source.

As first nations along the Fraser River grow their capacity to take on technical work, there is an increasing interest in collaboration with science and technical staff at DFO with the intention of moving into the complete transition of technical work to first nations. DFO operates extensive technical work throughout the lower Fraser, with highly variable levels of inclusion and respect for the authority of traditional territories and resources. DFO needs to develop a transition program for all work happening in the traditional territories of first nations that are interested in taking on fisheries work. DFO staff are not required to include first nations in their programs in our territories, let alone to transition their programs and facilities to interested first nations. This needs to change.

First nations are prepared to collaborate, but our ability to do so is highly dependent on the personality of the DFO staff person we are working with and basic, consistent resourcing for our teams. In some cases, the relationship is open and productive, while in others it's a challenge to receive basic information. What we see with other sectors is that DFO does seem to be consistently engaged, prepared to share data and happy to resource participation and collaborative projects. What we are looking for now is that same openness, transparency and collaborative spirit extended to first nations and our science and technical work.

Yalh yexw kw'as hoy. Thank you, committee members, for your time today.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

We'll now go to Ms. Giffin for five minutes or less, please.

Ms. Melanie Giffin (Marine Biologist and Program Planner, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): On behalf of the approximately 1,200 fishers in P.E.I., I would like to thank you, Mr. Chair and members of this committee, for the invitation to speak to you today.

The P.E.I. Fishermen's Association was created in the 1950s and has evolved alongside the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to create the well-established working relationship we currently maintain.

Since science is the topic today, I would first like to say that the PEIFA knows how hard DFO scientists work to ensure fulsome representation of the data collected. Our goal in being here today is to focus on the processes and mechanisms behind the collection of scientific data, and how they can evolve along with industry and the changing needs of DFO.

The quality of the data being collected and how it differs from species to species was brought up in previous sessions, so I will expand a little, but I will also include specific comments regarding process.

Number one, logbooks are an economically feasible way for DFO to collect a wealth of information. Unfortunately, it has become common practice for DFO to create these logbooks with no input from industry. If harvesters will be filling out the data, they should be involved in the discussion on how it is recorded to ensure consistency of the data collection. Otherwise, the data becomes unreliable and the logbooks a wasted resource.

Number two is field and at-sea data collection. This can take place by DFO directly or by industry for DFO. No matter which way this happens, DFO needs to ensure that funding is there to complete the work that would be considered "A-based" data collection in DFO's eyes. That is data required to complete the appropriate stock assessment for that species. This burden should not fall to industry to cover. DFO also needs to ensure that the process for industry to help is streamlined. Both the procurement hub process and the process to apply for a scientific permit are flawed and could use improvements.

Number three is CSAS publications and stock assessments. Although it was noted previously that industry is always included in this process, that is not the case. The PEIFA is not always invited to the process, and when we request a seat at the table in a meeting, we have been denied even an observer's seat during that process in the past. The PEIFA feels that there is a lack of interest by DFO in hearing what harvesters have to say. In reality, it is the harvesters who see the change first, long before DFO scientists ever do. Ideally, DFO should be looking for a way to capture this industry perspective and use it to shape their data collection moving forward.

Stock assessments are moving toward a model approach with less industry input. This is not ideal, but if this is the road stock assessments will take, it would be ideal to include industry in DFO training on incorporation of models into stock assessments to ensure meaningful contributions by industry.

Number four is trust and transparency. Advisory committees were set up by DFO so industry could be heard, but to industry, most of these advisory meetings now appear to be a checkmark for DFO to say they have consulted with industry rather than taking part in meaningful engagement and collaboration. The PEIFA has approximately 22 committees with over 200 volunteer fishers who put significant time and effort into in-house meetings in preparation for these DFO advisory committee meetings. The PEIFA does this with the understanding that its recommendations on science and management will be passed along to the minister. There is no transparency around the information that is passed to the minister and what input, if any, is being considered by DFO.

Number five is process. Through all the avenues to gather industry feedback and data—CSAS, advisory minutes, meetings, procurement—DFO does not create an atmosphere that is inclusive with respect to participation in science. In some cases, industry does not receive documentation until the day of the meeting. In other cases, packages are not released from their procurement hub until two weeks prior to a deadline. Sometimes field sampling starts much later than planned with no back-up plan from DFO. There are many examples of DFO timelines or processes being a hindrance to data collection with no room for industry input into the data collection, efficiency of collection or discussions on real costs associated with the data collection.

Again, the PEIFA wants to reiterate that we believe it is the DFO process that is hindering proper data collection, proper data sharing and proper science consultation.

Thank you for your time.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Giffin.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Côté (Scientific Director, Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

The 146 skipper/owners, three local indigenous nations and I all thank you for your time.

I have a bachelor's and master's degree in marine biology from Laval University. My professional career started in Gaspésie while working for a pioneering sea farming company in Quebec. I later joined a university team as a research assistant. Then I spent 16 years as a scientific director for a sea farming company. Since 2010, I have worked for the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du Sud de la Gaspésie, or RPPSG, as a scientific director.

The RPPSG and I are also members of the Lobster Group, better known as the Lobster Node, a group of fishers' associations from the five Atlantic provinces. Government researchers from DFO, a provincial ministry, as well as university researchers also take part in this group. Through collaborative research, it conducts studies and fills the gaps in our knowledge about the productivity, structure and connectivity of lobster stocks in their distribution area.

