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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1300)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 42 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022.

We will begin in public to hear testimony from witnesses. Following that, we will go in camera to discuss drafting instructions for the letter.

Before we proceed, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike and please mute your mike when you are not speaking.

Interpretation is available for those on Zoom. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. For those in the room.... There are no witnesses in the room. I know that everybody who is in the room knows how to use the interpretation.

Please address all comments through the chair.

Finally, I will remind you that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

Mr. Bragg, you can't take a picture and show it to your grandson.

The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I am informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on October 4, 2022, the committee is commencing its study on the impacts of the climate crisis.

I would like to welcome our first panel of witnesses.

Representing the Government of New Brunswick is the Honourable Margaret Johnson, minister, Department of Agriculture,

Aquaculture and Fisheries. Representing the Government of Nova Scotia is the Honourable Steve Craig, minister, Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. Representing the Government of Prince Edward Island is the Honourable Jamie Fox, minister, Department of Fisheries and Communities. Of course, from my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we are joined by the Honourable Derrick Bragg, now a proud grandfather, minister, Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

Welcome to all four of you. Thank you for taking the time to appear today. We have up to five minutes for each of you for your opening statements.

I invite Minister Johnson to go first, please, for five minutes or less.

You're muted.

There you go.

Hon. Margaret Johnson (Minister, Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, Government of New Brunswick): Mr. Chair, that's the first time I've ever done that, as you can well imagine.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I'm thrilled to death to join my Atlantic counterparts and to speak to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Climate change is already affecting New Brunswick. From our coastlines to our rivers, our agricultural land and our forests, climate change is impacting the health of our environment and the well-being of all New Brunswick.

When it comes to climate change action, the province has achieved a lot over the last five years, but we still have a lot to do. We need to build on our progress to date. New Brunswickers have told us that they want healthy and resilient communities, sustainable natural environments and clean growth in a low-carbon economy. Our province has had the resources and expertise needed to make this happen. New Brunswickers must continue working together to address the urgent challenges posed by climate change and successfully act upon the opportunities presented by decarbonization, while at the same time supporting the managed transition for our existing sectors.

Our New Brunswick climate change action plan, which was released last month, builds upon our progress and lays out the steps to ensure that our province has what it needs to thrive in a resilient low-carbon economy. We're going to continue to act on opportunities to achieve our greenhouse gas reduction target for 2030, which will put us on the path to being net zero by 2050. We will also continue to take action to address the impacts of climate change and build resiliency in our communities, businesses, infrastructure and natural resources.

During the past few years, New Brunswick has seen more and more severe weather events. Fiona and Dorian were both major storms that had a direct impact on fishery and aquaculture sectors. This includes major damage to wharves, fishing and aquaculture gear, and our fishing season. The fisheries sector remains an integral component of our provincial economies, which are the lifeblood of many rural and coastal communities. In 2021 the total export value for snow crab alone and lobster in Canada was approximately \$1.4 billion and \$3.2 billion respectively. You can see that it has a huge impact.

In this sector, fish harvesters and processors have opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and production costs through new technologies, energy efficiency measures, fuel switching and the adoption of beneficial management practices. These practices often achieve considerable co-benefits, such as improved biodiversity, ultimately supporting reduction in greenhouse gases and their emissions, and preparing for climate change. By implementing climate smart solutions that further reduce greenhouse gas emissions, New Brunswick fishery sectors will protect the land, water and air that the sectors depend on so largely for long-term sustainability.

It is imperative that we all speak with one voice when it comes to climate change issues. Collectively with our neighbouring provinces and the federal government, we can collaborate on actions and approaches that will mitigate impacts from future storm events. A working group has been struck between the four Atlantic provinces and their federal partners to discuss the impacts from hurricane Fiona, collaborate on approaches and problem-solving, and discuss a joint approach to future weather disasters. We appreciate the openness of everyone to share their thoughts and the wisdom that we can grow back stronger than ever before.

Within aquaculture, warming waters and infrastructure impacts in shellfish are concerns that we are closely monitoring and looking to mitigate or prepare for in the future. Our finfish aquaculture sector, through advancements in containment standards and fortifying structures, led to no concerns from hurricane Fiona. We're going to build on those successes as we continue to plan for the future.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to let me share the New Brunswick perspective on the climate crisis and the impact on the fisheries and ocean sector.

• (1305)

The Chair: Thank you. That's the first politician who ever went under time.

We'll now go to Minister Craig, please, for five minutes or less.

Hon. Steve Craig (Minister, Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Government of Nova Scotia): Thank you, Mr.

Chair. I will be under time because Minister Johnson just took up half of what I was going to say.

My name is Steve Craig, and I thank you for the opportunity to be with you today.

I am the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture in Nova Scotia, and thank you for having us. It is a pleasure to join you today to discuss some of the impacts that the climate crisis is having on Nova Scotia and on our seafood sector.

In Nova Scotia, seafood is a multi-billion dollar industry, one that employs more than 12,000 people, many in rural communities. The seafood sector is, by its nature, a coastal business and that makes it even more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which is exactly what we saw with hurricane Fiona.

It has taken months to truly understand the impact of this storm on our fisheries and aquaculture infrastructure, on operations and on our coastlines. Fishing vessels stored on land were blown over. There was severe flooding in seafood processing and lobster holding facilities in this province. While most operators had generators, no one was prepared for the two- to three-week power outages. Operators ran out of fuel and couldn't get more, which put inventory of cold storage at risk.

On the aquaculture side there was damage, too, especially on our shellfish farms in northern Nova Scotia. Gear and product in the water were damaged or lost entirely, and the gear operators pulled ashore before the storm in many cases ended up washed to sea because of the storm surge unprecedented in events before.

Many of our processing plants are inches away from the shoreline. Our wharves, two-thirds of which are government-owned small craft harbours, are also susceptible to storm surges. Small craft harbours are already filled beyond capacity and we need more. As we speak today, six of them are not operational at all, and another 14 are operating at less than half of what they are supposed to be.

We are, though, thankful DFO and ACOA came to the table quickly with offers of support and commitments to repair the small craft harbours that are so crucial to our seafood sector and coastal communities.

The seafood sector is an incredibly complex seafood supply chain and we rely heavily on interprovincial trade to get our high-quality seafood to customers around the world. The transportation corridor between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick is a great example. We need commitment from the federal government to help protect the Chignecto Isthmus, which connects us to our New Brunswick neighbours and the rest of Canada and the world. It is our 401 here in Atlantic Canada.

With regard to the response plan, the other thing that became apparent in the aftermath of this storm is the need for flexibility and resources to respond to events like this, to be there with support for our fish harvesters, processors, aquaculture industries and coastal communities when they need us the most.

We know that climate change is also going to impact the wild species found in Nova Scotia's waters and the way our aquaculture industry cultivates product close to our shores. We're looking to our federal counterparts to make sure the resources are in place to collect the data needed to make informed, science-based decisions about resource management.

We're also looking to our federal partners when it comes to innovation in the seafood sector. We need to transition away from fossil fuels, and programs like the Atlantic fisheries fund and the clean technology adoption program are going to continue to be really important in moving this industry along.

I know we're here today to talk about climate change and hurricane preparedness, and our focus is to make sure that we are ready for that. Making our infrastructure strong, our industries prepared and governments that can respond quickly is one of our key goals. However, I don't want to lose sight of the human side of all of this. We are talking about people's livelihoods and we're also talking about their lives. Storms are unpredictable and that means sometimes fish harvesters or processors or sea farmers need to go out in that weather to pull their gear, to check on their vessels, and maybe even to turn on the generators. They are looking to us for help, they're looking to us for leadership and we can't do that alone. We need to work together, together with my colleagues on this panel today, together with industry and together with our partners in the federal government.

Those are my initial remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1310)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Minister Fox for five minutes or less, please.