Our association is known for designing and implementing measures that conserve lobster stocks and reduce fishing effort, in order to preserve the resource for all lobster fishers in the Gaspé, both indigenous and non-indigenous, all of whom depend on this resource for their livelihoods and the livelihood of their communities.

In this context, for over 10 years, I have conducted surveys and analyses of lobster stocks in the Gaspé. Data collection during the commercial fishing season takes place in lobster fishing areas 19, 20A and 20B, but not yet in area 21. Fishers who participate in data collection use modified fishing traps to obtain a complete sampling of the stock structure in the fishing areas under study. The data is then provided to scientists at the Maurice Lamontagne Institute here at DFO in Quebec City.

After the fishing season, following a rigorous protocol in place since 2011, I collect similar data to analyze the remaining stocks in Lobster Fishing Area 20. This data is compiled and then forwarded to DFO. I do a summary analysis myself and present it to my fishers. The RPPSG fully funds this monitoring. We applied for funding from the Fonds des pêches du Québec, but it was denied on the grounds that this was a follow-up, not a project.

Since 2021, in partnership with the Centre de développement et de recherche en intelligence numérique, CDRIN, we designed a novel artificial intelligence model. We used post-season data collected over the last 10 years to predict the evolution of stocks and catches.

Furthermore, as part of the MSC certification of the spring commercial fishery, and to better answer certification assessors' questions, I conduct an annual analysis of fishing bait and bycatch data in Lobster Fishing Areas 19, 20 and 21. With the agreement of our fishers, we use the data from JOBEL, an electronic logbook developed by the RPPSG and used since 2015.

Unfortunately, over the past 10 years, I have not had the opportunity to move towards further collaboration with DFO on data analysis and scientific work done by the RPPSG. Certainly, as an expert, I attend the regional peer review of the Quebec inshore lobster assessment, which normally takes place every three years. The last meeting was in March 2019. The next one, which was supposed to take place in February 2022, was postponed. However, lobster is a key species from a socio-economic point of view for Quebec and the Gaspé. Its distribution is changing, as is the stock. For this reason, it seems essential to me to conduct a review of the biological basis for assessing the lobster stock's healthy zone. This would provide a more realistic vision of the state of the stocks and fishing pressure.

This is especially important for Lobster Fishing Area 21, on which very little data exists. The last stock assessment in 2018 was based on partial data for the area. DFO advice, dated February 11, 2020, was presented at the lobster workshop. It indicated that in the context of environmental change, inducing a new source of variability is undesirable. DFO's changes to management measures in 2019 are inconsistent with conservation objectives intended to avoid increased fishing pressure.

• (1130)

In September 2021, despite this advice, the lack of data for fishing area 21 and RPPSG's concerns about the impact on a fishery's fall stocks, DFO modified the lobster fisheries management plan for fishing area 21 by introducing a second commercial fishing season, ostensibly to collect data. Despite repeated requests from RPPSG, we haven't received any information regarding the protocol planned by DFO nor have we obtained the results of the study. Therefore, we're wondering if this data is considered confidential under the Fisheries Act because it would have been collected with the help of an indigenous band. We think there is a lack of information sharing between the department and the associations, which are very involved in the research, particularly the lobster research, in our case.

Thank you.

• (1135)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

Before I move to questions, I have a reminder to members that we have to go in camera for about the last half hour of the committee this morning, to discuss some committee business.

I remind members that we have our witnesses on Zoom. Please identify who your question is for, so we don't have five people just gazing at the screen wondering who should answer.

For the witnesses, if somebody is answering a question and you have a comment you want to add, if you use the "raise hand" function, I'm sure the member will recognize you and have you participate in that.

As we move to questions, we'll go to Mr. Perkins to start off, for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, witnesses. Those were very interesting presentations during this important study we are doing. It's been very enlightening.

My first question is for Mr. Sullivan.

On February 17, FFAW-Unifor issued a news release that said:

At the Canadian Independent Fish Harvesters Federation annual meeting, Minister Murray put forward her ideas and vision for the fishery on the east coast of Canada and stated clearly that her goal is to leave as many fish in the water as possible and to grow as much vegetation in the water as possible so that the Atlantic Ocean can better absorb carbon to combat climate change.

The release went on to say:

The Minister also stated that fish harvesters will have to accept this sacrifice as part of Canada's commitment to fight climate change, noting that given techno-

logical advancements, harvesters could change career paths and work remotely from their communities.

I'm not sure that statement was based on the quality of the science she was receiving from the department, so I asked the minister about that news release in the House in question period in March.

Her response was, "I have been misquoted at times". Again this week in the committee of the whole, I gave her a chance to correct herself and to say whether or not she was misquoted. She said, "I think that is a complete misconstrual of what I said."

This is my opening question, Mr. Sullivan. Is that a misconstrual? It reminds me of a Groucho Marx quote: "Quote me as saying I was misquoted." It's always sort of an excuse in a private meeting afterwards to say you were misquoted.

Did the minister say that?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: I guess first of all, I don't think it was misconstrued. We'd heard similar things before and were quite concerned. Our colleagues on the west coast, as Ms. Burrige mentioned, were highly concerned about a decision we had seen on her ring. Our members were very concerned about some of the messages we were seeing, and we just wanted to raise our concerns.

We hope that the minister has reconsidered her position. We've certainly had a lot of discussions and there have been a number of decisions since then.

At the time, our members were really concerned about the messages we'd been hearing from the minister at that time.

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

Ms. Burrige, you made a comment about the Pacific herring decision and the science that the stocks are healthy, but it was cut by 50%. Your concern obviously was that science wasn't used in that decision-making process.

I know that when groups asked the minister's office why that decision was made, the minister's office said that it wasn't based on science; it was based on a holistic approach to the ocean, which is, of course, not something I quite fathom in terms of a definition.

Could you please comment on the decision to call adult herring a forage fish for salmon and use that as reason to cut it without science?

Ms. Christina Burrige: As I mentioned, Pacific herring has one of the very best datasets, going back decades on this coast. It's also recently been through a management strategy evaluation, which allows the science people at DFO to evaluate the effect of different harvest-control rules. The harvest-control rule that we've long had in place, going back some 30 years, of essentially a 20% harvest rate, has been shown through modelling to be not significantly different in terms of the biological outcomes from the 10%, say, that the minister chose.

The effect of that decision was to take \$15 million or \$20 million out of the fishery, without in our view putting any more fish for salmon, especially as the predator-prey relationship between salmon and herring is really quite complicated because on the whole salmon don't eat adult herring. Sometimes they do. However, herring do eat juvenile salmon, so we can actually see, going back over time, that as herring populations in the Strait of Georgia have increased, Chinook salmon populations have gone down. It's much more complicated than the minister suggested.

For me, the worrying thing is that the science, with all these years of hard work and peer reviews, was ignored. I think that sends the wrong message to fish harvesters, because basically we're prepared on this coast to live and die by the science. If the science says we can fish, we should. If it says we can't, we won't.

● (1140)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

Ms. Giffin, you mentioned the role of harvesters in developing policy, science, knowing what's going on. Often at this committee we've heard witnesses suggest that harvesters and their associations shouldn't be involved in those decision-making processes. We also hear that first nations knowledge should be. To me, both of them are valid.

Could you comment on that, please?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Yes. I think what it comes down to is understanding the contribution that industry can provide. As I noted in my opening remarks, the harvesters are going to see the changes on the water before DFO scientists ever do. The recommendation would be to make sure DFO is using that knowledge to shape the data, the science and the data that they collect, going forward.

I feel that harvesters have a right to be a part of that process, because there are situations, especially now, in which DFO says, "We're not seeing that," but industry is, and that's being missed. There's a complete miscommunication there. With industry not a part of those meetings and not having a voice, that gets cut out completely.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

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

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

My question will be for Mr. Sullivan.

Let's talk about shrimp for a minute. As you know, I have close to 15 shrimp fishermen here in the region who were impacted by the quota drop this year in the shrimp fisheries. Let's do some math here.

What do you think of those numbers that DFO gave when it comes to the number of shrimp that are eaten by the redfish? DFO said that it's more than 200,000 metric tonnes of shrimp that are eaten by redfish, and the quota this year dropped close to, I think, a little more than 15,000. What do you think of those numbers?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: As you say, it doesn't necessarily add up. One thing I think harvesters believe, and one of the things they've

seen and have been legitimately concerned about, is these growing redfish and the impact they're going to have on the shrimp. That's why the people who are impacted really have to be the people who get access to the other adjacent resources there.

Similar to the point that we saw with herring on the west coast, we had an agreed-upon precautionary approach with harvest-control rules in that fishery. It was really only eight or nine years ago it was put in place. It was done with harvesters and with scientists and managers, and the cuts went even deeper than that. It deviated from that without the engagement of industry, which was really disappointing. I think it hurts the relationship with the department when we deviate from those things.

The shrimp harvesters, a couple of hundred in Newfoundland and Labrador, plus those working in the plants, were really hurt by that decision when things were tough already.

● (1145)

Mr. Serge Cormier: With those numbers, the goal of DFO is to actually make sure that we rebuild the stocks, right? With those numbers, though, if we keep on going year after year... I think that last year it was 168,000. This year, the number is close to 218,000. Next year, it might go up again. What is the solution? We want to rebuild the stock, of course, but at the same time, those redfish are eating a ton of it. We already saw a drop in quota for next year.

What are you proposing? Those redfish will still eat the shrimp for sure, but at the same time we have to make sure that we try to rebuild the stock. The way I'm seeing it right now—and I'm not an expert—it will be very difficult to rebuild the stock if the redfish are eating it. I know we want to have a redfish fishery in the coming years, but as you know, we're not there yet.

What is your solution to, yes, helping rebuild the stock, but also, it's our communities, as you know, that are suffering from the cutting of quotas...? What is your solution?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: I would say first of all that in a situation like that, when we have an ecosystem and large predation like that, there are no easy solutions. I think we have to look at a couple of things. First, to cut harvesters is not the only solution to dealing with these issues. There could have been—and that's why I mentioned the social sciences—some additional consideration given to how we handle these situations, because a lot of people don't believe that there is any rebuilding of shrimp with that many redfish and that kind of a dynamic in the environment. That's one thing.

The other thing we talk about is giving consideration to those who are adjacent to the resource, the people who are impacted by redfish taking over the habitat that the shrimp have, and to not exclude them from that fishery, with people having access to several fisheries and different parts of the ecosystem. Having that diversification in terms of what's in adjacent waters is a plan that can really give some stability at times when we know the environment is really unpredictable. We have highs and lows that oftentimes are not caused by the harvesters themselves.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I have only one minute left.