Hon. Jamie Fox (Minister, Department of Fisheries and Communities, Government of Prince Edward Island): Thanks, Ken.

I can tell you one thing; I'm very disappointed. They called me at 15 minutes after 12 this morning and told me my flight was cancelled.

Anyway, I'm going to get right into it. I'm throwing away the notes here.

Fiona devastated us in P.E.I. It's just as simple as that.

We have massive coastal erosion. We have huge tracts of land where the trees have just disappeared. With our increasing winds, as winter comes, some of these trees that weren't blown over continue to blow over. We've had to mobilize shore cleanup crews. I'm thinking right now of Hebrides, where actual buildings, houses and cottages were taken right across salt marshes into coastal areas. We have wharves that have been devastated.

The federal government announced \$300 million over two years. My estimate to our harbours and wharves alone is \$150 million, just to get the infrastructure back up to a usable condition for next year, and I don't think that's going to happen. I think we're going to have to work with DFO, with which we have a great relationship regionally, to have some harbours and some vessels relocated to neighbouring ports so that our fishing season will continue.

Fiona caused our shellfish harvest areas to be closed through CFIA regulations and how we work with them in terms of a safe product being delivered to the economy.

We lost holding of lobster. We lost holding of oysters and mussels. We have spat on the seed side that have been devastated. We're probably looking at least at a two- to three-year recovery on that. With that alone, our losses—probably uninsurable—are somewhere in the area of \$75 million, give or take, plus or minus. That was a huge impact.

Right now we've contracted barges to come in. They're off our coast working to get gear out of the water, mussel gear, mussel socks and ropes. I will have to say that this is ghost gear, in retrospect, but we're having a hard time convincing some people that this is really ghost gear.

We're already talking about climate change, but I think we also have to talk about whale remediation. I can't take the chance of fishing gear floating off our coast and having a whale or some kind of mammal get tangled up in it.

The minister and I have been very.... Joyce and I have talked about this. She's very supportive of what I'm saying, but this type of action is going to happen more and more. We must make sure that we have the resources in place to adapt and to help our industries when this type of stuff comes.

I will talk about gaps. We have gaps in programs that have been rolled out. The federal government announced \$300 million, which we appreciate, in recovery or help assistance across the Atlantic region; however, that is not going to cover what we're going to need across Atlantic Canada.

Right now I'm talking as the chair of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and also Quebec. Aquaculture and fisheries to our region is one of the most important industries there is. Aquaculture and fisheries is the primary resource besides potatoes, our crop in agriculture, to our province. We must make sure that we have the supports in place for that.

Presently, with some of the programs that are available, P.E.I. is left out, because it does not cover companies that have over \$200 million or over 20 employees. That's a great concern to us.

We are surveying right now. We're finding right now that, as I said, we have around \$75 million in uninsurable losses across our total province when it comes to aquaculture and fisheries. I must put this in comparison to a farm. In the aquaculture industry or the fishing industry, we plant that stuff or we grow the species to a market. It's no different than corn in a field, potatoes in New Brunswick or bees. You just can't take these products out of the water, put them on a shelf and hold them until a storm goes by, the exact same way as corn in a field. You can't cover corn up. You have to deal with what happens when a storm hits.

• (1315)

The federal government, in conjunction with the provincial governments, must look at aquaculture and fisheries the same way they look at agriculture. In agriculture, we have programs available that help with crop loss. In the fisheries, we don't.

I've had this conversation with Minister Murray. Joyce and I have agreed that we need to look at this. Our department right now is looking at the AgriRecovery program to see if we can adapt it to the aquaculture and the fishery, which will be circulated to the Atlantic ministers, including Quebec. Then we will be presenting that to the federal government.

Climate change is real. I think it was a year and a half or two years ago that we came up with the Atlantic Canada plan. It was \$750 million over five years. That was specifically to help our infrastructure, whether it be harbours or wharves, to make sure it supports a blue economy. I totally support a blue economy. I've been saying that if we do not have the infrastructure available that supports a blue economy and that is also prepared to deal with climate change and surges, we're not going to have a blue economy.

The federal government was very generous in the last budget. They gave us \$300 million over two years, but that was divided over three coasts.

I am again sounding the alarm and saying that Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland are subject to climate change, in most cases more than other areas. We saw that—

• (1320)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Fox.

I have to cut you off. It's gone way over. I want to give Minister Bragg a chance to get a few words in. I'm sure he's biting at the bit.

When you are ready, Mr. Bragg, you have five minutes or less, please.

Hon. Derrick Bragg (Minister, Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador): Thank you very much, Chair.

I may get a little off script as well, similar to Minister Fox. The past three Atlantic ministers have explained where they have been and we are in the same place. My notes are comparable to their notes, but I can make it pretty real.

We lost something we can't get back. We lost a life in the recent event that we had on the southwest coast of our province. We had another storm some years ago—Igor—and we lost another life. For material things, no doubt we can find a way to get them back. There are programs, there's insurance and there's help from the communities.

As you would know, Mr. Chair, I live right on the Atlantic Ocean. I'm on the northeast coast of Newfoundland. In the last 58 years, I can tell you I've seen the changes that are happening on the ocean. I've seen more severe storms and warmer temperatures. I can remember seasons when the ice floes would go well south of the island of Newfoundland and beyond that out to our rigs and on to the Grand Banks. Now, we don't see ice anymore. We don't see harbours and tickles freezing over anymore. These are all good indications of warmer water temperatures.

I've seen fishing stages that were built over a hundred years ago wash out into the ocean because of the extreme high tides, not only from this event, but from previous events.

This time we were devastated on the southeast coast. Right now, we've had to remove a hundred families from their own residences and take them out. They are in a dangerous.... Some homes, as everybody would have seen, were washed out into the ocean. The recovery and the cleanup from that is ongoing as we speak. We've had some great help. The armed forces were in for a while on the southwest coast. We've had companies come in cleaning. As Minister Fox would say about the ghost gear...because we lost fishing gear.

The infrastructure along our shorelines was built many decades ago. Some of the new infrastructure withstood it really well. What was built over the years did not withstand the forces of nature this time around.

We need to look at a new approach. We can't really build wharves any higher or any farther. We can't build them inland, obviously. We live on the ocean. We make our living from the ocean. Most Newfoundland coastal communities are dependent on the ocean and many lives have been given up to the ocean. But rarely has a life that's on the land been swept into the ocean from the storm. This time, that made it real. People were there. People were watching.

I could probably go on for an hour on this, Mr. Chair, as you know. It's very personal for you. This is your own province as well.

Climate change is real. We need to work with our municipal councils, our local service districts and with small craft harbours. We need to find a way to build better infrastructure if we have to exist near the ocean, which we have to do for many decades to come. We need to find a way that is more resilient and more ready.

For the municipalities, we have to look at a way of moving some houses back from the ocean. This was quite evident on the south-west coast. Everybody saw the pictures. I saw vehicles being washed away on videos. That's amazing when you're tens of feet away from the ocean and the sea has never reached there before.

I look forward to these proceedings. I am delighted to be part of this today. I have multiple notes in front of me, so I look forward to the session going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak.

• (1325)

The Chair: Thanks, Derrick. You win the prize for leaving the most time on the clock. I appreciate that. It helps make up for ones where we didn't.

We'll now go to our first round of questions for six minutes or less.

We have Mr. Small, please.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to be splitting my time with Mr. Perkins.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming in today.

Mr. Craig, would you be able to give some kind of a report card on the response to Dorian and how successful the rebuilding effort has been? Just give us a look back at the track record to see what we're dealing with here as we work on rebuilding from this storm.

Hon. Steve Craig: Thank you, Mr. Small. You mentioned Dorian. Did you mean Dorian or did you mean Fiona?

Mr. Clifford Small: It was the one that you had in 2019, hurricane Dorian. How has the response to hurricane Dorian been? I just want to go back and have a look at how well we did on that one, and that could be a guidance for repairs for Fiona.