You sent a letter to Minister Murray for some possible solutions that would very rapidly help those fishermen. I want to clarify something. It seems to be a little different when it comes to permit costs between your fishermen in Newfoundland and our fishermen here in New Brunswick. If I'm not mistaken, your licence fee is only \$100 per fisherman, right?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: There are certainly significant individual quota fees on top of that, and some of the short-term solutions were some additional supports for people who have really been hit hard, yes.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I understand. I think that for us here in New Brunswick the licence fee goes up by the pound or by the quota you have. It's a little different, I think. Is that right?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: In the northern shrimp, we don't manage on individual quotas, so harvesters do not pay the IQ fee, but in the gulf they do.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I also see that you're asking for a little more science with DFO on the shrimp fisheries. Is that right?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: Yes. We are working with our colleagues in New Brunswick and Quebec to improve that as well.

Mr. Serge Cormier: For next year, what do you think we should do regarding the quota?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: Well, I don't think we should automatically decide in advance what the quota is for the following year. I think we have to talk about the impacts and look at the latest science as well.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay. Thanks.

I think my time is up.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses for being here. Your remarks, which are always very interesting, provide a lot of food for thought.

Mr. Côté, some time ago, I met with lobster fishers from the Magdalen Islands who are part of your group. According to them, there is nothing more important than preserving the resource and its sustainability.

How do you explain the fact that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or DFO, doesn't take your requests and scientific advice more into consideration?

• (1150)

Mr. Jean Côté: That's a good question.

As I often explain, there is a tendency to say that fishers are too involved and that our science is not as good as that of the researchers or of the department itself. However, I wanted to demonstrate earlier [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] that this is very useful to the department. We invest money, and sometimes we do it without help.

Most lobster fishers are multi-species fishers who have experienced the cod moratorium and don't want to go through that again. So sustainability is essential.

It is important that the department take into account the assistance that fishers can provide, that it can also help them, even financially. Also, there may be a lack of resources in the department today. There were attritions a few years ago, and now it's difficult for the department to keep up. The department itself will need help to ensure that its advice and research are always up to date.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you for that excellent answer.

Environmental changes occurring as a result of climate change are surprising. Every day and every week, we learn new things. How can the committee support you in raising awareness with DFO? I'd like you to address my colleagues around the table because I think we are all very sensitive to the situation.

Mr. Jean Côté: Several presentations made this morning have shown that all the associations, wherever they are in the Atlantic, are very committed, and have been for a long time. I'm talking about non-indigenous and indigenous associations. We can see that science can be conducted anywhere. Therefore, there must be more collaborative and participatory science.

Ms. Griffin said earlier that fishers could be present, that they could make their contribution. They are often the first to see what is happening at sea. We have to listen to that.

Ms. Giffin said that her organization was sometimes consulted, that things were presented to it, but that she was not listened to. It isn't the same. It's one thing to consult, but sometimes you have to take our advice and what we say into account. This is very important, and there really has to be a better connection between the science in the department and the science in all the associations, in Quebec and elsewhere in the Atlantic region.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Côté, have your attempts to obtain information always been in vain? At certain times, have you had access to certain information? Does that block more specific information?

Mr. Jean Côté: There is specific information where it gets blocked, but unfortunately I am not the person who handles these files in the office. Claire, who was supposed to be with me, could have answered the question better than I could, but the process of accessing information sometimes takes a long time.

Sometimes there is scientific research data that we would like to have on areas, and we don't have access to it. There really needs to be some kind of clarification, there needs to be more transparency about research and data, and there needs to be access for everyone.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Is there a way to get financial support? You say you're unable to get any. Your input is important, and I think it's difficult to sustain. When we see the investment you are making with fishers, we see your willingness to contribute. Financially, what is it that you're missing?

Mr. Jean Côté: There are already a number of programs. The department has implemented them. That's fine, and we thank them for it, but there are often restrictions on application or time.

Unfortunately, the last few programs often started on dates that did not allow us to respond within the prescribed time frame. When we are told a month or three weeks in advance that a project must be submitted, we don't have enough time to do so. We really need to be given time. Most organizations are small organizations with a certain number of employees, and it's difficult to submit projects on time. There must be reasonable time frames. At the moment, I would say that it is often a hindrance.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you very much, Mr. Côté.

Mr. Jean Côté: Thank you.

• (1155)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. You're right on time.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses here today. It's nice to see you and hear all the valuable information you've contributed.

The first question I was hoping to ask is for Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Sullivan, you spoke a bit about the importance of socio-economic sciences being integrated into CSAS processes. I'm wondering if you can expand on that—on what that might look like. Can you please add some thoughts to that?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: It goes back to what Melanie talked about: harvesters observing changes in the environment, very quickly. I recognize that it's difficult to get that information into a formal process, and we're challenged by that. There are ways to do it. I think having a more formal process, like input from logbooks, up front, as people talked about.... Having harvesters do more observer work and real-time science is a way to do that.

The Canadian Fisheries Research Network was also discussed. Mr. Côté talked about the Lobster Node, which did an awful lot of work in the natural sciences, but also in the related social sciences. I think there are opportunities to expand on these things, put more investment in them, and work with the harvesters up front.

I think we've been taking steps backwards in a lot of ways, whether it's in the management process or CSAS having fewer harvesters around the table. Just a few years ago, there was a section for harvester or stakeholder input—for something captured by harvesters that wasn't serious scientific observation. There was a place

to note something like that. That got removed from the CSAS process. I think it's a number of things.

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

I agree on the importance of that interconnection. I appreciate your bringing that forward and highlighting some of what you saw.

Ms. Burridge, we saw, in the herring fishery, many fishers paying licence fees and finding out, after paying those licence fees, that there was a reduction occurring within the herring fishery.

I'm wondering if you can speak to this a bit. What are your thoughts? Should DFO be re-evaluating its licensing system to ensure that harvesters can make more informed decisions based on assessments? Please expand on that.

Ms. Christina Burridge: One of the frustrations for us is that there is no mechanism to renew licence fees. Licence fees for Pacific herring were set in the 1980s, I think, during the Japanese bubble, when Pacific herring was worth about 10 times as much as it is today. The same is true for Pacific salmon. The same fleet is paying, say, \$4,000 for a licence at a time, when it perhaps doesn't know how much it's going to be able to catch. We certainly, for many years, have been calling for a review of licence fees to make sure that, at least on our coast—maybe as a one-off, because I know it's perhaps sensitive for some of my east coast colleagues—there is some mechanism to redress the situation, where the value has changed enormously over time and the licence fees are no longer fair.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Ms. Burridge.

I think I'll get only one more question in, but I'll try for more.

My next question is for Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Fisher, I'm wondering if you can expand a bit on the importance of having indigenous forms of knowledge, and how that sits alongside scientific knowledge. Can you speak a bit more about how the Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance is doing this work, in practice?

• (1200)

Mr. Aidan Fisher: We have operated an indigenous knowledge collection program for over five years. It has developed in iteration a few times. Essentially, including indigenous knowledge in some of these processes is a challenge, because it's not collected in a way that's representative of the information. In order to produce indigenous knowledge that could be included in some of these processes, it really needs to come from the nation level, making sure the final product is reflective of what's actually there. In order to do that, you need to go to the communities and knowledge holders in order to truly understand where they come from and how to use the information in a respectful and good way, and for it not to get misconstrued or misunderstood in other processes. That's something we've been doing for five years or so.

Now, the challenge is, once we have this database available and collected, where is DFO going to use that? What I have seen of the CSAS process is that there's no real way for the process to include it. It's definitely something that CSAS could look at improving and taking into much greater consideration, moving forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

There are only six seconds left. It's hardly time to get in a question, let alone an answer.

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

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for appearing. This is a very interesting study we've undertaken here.

I'll start off with Ms. Burridge, if I could.

Ms. Burridge, you mentioned in your opening remarks something around how the science work or the research requests come forward. In the information we've received in answer to a recent Order Paper question, we see the budget for ocean science has increased by 65%, yet there's been a decrease of 3% in the fisheries science budget.

Can you speak a bit more about how you see the science that is being requested to be undertaken, and how it's affecting the harvesters?

Ms. Christina Burridge: We certainly have seen ourselves that, as welcome as the influx of science money has been over the last few years, most of it has gone to ocean science and very little has gone to fisheries science. As I'm sure my colleagues will agree, stock assessment, evaluation of the risk and the risk mitigation that fisheries management undertakes are absolutely essential. We are seeing that the increased demand on science has grown exponentially. Much of this is regulatory and legislative, so it tends to bump regular stock assessments. Even if we need a stock assessment to meet a Marine Stewardship Council condition, there are so few staff able to work on these projects that, if a SARA or a COSEWIC comes up, the relevant people are taken off work for industry and directed to SARA work. That's only going to get worse with the fish stock provisions.

One of the recommendations we would like to see from this committee is the proper resolving of the stock assessment and science function. I think that's particularly critical given that we're see-

ing the retirement of many of the well-established stock assessment and technical people from DFO, replaced with recent graduates who have no experience, so there's no chance for mentoring and growing up into the stock assessment process.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you. I need to move on.

I'd like to move to Mr. Côté now.

Mr. Côté, you mentioned that you have developed an AI system to predict stocks and harvest levels, possibly, but you're not able to move further forward with that. Have you developed that program because the department isn't able to provide the information, or do you feel it is going to be more beneficial in predicting harvest rates or seasons in the future?

Mr. Jean Côté: It's a good question. Basically, I've been discussing that with a lobster biologist in Quebec, but never have the time to do it. He knows how to model, but he never has the time to do it. There's a lot of work, and now he's on a *congé de maladie*; he's not there.

I wanted to do something so I could use the data, and I wanted to do it right now and start somewhere. That's why I went to a different area, a private place. It's a small model. We are starting at one point, but the minister, like Mrs. Burridge said, is losing a lot of experienced people. Some new ones are coming, but they don't necessarily have the experience to do so.

• (1205)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you. I'm trying to fit in as many questions as I can.

I'd like to move to Mr. Fisher now, with the Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance.

Mr. Fisher, can you tell the committee if work plans have been finalized for the prioritization of the developing and sharing of science and traditional indigenous knowledge?

Mr. Aidan Fisher: Not to my knowledge, I would say. In reference to DFO work plans, in that respect, we haven't seen anything.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Actually, I was referring to the Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement. Has there been anything finalized there?

Mr. Aidan Fisher: There have been a few. The Fraser Salmon Management Council process is something I associate with peripherally. I'm not deeply involved in the day-to-day work of that. I work on the technical side.