Hon. Steve Craig: Admittedly, I don't have a lot of information on Dorian, being new to this ministry, though we have looked at what has happened in the past. Relatively speaking, one of the things that I've noticed in recovery is that although we moved quite quickly, I think.... DFO came out and surveyed basically the next day. The other ministers and I were texting back and forth immediately as the storm was hitting. We were talking with the parliamentary secretary, Mike Kelloway, as well about the response and how quickly we could get some of these things happening.

Maybe I can tie this into your question about Dorian, as it relates not only to Dorian, but Noel before that, and before that, hurricane Juan. We have a history of storms increasing in severity and approaching our coastlines, of which we have 13,000 kilometres. What struck me was that, in spite of the response that we had in this

storm, there seemed to be no playbook, if you will, no off-the-shelf way that we could approach what was happening.

The work under way now seems to me to be in response, and I think the work has been quite responsive. As Minister Fox mentioned, the monies aren't as great as they need to be to cover off what has to happen.

We need the ability to have guidance around the prevention and the measures around the preparation and access to subject matter experts, and funding for the guidelines and distribution mechanisms. We just need an overall playbook in what happens next. We know that an event is coming, and the severity of those events is increasing. With the current one, Fiona, the barometric pressure was the lowest on record. With the storm surge, where people had put their gear on the shores where normally it would have been okay, it was washed away because the water came up so much. We need to take a very serious look at it and have a coordinated, planned approach before an event hits.

That might tie back into your question about Dorian. I can tell you that it's an observation of mine. I asked staff what happens next. There really wasn't an answer other than that people could look at their insurance; people can go through to the next level of funding. Then, of course, there's the ACOA and the \$300 million, \$100 million of which was designated for Atlantic Canada fisheries. It seemed to be happening sort of piecemeal, but it was happening quickly. So, the responsiveness, I think, was there.

• (1330)

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, sir.

I will pass it over to Mr. Perkins now for a question.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): I'll try to make it quick. We only have a little over a minute left, so perhaps we can have quick answers.

Small craft harbour funding has been underfunded for decades. I'd like to hear quickly from the province that is perhaps the most affected, P.E.I., and the P.E.I. fisheries minister, in particular. Was there a difference in how small craft harbours that were repaired survived versus the ones that had maintenance deferred?

Hon. Jamie Fox: No. Red Head harbour, a prime example, which was completely redone within the last two years, was devastated. That harbour itself will have to be completely rebuilt.

Mr. Rick Perkins: As far as the estimate of \$100 million goes, my estimate is that the wharves alone are going to cost about half a billion dollars to repair, so the funding is nowhere near that.

Has any of the money to analyze, to do the engineering studies and to start the process of rebuilding come to your provinces yet?

Hon. Jamie Fox: None has that I've heard about or seen yet.

I'll just say something back there, Rick.

You mentioned \$100 million. Within our department, we estimate it will take \$150 million to repair just the harbours and wharves on Prince Edward Island and to get them ready for next season.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That doesn't include the other provinces.

Mr. Jamie Fox: No.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's why I think it's closer to half a billion dollars for Atlantic Canada. That doesn't even include the private wharves that were devolved. That's just small craft harbours.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

We'll now go to Mr. Kelloway for six minutes or less.

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

Ministers, thanks for coming today.

Minister Bragg, congratulations on becoming a granddad. That's great news.

Our study is meant to explore a few things including the impacts of climate change on these types of storms and how we can prepare our coastal infrastructure for future ones that are going to come.

The devastation of Fiona was real, and you've all spoken eloquently on the impacts to people, infrastructure and communities. I'm not a meteorologist, but I do read articles and reports indicating that Fiona's size was the result of warmer water temperatures. In the past, hurricanes would come from the gulf, hit the Atlantic Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean would be cool enough to remove some of the impact and the energy from the devastating force.

Thank you again for sharing your observations and first-hand knowledge of the impact on Atlantic communities you represent. Also, I appreciate that you acknowledged in your testimony the fact that climate change is real and the climate crisis is here.

My question is for Minister Craig.

Minister Craig, what do you think we need to do to better prepare our coastal infrastructure in Nova Scotia, such as small craft harbours, for future storms that will inevitably come?

Hon. Steve Craig: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway, for the question.

I think we need to do a number of things.

First of all, we need to take an inventory of our current infrastructure and, with our assets and investments, make them as good as possible to mitigate the damage of storm surges and wind.

Storms are becoming more frequent. They are becoming more severe. Two-thirds of our wharves are under the government and one-third are not. We need to look at all of these. We need to invest in the studies. We need to ensure we take the measures the engineering indicates. Maybe the engineering says it has to be three

times what it is now. Well, let's build it five times, okay, because this is very unpredictable.

We also need to invest in what I call the state of good repair. We need to ensure we have something that is going to be well maintained.

We need to prepare our coastal infrastructure, use the science to make evidence-based decisions, determine where we are vulnerable, invest to adapt the impacts of the climate change, and then learn and apply what we are seeing.

One of the fishermen I talked with, as well as the fish plant owners, after Fiona said, "You know what, we're learning every time a storm hits us. We're taking some measures, but we don't know what's going to happen next and we do need government help."

I would suggest to you, sir, that we do need some investment here. I know my colleagues and I are prepared to work hand in glove with the federal government to ensure this happens.

• (1335)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Minister Craig, I also want to take this moment to thank you for your leadership on the ground. You visited numerous coastal communities, numerous small craft harbours. In particular, I think of your visit and my visit to Osborne Burke's processing plant in Victoria County.

When we talk about small craft harbours—and, of course, we focus on those because they're the economic engines of our coastal communities. They're the heartbeat. I keep telling folks I know in central Canada that just as their car manufacturing plants are the heartbeat, and out in Alberta the natural resources are, the small craft harbours are the lifeblood of coastal communities. They're who we are, but they're also the economic engine.

When you think of an operation like Osborne Burke's, which was a processing plant that was completely devastated by the waves and the high tide and the winds, would the same solutions you put forward with respect to small craft harbours apply in terms of processing plants?

Hon. Steve Craig: Certainly. Most processing plants in our province, and I suspect the other ministers' provinces, are very close to where the wharves are. They are very close to the high-water mark. In Nova Scotia we have people who are....

I look at the high-water mark, and it's that far—that far—to get to the road. With a storm surge it's like this...and then it automatically flows into processing plants that are quite often located very close to where those wharves are.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I have 50 seconds left. I'll use those 50 seconds to give maybe one of the other ministers an opportunity to maybe chime in and give a short answer to the question I'd directed toward Mr. Craig.

Hon. Jamie Fox: I want to grab that one there, Mike.

I had a good conversation with Minister Murray in Covehead about three weeks ago. We were talking, and we both agreed that our infrastructure right now needs to be three feet taller. It's as simple as that. Any wharf going forward that we have to repair or refurbish needs to be three feet higher. It's as simple as that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Madam 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 would like to thank the witnesses who are with us today. They are making a generous gesture, as their time is valuable, I am sure. We are grateful to them.

In Quebec, we also have a concern in this regard. Hurricane Fiona hit the Magdalen Islands very hard. We are also sensitive to the realities that our witnesses are experiencing, since they are directly related to ours.

We are also concerned about the small craft harbours and the port of Cap-aux-Meules in the Magdalen Islands. They too have problems, and urgent action is needed.

Ms. Johnson, how much of the overall investment could be directed to the restoration and maintenance of small craft harbours in the total budget dedicated to climate change?

Do you have any idea how much of that budget you would need, back home?

Hon. Margaret Johnson: Thank you for the question.

[English]

I'm hesitating on the actual percentage, because the impact that New Brunswick received as a result of Fiona was disproportionate when you compare it with what the other three Atlantic provinces did receive. However, the impact to small harbours was large. We are looking for help from DFO in doing some repairs. I don't have an actual percentage of that at my fingertips right now, but I can get it.

I can't tell you how proud I am of the fishermen we do have, who rose to the occasion and made sure they got their gear out of the harbour before the storm hit. But if you talk to them, they talk about the impact of wind and wind direction, and the fact that we were so fortunate to have the winds acting in our favour.

So we had less impact here. I don't have a percentage at my fingertips. I'm very sorry.

• (1340)

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you for your answer.

My next question is about climate change.

The Minister of Environment and Climate Change has announced that there will be new searches for marine oil deposits off the coast of your provinces.

Does this worry you, given that any oil development obviously involves increased greenhouse gas emissions?

I would like to get comments from each of you, perhaps starting with Ms. Johnson.

[English]

Hon. Margaret Johnson: I'll start, just because I still have my mike open.

We're working in conjunction with our environment ministers and our department. We are also looking at flood plains. We have flood plain examinations in place. We're looking at our inland waterways as well as our coastal waterways at flood zones, and examining where we're going to allow infrastructure to be put in place. We're relying on those activities to help us out with making decisions as to what buildings and infrastructure are put in flood zones, and making sure we're protecting that.

With the small craft harbours, we're dependent upon DFO to help us out with that, because we don't have a percentage or a dollar amount for how that's going to impact our fishers.

Hon. Jamie Fox: I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment on this, because off our coast of P.E.I., whether I go east, west, north or south, we have no exploration going on in our area. It's something we have to be cognizant of, but I don't think it's something I could really give an opinion on, to be honest.

Hon. Derrick Bragg: I'll go next. It's Derrick Bragg from Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have extensive exploration ongoing, and we have offshore drilling happening as we speak, and oil being pumped out. We are very much concerned. Our environment minister and I just got back from a convention in Egypt to talk about our environment.

In our province we've done a thing for on-land flooding called flood risk mapping. We've mapped out various portions of our province and we've put communities on alert. We have monitoring systems that would be in place for risk of any floods, to give people the chance to get out of their homes. It's an evacuation plan, I guess. We've done a great job of flood risk mapping in our province.

Hon. Steve Craig: I guess that leaves me.

The province of Nova Scotia is looking less and less to fossil fuels, and certainly our emphasis has been on green hydrogen, wind-mills and solar power, and the way we look at offshore wind as well.

We're exploring less and less. Decreasing our emphasis on fossil fuels is a focus of ours. I can't talk about the details, it not being in my portfolio, but I can say, as a cabinet minister, that we are in fact looking at moving away from fossil fuels as quickly as is feasible.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Desbiens.

Hon. Derrick Bragg: Thank you for reminding me that—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Bragg, but the time is up.

We'll move on now to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less, please.

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

Welcome to the ministers who are here today, and thank you for taking the time to come to talk to us about this important topic.

First, I know it's been a few months since this occurred, but I want to express my deep empathy for everything that occurred on the east coast. I'm sure my colleagues are sick and tired of hearing me say it every time an east coaster is here, but my roots are from Newfoundland. My home is now on the west coast, and it's clear that the impacts of climate change are going to continue to impact us all.

I'm happy we're talking about the specifics of what occurred with hurricane Fiona and learning from that, because the reality is that as we're talking about hurricane Fiona, inevitably another storm is brewing.

My mind is going to the challenges that we're currently facing and how we move forward, so I'm grateful that we have you here today. The reality is that we need all levels of government working together to address these impacts.

I'm a bit of a visual person, so I'm looking at all of this from the lens of prevention, the response and then, of course, cleanup.

With my first line of questioning, I want to focus predominantly on the prevention side of it.

Minister Craig, you spoke a little bit in relation to my colleague MP Kelloway's question, but I wanted to put this to Minister Johnson first perhaps.

In your position—of course, I am on the federal side right now—what is your experience as far as what you perceive to be any gaps in support from the federal level is concerned—gaps in communication or gaps in a climate plan? What are the top three things we could be working on at the federal level to better work alongside you to begin addressing future climatic events such as hurricane Fiona?

• (1345)

Hon. Margaret Johnson: We're very hopeful that the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans is going to be supportive of the eastern fisheries. As Minister Craig indicated, our biggest request is for the science to help us look at things like the impact of

climate change on our current coldwater species and the sustainability of those going forward.

With respect to assessing the damage to future stocks, a lot of the time we look at the damage that is happening right now and we don't think about the fact that we have young stock that's going to be impacted, and that we won't actually see the direct impact of that for a couple of years when those species grow.

We would like to do some more science to assess water temperature changes and the effects on species distribution, retention and the presence in future of pests. We want to look at water temperatures and flood mapping and modelling to assess future impacts on seafood processing and wharf infrastructures.

We really need the help of the department to look at the science-based policies and the science-based decisions we're going to require, because we recognize that things like Fiona and Dorian are a part of our future. They're not something we can run away from. We recognize that catastrophic events like these are going to be part of our future, and we need to be looking at how best to mitigate them.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister.

Perhaps for simplicity, I'll ask Minister Bragg the same question.

Hon. Derrick Bragg: Thank you.

I think Margaret covered most of it, but for sure science is very important when it comes to what's happening with climate change. We are adapting in our province, as I said previously. We've gone into more flood-risk mapping.

In terms of our municipal infrastructure, when we build any municipal infrastructure now, we take into account the one in 100-year storms that are more common than ever before. We develop berms around certain buildings for protection. We install bigger culverts. Our engineers are always thinking, "We have to go bigger; we have to go bigger." As Minister Fox said, when you look at the infrastructure of wharves, they need to be three feet higher. Well, when we look at our culverts, they need to be at least 30% larger.

Then we do a lot of work in anticipation. Thankfully, we have good, good people who monitor the weather systems we have. I guess we do have some knowledge ahead of time that there's a storm heading our way, but we never know exactly what the effect of it will be. Fiona was the latest example of that. You would have heard interviews with people in Port aux Basques the day before Fiona, when they said, "We're used to wind. We've seen wind. We've seen wind 130, 140 kilometres before. It's no big deal." No one knew what the ocean was going to throw at them this time. It has frightened people. They're afraid to go back to live where they once were. We are moving people out of these areas because of the risks for the future.

In all of our coastal communities we have to encourage municipalities to consider these larger storms with respect to any building along the coastline now. We need good, scientific knowledge to bring to the municipal world as well.

• (1350)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister.

Am I done now?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I'm going to talk quickly.

Finally, I want to put this to you, Minister Fox. In relation to that also, perhaps you could speak to how, when we are rebuilding we should be looking at green technology and green infrastructure so that we're not continuing to produce the same problems that are creating the symptoms that we're responding to, just as a cyclical problem.

I'm sure you'll have to provide that in writing, but I'll see if the chair will allow you to speak a couple of words and take it from there.

The Chair: Could you give us a very brief answer, please.

Hon. Jamie Fox: Thank you.

P.E.I. has really taken climate change seriously when it comes to different programs coming in now for solar, renewable energy and that kind of stuff. Basically now, every department has a secretariat that actually looks at everything through a climate change lens and in terms of renewable energy concepts or new ideas or techniques.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

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

I'll be sharing my five minutes with Mr. Bragdon.

I have four questions I'd like to get through, and I'd like answers from all four of you. I know this isn't going to be possible in the two and a half minutes I have, so I'll try to ask each one of you one question and perhaps the others could provide answers in writing to us following that.

I'll start with Mr. Fox.

When do your harvesters need small craft harbours to be rebuilt by—how soon?

Hon. Jamie Fox: Our people start hitting the water in mid-March. It's as simple as that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

If the others can provide a reply in writing to the committee, it would be appreciated.

Further, for Mr. Bragg, to meet that deadline, when do repairs need to begin and start to happen on harbours in your province?