We did produce work plans for two years, but so far, as of this fiscal, we haven't seen a work plan, and all work has halted on the Fraser Salmon Management Council management board process.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. You went a bit over there.

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

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

There's been interesting testimony on science during this committee study. A number of common themes have been coming out, regardless of who the witnesses are, so I'll frame my question from this perspective. When the department and the minister increase quota, nobody questions the science—the fisher, nobody; you never hear a complaint. The science is fine. It's always focused on when there are too few fish for everybody to catch and it comes to dividing them up.

To Ms. Giffin and whoever else, I agree totally that the department could do a better job of including fisher knowledge in its decision-making process, but what information should the department use? I'll use a recent example from the closure of the gulf herring and mackerel. It depended on which group I was lobbied by. One group of fishers said somebody else should have been closed, and the next group said it should have been them. Each group that met with me had a different answer on who was causing the problem.

Ms. Giffin, on that particular fishery decision, did the minister miss something? Would the decision have been better if some knowledge you had could have been presented to her? What part of the stock assessment did the department get wrong in making the decision to advise the closure of the gulf herring and mackerel fishery?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: That is a great question, with a lot of different aspects to it, I think.

First, I'll touch on the fact that—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I generally want to know where: Where was the decision...and where might the minister have...?

Do you have information you can provide to the committee on which area of that may have been overlooked?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I think the area that was overlooked was the observations that fishers have been seeing for years. It was not “new news” that we thought the mackerel fishery was in trouble. For years at the Atlantic mackerel advisory committee table, each organization had been making recommendations.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The fishers had been recommending to restrict the quota on this fishery for years, and the department overlooked it?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: They had been recommending different changes that could've been made to prevent this from happening in the first place, yes.

• (1210)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you itemize a few of those changes that may have been ignored that the fishers were recommending?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Sure. We talked about an increase in the minimum size, which has worked in other countries to improve the quality of the stock. We talked about a better understanding of the egg survey. We talked about new fishing methods and new fishing gear that would target specific sizes. All were overlooked. I would say that's been over the past 10 years that we've been making those recommendations.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you for that.

Perhaps you could follow this up on paper, because I feel it's very important that the advice going from the science division of the department should also, in a documented way, in a formal process, incorporate the fisher knowledge. You are correct that they're the first people who see changes. This advice has been given by all groups, and in fact Mr. Côté as well.

How could the department, in a structured and formal way, incorporate the information and the advice from fishers, recognizing that the fishers are often competing amongst themselves in giving advice? I know you won't have time to finish this answer or get to the details, but I very much would like for the committee to have the benefit of your vast expertise on how to address the transparency issue and how to address the mistrust between the department scientists and fishers.

That's a lot to frame up in 70 seconds, Ms. Giffin, so we'll need some of that on paper.

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I can do this pretty quickly, I think.

One way to address the transparency would be to share with industry and the advisory committee a summary table of what each association recommended, and let each other organization see what all other organizations are submitting as well. That's not shared currently. I have no idea what other organizations recommend.

On the other side of things, in terms of what fishers are seeing, I've actually had discussions with Erin Carruthers at the FFAW about a voluntary logbook, so that we can quantify what's happening right now. Everyone seems to be anecdotally saying they see a lot of small mackerel. They're seeing it in Newfoundland; we're seeing it in P.E.I.

If we could quantify that in a standardized way, so that all fishers are submitting that information together in that method, then that's something that DFO scientists could actually use going forward, to reshape the data they plan to collect. I don't know that it's as complicated as it may appear.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thanks so much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

I know I asked witnesses to raise their hand if they wanted to join in on a comment, but Mr. Sullivan had his hand up. I'll remind members that they can see only one person on their screen. Take a look at the screen on the wall here behind me, and you'll see if somebody has their hand up.

Mr. Sullivan, if you had a bit of a response for that particular interjection at that time, please send it in in writing if you don't get a chance to say it here as we move forward.

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

[Translation]

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

I'll address Mr. Côté again, not because I don't like the others, but because he is closer to the St. Lawrence River and the gulf. But don't feel bad about it.

Mr. Côté, I'm familiar with your group, I know that there are non-indigenous and indigenous groups of fishers, and I know that you all work together.

What makes you think that the data that DFO refuses to disclose would have been collected by an indigenous group?

Mr. Jean Côté: We don't know.

What I was saying earlier is that there was a second commercial fishing season, presumably for research and exploration purposes. It's never been very clear. When we ask for more details, we don't get the details of the protocol or the data. We can't know them, no matter what the field. It's the same with the evaluation; there's always data missing. We would like to see this data made public or, at the very least, have it available to us, because we all work together.

If we want to move in the same direction, we need to see all this data.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I agree with you, Mr. Côté.

Thirty years ago, my father fished recreationally. He took me fishing for cod in the Saguenay and around the gulf. He told me that there would soon be no more cod because of the pinnipeds. He told me to eat it because there would soon be none left.

Why do you think that, 30 years later, we still haven't found solutions to the overpopulation and management of the pinniped resource in relation to the decline in pelagic fishery?

• (1215)

Mr. Jean Côté: I don't think I can explain it to you today because it would take a long time. Besides, Mr. Sullivan would probably be in a better position to talk to you about that.

Surely this question also relates to the last question about herring and mackerel.

If it is so urgent to stop the fishery at the last minute, first of all, why are we not looking for the cause of the mortality? In fact, we know very well that seals are the cause.