Hon. Derrick Bragg: In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, that needs to start now. As you can imagine, there's a global shortage of almost all types of supplies, so we have to get in.... Many of these wharves will require cement work. We don't do a lot of cement work in the wintertime.

Jamie is saying March, and our boats are on the water in early April and mid-March, so we're in a similar situation in that part of the province where we had damage this time around. We're fishing at almost the same time as they are in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Now, for Mr. Craig, have federal funds been earmarked for rebuilding after Fiona in your province?

Hon. Steve Craig: The short answer is yes. We don't know the degree that they are. There is \$100 million that has been provided, through ACOA, of the \$300 million.

I'd just like to say that the boats in my most productive area of the province are going to be fishing in fewer than two weeks.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

The fourth question is—and again, I'd like each of you to reply to all four of these questions if you haven't replied verbally—have federal funds been delivered in your provinces at all after the promises that were made?

I'll allow Ms. Johnson to respond to that one.

Hon. Margaret Johnson: Well, in actual fact, I think I should defer that to one of my colleagues because, as I said, the disaster finance assistance we've had in the province has helped most of ours, but let's talk to people who need a bit more help.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay.

I believe my half of the five minutes is up.

Mr. Bragdon is next.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mel.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the wake of a storm and the aftermath of a storm, there's an old expression that seems most appropriate right now: Many are those who curse the wind, but what real leaders do is adjust the sails. We have a lot of cursing of the wind. We hate what's happened.

We don't like the storms, but I think there are two ways of doing this. Either we can adjust, we can adapt and we can mitigate, or we can just choose to continue to curse the wind, increase taxes and hope for something to get better.

I think the best approach is strategic investment. That's what I'm hearing from you witnesses here. It's strategic investment in key areas of infrastructure to get our coastal communities up to speed and bring the wharves and infrastructure where they need to be so that they're ready for future storms, which are inevitable and are going to be coming, no matter how much we want to curse the wind.

Minister Fox, I know that you've put in a lot of work around some infrastructure planning for the future and what it's going to require. Can you speak to that briefly here in my remaining time?

Hon. Jamie Fox: Thank you, Richard.

Basically what we need is A and B programs under DFO to be revisited and re-evaluated for the future. We need an immediate infrastructure amount put into Atlantic Canada to prepare our wharves for climate change and to make sure they support a blue economy. As I said, I think this is at least a \$750-million request that DFO needs to look at with Treasury Board to ensure that Atlantic Canada is supported as climate change occurs and continues.

I want to touch on one thing very quickly, Richard, and that is science. Science is key to this. We need to look at our fleet of vessels that are within DFO and ensure those vessels are on the water doing the required science to find out how fish stocks are affected, how fish stocks are moving and, especially as temperature rises, what is going to be happening when it comes to mammals coming into our areas and around our coastal areas.

• (1355)

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Okay. That's great.

Mr. Chair, how much time is left or do I have any?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Well, thanks to all the witnesses. You've given us valuable input. I think what's obviously becoming clear is that we need a practical and, yes, science-based approach towards adaptation and mitigation, and a whole lot less talking to the wind.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bragdon. That was dead-on for time. Good for you.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): I thank all the ministers for being with us today. We are happy to see them.

Ms. Johnson and those who know me know that I come from a coastal community, a fishing community. My father was a fisherman his whole life. Having spent a lot of time on the docks, I know how important small craft harbours are to communities.

Before I begin, I'd like to put the numbers in perspective. Everybody likes numbers. In your discussions, it will be very important for you to consider what has been done.

From 2006 to 2015, under the former Conservative government, \$499 million was invested in small craft harbours in Atlantic Canada over a nine-year period. On average, this represents \$55 million per year.

From 2016 to 2022, under the Liberal government, \$884 million was invested in small craft harbours in Atlantic Canada over a six-year period. On average, that's \$147 million per year.

We are obviously not here to determine which government did the most and which did the least. What we want to see is even more money invested in small craft harbours in every region.

Ms. Johnson, since you are a New Brunswick native, I will definitely ask you some questions.

Have you assessed the damage that the ports in your area have suffered? I know that is usually the responsibility of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, but you may have done an estimate on your end.

We know that southeastern New Brunswick was hit harder than northern New Brunswick, although there was damage there, as well.

What's your estimate on that?

What should we do to help coastal communities as quickly as possible?

[*English*]

Hon. Margaret Johnson: That's a very good question, Mr. Cormier.

The morning after the storm, I was on the phone immediately with the fishers, whether it be aquaculture or oyster or whatever sector we were dealing with, to see what the damage and impact was to our fishermen.

I have not been up to the north yet to see what the damage was to small harbours. However, they've sent me lots of pictures. There are some who are in dire need up in the Baie du Vin area where we have some stuff that requires serious attention.

Minister Craig talked about the fact that we have some processing units in the southeast where the waters came right up to the doors. Bless their hearts, it didn't manage to get in, so they've done very well.

None of the monies have come forward yet. We're working with the federal government to assess how much money is going to be required to bring these things up to scratch and to get them in a position where they're going to be safe.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Earlier, you spoke briefly about science. In your opinion, more scientific studies should be done, especially in the area of fisheries. I agree with you on that.

I don't want to take the blame away from the federal government or Fisheries and Oceans Canada, but you are probably aware that the climate change funding that you mentioned earlier comes from carbon pricing or the price on pollution.

If memory serves, New Brunswick has received \$170 million over the past three years. This money is given directly to the province to do with as it pleases.

According to the figures, a large portion of that money, 87%, was given to New Brunswickers in the form of tax cuts. This money could also be used to develop science programs in collaboration with Fisheries and Oceans Canada or the federal government.

Do you agree that a portion of the funds could be used to establish such programs?

As all the members and ministers here today have said, we need to work together to get more scientific studies done on fish stocks. In addition, we need to build infrastructure that is more resilient to climate change than the existing infrastructure.

● (1400)

[English]

Hon. Margaret Johnson: Absolutely. We want to be working with our federal counterparts all the way. The only way we can do this moving forward is to make sure we're all on the same page and we're using our combined resources to give our fishers the best service we can. So we're definitely wanting to work with them.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Do you plan to apply to the federal government under the disaster financial assistance arrangements?

Will you assess the damage and submit an application to the federal government to pay a portion of the costs?

[English]

Hon. Margaret Johnson: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: That's great.

Thank you.

Hon. Margaret Johnson: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier. Your time is up by six seconds.

I want to thank our four esteemed provincial witnesses here today for sharing their knowledge with the committee. A huge thanks to you.

I'll let you sign off now as we suspend for a couple of minutes to change to our group for the second hour.

● (1400)

(Pause)

● (1405)

The Chair: We're back.

I will make a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. Please mute your mike when you are not speaking

For interpretation, for those on Zoom you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. For those in the room, of course you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel as we've always done. I will remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. Representing Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation, we have Ariel Smith, coastal and marine team lead. Representing the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, we are joined by Molly Aylward, executive director; Mitch Jollimore, fisherman; and Gerard Watts, Covehead Harbour Authority.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today. You each have five minutes for an opening statement.

Ms. Smith, when you're ready, you can lead off with five minutes or less, please.

● (1405)

Ms. Ariel Smith (Coastal and Marine Team Lead, Coastal Action): Thank you.

I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me to present today. I'm grateful for the opportunity to share my thoughts and concerns on behalf of Coastal Action as related to the impact of the climate crisis in Atlantic Canada.

I'm the coastal marine lead at Coastal Action. Coastal Action is a charitable organization in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, that believes in safeguarding a healthy environment for future generations through research, education, action and community engagement.

Abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear, known as ghost gear, is a persistent environmental problem. Making up 60% of macro marine debris, ghost gear impacts marine habitats, causes entanglements and breaks into microplastics. Climate change and severe storms have a direct impact on the creation of ghost gear in Atlantic Canada. Already affected by hurricanes each year, as we know, the region is vulnerable to severe weather events that threaten our coasts and livelihoods. With annual storms only increasing in severity, the opportunities for fishing gear to be lost at sea are amplifying.

Ghost gear can be generated in a myriad of ways, including unfavourable environmental conditions, gear conflicts, poor gear condition and inappropriate disposal at sea. Such conditions as high-intensity wave action, tides, currents and bottom type can cause losses by damaging or severing gear. Inappropriate disposal of fishing gear at sea takes place when unwanted gear is abandoned. This may be due to the burden of hauling gear to shore when there is a lack of accessible drop-offs and gear returns on land.

Coastal Action has done ghost gear work since 2020, and is supported by DFO's ghost gear fund. We've retrieved gear from Yarmouth to Lunenburg and in the Minas Basin. During our 2022 season, our team retrieved over 17 tonnes of debris from the ocean and close to five tonnes of gear from shorelines. Eight commercial fishers conducted 70 days of retrieval from mid-September to early November. Our field techs collected high-quality data on bycatch and gear types and weight. Fishers provide us with invaluable knowledge on retrieval areas and connect us with other captains in their communities.

Gear that cannot be returned to owners is repurposed, recycled or disposed of responsibly. In addition, we are piloting the recycling of four tonnes of end-of-life fishing rope into synthetic diesel fuel. Our team has developed communication content and published articles to describe findings to industry, government and the public. Prevention and stewardship are woven into this work. Each year more captains are joining the project as knowledge of the issue spreads. As a result, where once the fishing community felt hesitant, they are now actively part of the solution.

Climate-related events will further impact ghost gear abundance over time, which means that continued effort in Atlantic Canada is needed. For example, we are currently working in Cape Breton under DFO's hurricane Fiona relief to conduct ghost gear cleanups at shorelines hardest hit by the storm.

Recycling ghost gear is in its infancy, specifically for end-of-life rope. In 2020 we set up nine rope collection bins at wharves across Nova Scotia, and in a matter of weeks they were overflowing. This points to strong support for a rope collection system where fishers can drop off rope rather than haul it to the landfill or have it end up at sea. Coastal communities have expressed a keen interest in the project that would collect and recycle gear, but there's little support long-term.

To close the ghost gear loop in Canada, more support is needed for new recycling initiatives. Opportunities are present outside of Canada; however, supporting efforts within the country will build capacity, strengthen community efforts and reduce carbon emis-

sions. Ghost gear will continue to put a strain on waste management if efforts are not made to develop a circular system.

Community groups and environmental non-profits like Coastal Action have been dedicated to the issue of ghost gear. Efforts are becoming more effective, but there is more work to be done. The climate crisis will continue to impact our coasts if action is not sustained. As stakeholders focus on retrieval and recycling efforts, we must also see the connection between ghost gear and the protection of shorelines through nature-based infrastructure. Such infrastructure, that works with our coastal environments rather than working against them, is vitally important. There are many opportunities to build resilience across sectors and implement solutions, but we must act fast to protect our vulnerable coasts.

Thank you.

• (1410)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to the representative for the P.E.I. Fishermen's Association. I'm not sure who's giving the statement, but whoever it is, you have five minutes or less.

Ms. Molly Aylward (Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the invitation to speak here today. I have appearing with me, Mr. Mitch Jollimore, who is a fisherman entrepreneur, as well as Mr. Gerard Watts, a representative from the Covehead Harbour Authority.

The P.E.I. Fishermen's Association was created in the 1950s to approach the federal government with one united voice. The PEIFA has evolved alongside the DFO to create the well-established working relationship that we still maintain today. The PEIFA represents approximately 1,275 core fishers.

Our goal here today is to focus on the impacts of Fiona on fish harvesters and on fisheries infrastructure as it relates specifically to Prince Edward Island.

The province of P.E.I. was heavily impacted by Fiona. The province had widespread power outages, with more than 85% of the province without power immediately following the storm. Some households and businesses were without power for almost three weeks.

We would like to commend the frontline responders and military for their hard work in the aftermath cleanup and restoration of power to the province.

Fisher harvesters in P.E.I. were significantly impacted by the storm. Several fisheries were still active, including the fall lobster fishery in LFA 25, tuna, halibut, rock crab and fall herring. The fall lobster fishery had untended gear in the water which was directly exposed to the full impact of the storm.

In the lead-up to the storm, captains worked to prevent and minimize damage to their fleet. Although every effort was made, the storm, as we know, was unprecedented.

In LFA 25, lobster harvesters experienced significant impact to onshore facilities, gear and revenue. For example, harvesters experienced lost and/or damaged gear. What was found showed significant signs of weathering. Extra time and expense were required to locate or repair missing gear. Catches were impacted, as lobsters do not trap well after such a storm and, in many cases, they were fishing with fewer traps.

For those who are dependent on employment insurance, a reduction in revenue and/or fishing time may impact qualifications. Overall, annual revenue for fish harvesters was impacted. This creates a hardship, especially for new entrants to the fishery. New entrants typically carry a higher debt load, making it more difficult to meet financial commitments.

It's unknown at this time what the impact is on the lobster habitat. However, the PEIFA, through the climate action fund, has commissioned two studies that look at the impacts of climate change on lobster and sediment transport. These are two issues that have been raised by fish harvesters and have been underscored by this unprecedented storm.

Specifically, one project is a climate change risk assessment to lobster. This study is being conducted in each of the P.E.I. LFAs. The work includes interviews and workshops with fishers, scientists and climate scientists to understand the pathway in which lobsters may be affected by climate change and how climate change may improve or degrade lobster survivability in P.E.I.

The results show that while climate change may in fact improve lobster survivability in the near term, certain aspects of climate change, such as extreme weather events or heat, are likely to negatively impact lobster in the future. The final report is not out yet, but is expected in the coming month.

The second one is a climate change study on impacts to sediment transport near small craft harbours in P.E.I. This was commissioned because of concerns over dredging requirements at small craft harbours. The study will include some sediment transport modelling at two small craft harbours, Skinner's Pond and North Lake, and that will be used to estimate the impact of climate change on sediment transport. The results of the modelling will be used as a case study to understand potential impacts, and this is due out in 2023.

In the aftermath of the storm, there were requirements for lost fishing gear to be recovered and brought to shore through LFA 25. This challenge was met by members of the Prince County Fishermen's Association and the PEIFA. Numerous boats retrieved lost equipment on the ocean surface or grappled for gear on the ocean floor over three days. A total of 35 volunteers worked hand in hand with DFO C and P, resulting in an orderly and impactful equipment recovery.

Although the lobster industry suffered the greatest impact, other fisheries were also impacted. There were delays in getting boats back on the water to resume fishing. Channels were inaccessible due to sediment buildup. There was a lack of ice to properly maintain catches, as well as a host of other issues with gear and onshore facilities.

In addition to the impact on the fisheries, there is a clear understanding that the rebuilding of wharf infrastructure is critically important and needs to be a primary focus. There are two wharves that are non-operational in P.E.I., Covehead and Stanley Bridge, a further nine wharves that are only partially operational and several others that have damage but are still operational.

● (1415)

This situation presents many significant challenges, including repairing existing infrastructure and properly improving vulnerable areas. We have aggressive timelines since the largest fishery on Prince Edward Island will commence in the spring of 2023, just six months away with the Canadian winter in between.

We commend the government for quickly announcing funds to assist the fishery. Three-hundred million dollars was announced, with a focus on repairing and enhancing the infrastructure at wharves. This is a good start. However, it is expected that the cost for repairs and upgrades will be substantially greater.

The damage experienced in P.E.I. from this category 2 storm was unprecedented. Should we get a category 4 or category 5 storm with the infrastructure we have, we would be wiped out. Moving forward, we need to prevent that by fixing what needs fixing and reinforcing what we have.

We look forward to working with all levels of government and to ensure our infrastructure is in good repair and ready for the future.