Also, why doesn't the department stop recreational mackerel fishing, which you mentioned, when we don't know the impact?

Therefore, to ban fishing is to give fishers the wrong role, as they may not even be responsible for the decline in these stocks.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

There was some interesting discussion as a result of Mr. Morrissey's questions. I wanted to offer the opportunity to Mr. Sullivan to share what he had wanted to share during Mr. Morrissey's question.

Mr. Keith Sullivan: I really appreciate that.

Specifically on mackerel, I think it was a good example of where the disconnect exists. The lack of attention to seals and their impact on a stock is one, just generally. I've been encouraged by the minister's recent work and announcements on seals, and I hope there are more actions to follow that up.

On mackerel specifically, the egg surveys take place only in the southern gulf. Harvesters in Newfoundland and Labrador, where they're most reliant on mackerel, have seen a lot of small mackerel in recent years. They weren't born in the gulf, most likely.

We've been looking for additional science for a decade at least. We've put in proposal after proposal to do additional science to go hand in hand with the harvesters' observations, and we didn't really get anywhere with it. I don't think we were taken seriously enough. It's really disappointing when a result ends up in a moratorium and you believe there are people thrown out of work, when there are questions that could have been answered.

That's just what I have on that. Thanks for the opportunity.

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

I was wondering, Ms. Giffin, if you could expand a little, as well, on what you were sharing around the importance of having shared information among the different organizations and of having a means for data to be accumulated so that we understand what's actually happening on the water. What would be needed for the government to move forward with these systems? Is there equipment? Are there processes that need to be evaluated? Can you expand a bit on what would be required to make that happen?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Yes. We've had discussions about a voluntary logbook for both seals and mackerel. Anecdotally, we hear from fishers constantly about the interactions with seals and mackerel, and also, as Keith pointed out, the large abundance of small fish, which fishers on P.E.I. now see as well. The discussions have somewhat stopped, though. It alludes to a bit of what Jean brought up, that we're all small organizations. We're big for the gulf, and we accomplish a lot, but we all have limits on what we can do. It comes down to the organizations to try to take that initiative.

It would be great if DFO could step up and DFO science could step up and create a way to do that themselves, rather than industry having to try to push that on them. I feel that is one of those key missing pieces and those key disconnects between industry and science that science could really be using to its benefit.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

It went a little over, but it was good information.

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

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for taking the time to be involved in this very important study.

I'm going to start with Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Sullivan, the way stock assessments have been completed in the last few years has had quite a few changes. We've seen some stocks, and I'll just use the example of 3Ps cod, that have been pushed farther into the critical zone. Would you mind explaining a bit about that assessment process, how it's changed, who has a seat at the table now during the assessments, and how the ratio of external scientists involved in this decision-making has changed, as in the ratio of external scientists to harvesters?

• (1220)

Mr. Keith Sullivan: With 3Ps cod stock on the south coast of Newfoundland, there were some changes in the assessment model in recent years. We have lowered the reference point for that stock, and now we're pretty well fishing at an extremely low level. Just to remind people, the mortality is not from fishing here. Harvesters really believe that it has a lot to do with seals, and particularly grey seals in that area. Also, there have been some significant changes that I don't think were necessarily communicated well by DFO.

This stock may be like others. Generally, there have been fewer opportunities for harvesters to be involved in the assessment. Probably more international ENGOs seem to be getting new seats at the table and priority. It's difficult to understand how people who have the expertise, who have first-hand knowledge, who are involved in surveys and volunteer their time—it's their livelihoods—are excluded more and more, while groups with international agendas get in around these tables more often. Sometimes I think their intentions are right, but certainly it's conservation with the main goal, probably, of having the fisheries shut down. We find that trend disappointing.

I mentioned before excluding the option to have harvesters have additional input in that CSAS process, where there was a specific place.... For just 3Ps for example, if you go back to around 2016 when we were able to have that input, we were seriously concerned about the stock and pointed that out very clearly. It wasn't about having more to fish. We were talking about the increased prevalence of seals and the destruction that harvesters were seeing from that. We'd been calling that out for a few years. They removed that section of input from the document. That disappeared from the conversation for a few years.

Now we're at a place where the stock has been driven down, like the neighbouring stocks in the gulf. They're probably going down continually, but not because of any removals from harvesters. In that process, I think more harvester participation in science and at the table is what's really required. It's one of our recommendations, and I'd hope this group would take it very seriously and start a process to examine that in more detail.

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

We've talked a little about mackerel, and I think it's an example we're using in general for the direction that science is going in with DFO. I've known harvesters who've caught large adult mackerels in gillnets on St. Pierre Bank in deep water. That's nowhere near where the traditional migration pattern has been.

What would you suggest would be the best harvester participation in science? We could use mackerel as an example again.

Mr. Keith Sullivan: On mackerel in particular, I think we've put through a lot of different options where DFO doesn't do the work or probably doesn't have the capacity now. We have the ability to do acoustic work. Harvesters have voluntarily collected small samples of mackerel—the young of the year—to prove that they're actually not born in the gulf. Do more analysis on those and do a more comprehensive survey of the spawning mackerel in different areas. As we know, the temperatures from the Gulf of St. Lawrence have increased significantly in the last number of years.