Thank you.

The Chair: We are going to our questions now.

We will start off with Mr. Small for six minutes or less.

I will be really tight on the time because we have to finish up after the first block of questions.

Mr. Small, you have six minutes or less.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for taking their valuable time and committing it to our study today.

First I'll go to Ms. Aylward.

You need those small craft harbours up and running by when?

Ms. Molly Aylward: The spring fishery will begin on May 1, 2023. That's our largest fishery in LFA 24 and 26A.

Mr. Clifford Small: If those damages aren't substantially repaired by then, what will the impact be on harvesters and processors in the fishing industry in P.E.I.?

Ms. Molly Aylward: It will be a significant impact for sure because, obviously, they need to be able to set their gear and to return home every day. It is imperative that those wharves are in good shape for the fishermen to do that. Of course, they need to bring in their landing so that can be brought to the buyers and then to the processors to provide the products to the consumers.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you think it's possible that those repairs will be done on time? What work has begun already? Has any?

Ms. Molly Aylward: I would like to turn it over to Mr. Watts. He is with the Harbour Authority of Covehead. Covehead was one of the hardest hit harbours here in P.E.I., and he can speak to that directly.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Gerard Watts (Covehead Harbour Authority, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): I represent the Harbour Authority of Covehead. We were the hardest hit wharf on Prince Edward Island, next to Morell. We took the hurricane right on the nose, so to speak.

At our harbour, the wharf is basically destroyed. There are 16 boats there and four mussel operations. There's only room for about four boats to operate right now if we were to start the lobster season, so there's really no place to safely put your traps.

The Chair: Mr. Watts, could you lower your camera a bit? The interpretation people need to see you....

There you go. Perfect.

Mr. Gerard Watts: They need to see my nice smile. Okay.

Anyway, we are in really bad shape. We will have to fish off the sand next year if we can't get this infrastructure corrected.

We have been working with the DFO. We will have the bulldozers there next week to remove all the debris. We lost a lot of our buildings and some of the infrastructure. There's about two feet of sand all over the wharf, and we're working to get that cleaned up. The whole infrastructure to put your traps and stuff is completely destroyed.

The DFO has cited us as being one of the priorities. Right now, it's saying, "Let's get things cleaned up," and it's meeting with us to come up with a better design for the wharf so that it's safe for everybody.

• (1420)

Mr. Clifford Small: I'd just like a quick response to this question, Mr. Watts.

Is there any slack capacity on Prince Edward Island now so that harvesters could move to different ports, or are you maxed out and you absolutely can't get by without those repairs?

Mr. Gerard Watts: Well, that was talked about: where you could go. Most of those harbours are pretty maxed out. It's difficult for fishermen that compete on the water to be moving from one harbour to another, because they sort of have their territories.

There was some talk of how maybe we can fix up another wharf intermittently to get us by, but the fishermen we met this weekend, they're pretty insistent. We're going to try to work with DFO as best we can on an interim basis to get enough safety equipment in place, whether it's plywood or something, to put the traps on to get them launched.

Mr. Clifford Small: All right.

I have one more short question. This one is going to be for Mr. Jollimore.

Looking ahead to next season, there has been a significant amount of fishing gear that's been lost, destroyed and rendered unusable. Do you see any issues with being able to have the fishing gear on hand that you need to set by next season? How's the availability?

Mr. Mitchell Jollimore (Fisherman, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): Thanks for the question.

No, I don't think there's going to be an issue on having gear ready. I think the issue right now, with a lot of the wharves in disrepair, is having a place to put our gear. We need to have our gear close to the water for us to be able to load on setting day. I don't think the amount of gear available will be the issue. It will be more about having the infrastructure in place to allow us to set our gear safely.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

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

What we've been hearing so far is an accurate assessment of the damage from the hurricane, which nobody disputes. Every member on this call has had a riding impacted and can see that.

My question is for Gerard.

If the Government of Canada transferred to your port authority \$10 million tomorrow, could you have the wharf back in place come the first of May?

Mr. Gerard Watts: No, we couldn't have it all back in place, Mr. Morrissey.

We'd have a pretty good shot at it if they could offer tenders and things like that. It takes a while for the tenders to get approved. It also takes a while for the engineers and stuff to design what they think they need to do to improve wharves. They have decided that they want to improve the infrastructure, and they would raise the wharves by five feet.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's my point. Currently, our government announced \$1 billion to be prepared to get the bills from the provinces from this latest hurricane. We've announced \$300 million for small craft harbours, which, to be clear, as we've said, is the first instalment. We know the bill is going to go higher.

The reality is that in my area we can't pivot on a dime. One of the areas that affects rebuilding is that of the different jurisdictions. Environmental permits are under the provincial government and they can delay, delay, delay. I was frustrated by a number of projects in my riding that were delayed because of the lack of approvals. We really need to have all departments come together and be prepared to move a lot faster than they've done in the past. We're all guilty of that, but the money is there. Getting projects under way will be the slow part.

I want to change my questions, because we've had a really good assessment of what the damage is, but nobody so far, including the four ministers who appeared, has presented this committee with what the challenge confronting governments is on dealing with climate change. We have a lot of climate change deniers who anticipate that you can do away with climate change with no cost.

My question is for Ariel.

Is there a cost to climate change? Can you deal with climate change with no costs impacting individuals? Give a short answer.

• (1425)

Ms. Ariel Smith: There definitely is a cost. I think we see that reflected here from the folks in P.E.I. and from the hardest hit areas of this hurricane. It will only continue to get worse over time, so—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Ariel, do we all agree that the biggest contributor to climate warming is the use of carbon fuels?

Ms. Ariel Smith: I think that is a huge factor, yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Molly from the fishers association and Gerard and Mitchell, can we agree that climate change is having a very negative impact on our coastal infrastructure and on our fisheries, one that we still don't understand?

What scares me and should scare the industry is that some scientists say that warming of the gulf by a couple of degrees could have significant impact on our lucrative lobster fishery and crab fishery. They will not be able to produce in these waters. Can we get agreement that climate change is real and that the biggest contributor to climate change is the burning of fossil fuel?

Mr. Mitchell Jollimore: First of all, happy birthday.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

Mr. Mitchell Jollimore: I think we can all agree that the weather now is definitely more severe and different from what we've seen. I've been a captain for 19 seasons, and the last three to five have definitely been worse than any previous ones. I don't think it's safe for us to say we all agree on how that's happening or on one specific reason why it's happening, but I think we can all agree that the weather we're seeing now is more intense than it was before and we're starting to see storms of the century every other year.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: We probably could all agree then that we had better get our act together collectively as governments and industry and come up with a long-term plan. Can we agree on that?

Mr. Mitchell Jollimore: Definitely.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Going back briefly to Molly or to one of the other witnesses, we are unique in Prince Edward Island given our large mussel industry, which has been significantly impacted, as has our oyster aquaculture.

Molly, could you comment on the impact on those?

We know the impact on harbour infrastructure was significant and we recognize that it must be improved, but can you touch briefly on what has to be done to rebuild the mussel farming and oyster aquaculture?

Ms. Molly Aylward: Thank you for your question.

Aquaculture is not part of PEIFA's mandate. That's part of the mandate of the aquaculture alliance.

I do know anecdotally from speaking with people who work in the industry that there has been a great deal of devastation there as well, and maybe even more so than in some of the other fisheries. Outside of that, I couldn't speak to that specifically, Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's fair. They will be appearing.

Chair, that's my only question. Thank you.

The Chair: Your time is up.

We'll now go to Madam Desbiens for six minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses again. We are very pleased to have you with us.

I obviously want to talk to you about Quebec and its problems. However, you represent other regions that are still facing the same problems. Indeed, there is a major climate shock. Hurricane Fiona has also hit the Magdalen Islands very hard. They are your neighbours and, probably in some respects, your collaborators because of the processors and some exchanges of expertise. I know that the Magdalen Islands have a good relationship with most of you.

Shoreline erosion, climate change, storms and hurricanes threaten even the Magdalen Islands with extinction. The maritime provinces will be next. So the situation is very serious. Right now, we are obviously discussing a quick fix.

My father, who is an experienced sailor, would say that this is a poultice on a wooden leg. We're urgently discussing quick fixes to get you back to fishing. I think that's very commendable. It is imperative for you to have funding that will enable you to get back to the sea and back to fishing.

On another note, I would like to get your impression of where the government is going right now in putting more money into oil, for example, in Bay du Nord or the Trans Mountain project.

Shouldn't we be taking that money to start a green shift that would make your fishing operations more climate proof and do more to fight climate change? Do you think the government is doing enough to fight climate change?

My question is for Ms. Smith and Mr. Watts.

● (1430)

[English]

Mr. Gerard Watts: Do I think the government is doing enough to fight fossil fuels? Well, I don't know what defines "enough". It's a difficult task.

I think we're working somewhat towards that, but I also think, to quote Mr. Morrissey, that we all need to be working together on this, all parties, because it's certainly here, and I think that if we don't do something, we're going to be in worse shape. We just need to get it together and have everybody get behind the plow and get it done.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Jollimore, is there anything you would like to add?

We can't hear you.

[English]

The Chair: You're on mute, Mr. Jollimore.

Mr. Mitchell Jollimore: Yes, we're good. I'm sorry.

In terms of fighting fossil fuels, I mean, we're here to discuss the effects of Fiona, which were wide and great, and I don't know if we've got enough minutes in the day to discuss a plan for that and whether the plan we're on right now is right or not. I think that's something we're going to have to judge a long time from now—hopefully, a long time from now—but if you'd like to speak about Fiona and what it's done to the wharves, our business community and our fishing community, I'd be happy to answer that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: There will be other effects like Fiona's. I honestly don't think we'll ever have enough money to prepare for what's coming. Of course, the money should be used to save your small harbours and facilities, so that you can get back to fishing, but shouldn't there also be an urgent need to think of an immediate plan to prevent you from being hit even harder next year, in two years, and so on?

At some point, we're going to run out of money to adjust to the severity of the situation. I'm concerned about that and I wanted to get your agreement on it. I know we're here to discuss your infras-

tructure, of course, but I feel that both of these topics need to be raised in this study, as they are directly related.

Ms. Smith, you seem interested in what I am saying. I am listening to you.

[English]

Ms. Ariel Smith: Yes, I'd like to say something. I do think there needs to be a more concerted effort to be proactive rather than reactive in these situations when it comes to severe weather events.

As I briefly mentioned at the end of my statement, but that I think requires more delving into, there is the use of natural infrastructure to protect our coastlines, particularly at wharves and areas where fishing-related gear can be damaged and can be washed out to the ocean. Those types of infrastructure need more attention in Atlantic Canada, but also in Canada overall.

Small options for that are possible, but massive coastlines also could be integrated for a natural infrastructure, as we're seeing in examples in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia. A small portion of the shoreline has been piloted to see what nature-based infrastructure could look like in working with our coasts. Rather than building up rocks and walls, we actually need to implement this in a more concerted way for the Maritimes.

● (1435)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I'm sure you've noticed this, but perhaps I can just point it out. I worry about future opportunities for our witnesses to be able to share what they've shared today, and I notice that every time Mr. Watts speaks, the camera is coming up on Mr. Jollimore. I'm not certain if that's something we want to address before we continue the meeting.

The Chair: Well, we haven't got much time, but I believe they might be in the same room and when one speaks it activates the other mike, but we are hearing Mr. Watts fine and we hear Mr. Jollimore fine.

We can shut down the meeting and try to straighten it out, but we only have until three o'clock, so your six minutes are counting down.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to make sure it was being addressed.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for being here today.

My understanding of why we're here today, and of the motion put forward around the study, is that we're here to learn not just about the impacts of hurricane Fiona—the costs, the damages, the impacts on human life and all of that—but also from these impacts. The reality is that we are in a climate crisis. We're feeling the impacts of the climate crisis. That was the reason that in my questions for the ministers I was talking specifically about that. We continue to experience the impacts of the climate crisis and then try to put band-aid solutions in response to the climate crisis. That doesn't actually help us in any way, because we need to be making some big changes in order to reduce the rate of extreme weather patterns that we're seeing.

To my mind, with the impacts we're seeing right now, our taking this time to look at it is an opportunity for us to discover how we can do things differently. I appreciate the term nature-based infrastructure that was used by Ms. Smith. I've been referring to it as green infrastructure, but we're all talking about the same thing. I would like us to be able to build on that in order to understand not only how we mitigate the impacts of it but also how we create infrastructure that will reduce the impacts moving forward, and of course the damages that we've already created.

I could go on for six minutes on a tangent on this all alone, but I don't want to do that, because I want to hear from you all.

Ms. Smith, you started to touch on this in relation to a question from my colleague Madam Desbiens. Can you expand a little bit further on what you see as effective nature-based infrastructure that we could be putting in? Can you speak a little bit to the ghost gear, the impacts of the ghost gear, and how we can do things differently around that? I'm trying to understand your thoughts on that a little bit more.

Ms. Ariel Smith: Thank you for the question.

Yes. I think there are two things that have been working very separately right now. What Coastal Action is trying to do is connect these issues. On the issue of ghost gear, we see that right now it's very reactive. It's about retrieving gear from the ocean and cleaning it up from our shorelines. We're not thinking about a closed-loop system and solutions that could work in tandem as we're cleaning up this gear.

You mentioned nature-based infrastructure. That's one way in which we can help protect our coasts and help our wharves from losing gear. A lot of the gear is there, close to the coastline, and it can be lost in severe weather events. We want to see the protection of our coasts. Green infrastructure works with the existing coastline and the existing environment so that it kind of absorbs that rather than bounce it back and cause more issues. We're working with nature to help us through these issues.

The issue of ghost gear in Atlantic Canada still needs more support. It's in its infancy in terms of knowing what is out there and

knowing the hot spots. Our hope is to have more funding from DFO—long-term funding, year after year, not just small yearly or short-term contracts—for long-term, sustainable solutions so that we can work with the fishing industry and work with captains to help prevent this, help work on the recycling end of things, and work on the solutions that are not just reactive.

• (1440)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Ms. Smith. I'm thinking about the reduction of plastics as well, which of course is interconnected with ghost gear and all this. Thank you for your thoughts on that.

Perhaps I can ask the same question of you, Ms. Aylward, and ask for your thoughts on nature-based infrastructure.

As well, what communications have you been receiving from the government, from DFO, through this process, and perhaps any consultations on the rebuilding process and what that might look like? Has rebuilding with a more nature-based approach been a consideration in the funding allocation to rebuild?

Ms. Molly Aylward: We've been working in consultation with both levels of government here in P.E.I. With the federal government, we've met with the minister a couple of times since Fiona, and we also work closely with our provincial government.

We had a very significant ghost gear cleanup after the storm. I mentioned in my opening statement the fishermen who fish in Prince County. They were fishing actively at the time of the storm. When the season was over, 35 different volunteers spent three full days out grappling at the bottom of the ocean as well as at the surface. They brought in quite a substantial amount of gear. Some of that was lost because of the storm, obviously. Some of that had been ghost gear that was ghost fishing, something that we want to avoid at all costs.

We have been working with both levels of government, yes.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Ms. Aylward. My question is gone. Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hammer is coming. That clews up our round of questioning for the witnesses this afternoon.

I, of course, want to thank Ms. Smith, Ms. Aylward, Mr. Watts and Mr. Jollimore for appearing and giving freely of their time today to share their knowledge with us.

We'll suspend for a moment while we switch to in camera for some instructions to our analysts.

Thank you, everyone.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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