We certainly know that mackerel are spawning in other areas. What we frankly don't know is just how much is contributing to the overall stock. A more comprehensive look at the spawning distribution of that mackerel.... Like I say, I know what harvesters are talking about. These people are voluntarily taking mackerel from the St. Pierre Bank. This is [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] large gillnets, so there's a large amount of mackerel if they're coming up in large-sized gillnets, for example.

We've already put a number of proposals, including to the Atlantic fisheries fund, but we were continually met with walls and, unfortunately, never got any support on doing this work. There have been a number of proposals, and we'd be happy to present those to the department and others.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small. That's a good bit over, but we'll manage.

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

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair. It's great to see the witnesses here.

Mr. Morrissey has talked about a lot of common themes over the past number of weeks. To me, one of those themes is the commonality of growing the fish and seafood sector, and we all share that, including the minister.

Mr. Sullivan, I want to direct my question to you. If may, I'll call you Keith, because we talk quite a lot. I think that's okay. I hope that's okay with you. You can call me Mike.

You've touched upon this. The minister recently announced the Atlantic task force seal report recommendations. She talked about the support for those recommendations and getting moving on it, and talked about the importance of a summit that is not a study, but is strategic and tactical and moving things forward. I've also talked to you about how impressed I was with your campaign in terms of seal predation. You're strong advocates on that issue.

I wonder if you could take a little more time to talk about moving in the direction that we are, as you referenced that you're encouraged by this. In particular, you could talk about some of the things you've seen that are the basis for moving forward strategically and tactically in a very smart way.

Mr. Keith Sullivan: Yes, I was very encouraged by some movement on acknowledging the impact that seals are having and furthering that work, because if we're serious about looking at an ecosystem approach to fisheries—which obviously the department is—it's a complex piece of work, but we know that these large predators are consuming a lot of fish.

I'll just share a couple of stats about the magnitude. Things are scrutinized and the capelin fishery is looked at a lot, and in Newfoundland and Labrador we have the international NGOs looking to shut down these fisheries, but seals probably will take about 100 times the amount of the commercial harvest, so those are really small amounts.

This is the magnitude of the problem we are dealing with. The solutions admittedly are not real easy because of some of the trade barriers. We want to be able to sell seal products and make sure we're doing it sustainably, so I think investment in some of the markets that are accepting of the products—and they can be diverse—can be the one thing we have to start right now. I think that in many ways there are real opportunities to do that with some countries. I know we've had some level of success internationally in the past, and I think that's one thing we can do.

I don't claim to be an expert marketer with relation to seals, but I think in acknowledging that they're a major problem for our fisheries and for sustainable fisheries, and that there are certainly high populations, we can deal with that, acknowledge it in our assessments and, obviously, have a sustainable industry on the sealing side. I hope there's consideration for investment into that, because I think it could pay large dividends, not only directly in seal products but also in maintaining healthy fisheries. We're seeing wild seafood values increase significantly, and I don't expect that general trend to change. It's a growth industry across the country for sure, and obviously in our province too.

● (1230)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thanks, Keith. I will say that this week I had seal for the first time. I had two bowls of seal and then went back for a third, but I thought better of it because my wife was probably watching somewhere. I want to make sure that she knows I'm not indulging too much, but it was absolutely delicious. We had a great delegation from Newfoundland and Labrador and Nunavut here.

I want to go back to your first recommendation in terms of incorporating more fisher knowledge and fisher expertise in decisions. I read through your submission, and I'm thankful for it. Can you talk

a bit more about the mechanics of involving the fish harvesters on the science side? I think that kind of connects to your social science point as well. I'm wondering if you could just unpack that a bit for the committee here.

We've talked about where we're falling short, from your perspective, so how quickly could we ramp up the knowledge that is around coastal communities, not just in Newfoundland and Labrador but from coast to coast to coast?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: I should start by saying that we do a significant amount of really good collaboration with DFO and other groups like the Marine Institute. We're involved in a lot of collaboration, and we have a lot of good examples. I know we're focused on the problems here, but we do a lot of good work already, so there are a lot of models that we can look at.

I think there has been some movement away from focusing on work with harvesters in recent years. When I was a fisherman, I was involved in Sentinel Fisheries for a number of years. I was involved in that program nearly 30 years ago. The actual funding for that in real dollars has kind of declined, so it's no wonder we're having problems maintaining that.

I think that is reflective of the investment in the collaborations in a lot of ways, and I think it needs dedicated focus. If work like that of the Canadian Fisheries Research Network—where we did a lot of work particularly on lobster and the socio-economic pieces—and focus on that collaboration with the harvesting groups is something that's more important than it was in the past, then larger offshore corporate groups, individual private groups, probably have an easier path to doing some of that work than do a large number of in-shore harvesters trying to do things.

I think it needs specific intention, and if anything is going to be successful, there needs to be some investment, but that comes from a culture of collaboration and then the investment to back that up.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway. We went a bit over, but I wanted to allow the answer to be heard.

That closes up our time for the public meeting today.

I want to thank you, Ms. Giffin, Ms. Burrige, Mr. Fisher, Mr. Côté and of course Mr. Sullivan, for your attendance here, albeit by Zoom, and for sharing your information with the committee. I know it will be a valuable asset when they finally get down to writing the actual report. I'll allow our witnesses to sign off.

We'll recess for a moment and then go in camera. I will let the committee know that the Bait Masters weren't able to be contacted first or last in any way for certainty, so we're going to reschedule them to appear at a later meeting on the study. It won't be lost.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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