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Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Before we get started, Monsieur Lapointe, would you like to have the floor?

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

I would like to direct the attention of the committee to the following motion:

That the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans hold a meeting, before the summer adjournment, to address mounting public and scientific concerns over the immediate threat posed by seismic exploratory work, geotechnical drilling and other exploratory work to be conducted within the marine environment to species listed under the Species at Risk Act and other vulnerable species in the Gros-Cacouna region of the St. Lawrence River; that Department of Fisheries and Oceans officials be invited to that meeting to provide the committee with a complete list of the conditions the Department established for this work, along with the scientific basis upon which these conditions are based, and to respond to questions in this regard, and clarify which activities, if any, would have been subject to a federal and environmental assessment under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act prior to its repeal; and that the committee report its conclusions and its recommendations to the House of Commons.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Lapointe. A notice of motion has been provided.

Mr. Stringer, I'd like to welcome you and your colleagues to the committee today. I know you're no stranger to these committee meetings, so I'll ask you to please proceed with your presentation.

Mr. Kevin Stringer (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystems and Fisheries Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you very much for having us here today to talk about eco-certification.

My name is Kevin Stringer, I'm the assistant deputy minister for ecosystems and fisheries management. On my left is Eric Gilbert, director general for aquaculture management. On my right is Nadia Bouffard, director general for external relations. On her right is Jean Landry, acting director general for ecosystems and oceans science. We're very pleased to be here today to speak to you and to hear your questions about the timely topic of eco-certification of wild-capture and aquaculture fisheries. I have a few opening remarks and then we'll all be happy to take questions and comments, etc.

To give you a bit of background, Canada first witnessed this trend to eco-certification in the forestry sector in the early 1990s when markets, primarily in Europe, began demanding that forest products they purchased come from forestry operations that were certified as sustainable by third parties.

[Translation]

Ecocertification organizations targeting fisheries, first started in Europe, appeared in the late 1990s. As in forestry, European retailers and buyers were first to signal their preference to purchase products from certified fisheries. Thus the first Canadian fisheries to seek ecocertification were those with significant exports to Europe—shrimp and Pacific salmon.

• (1535)

[English]

The first Canadian fishery certified was a northern prawn trawl fishery in 2008. Since then, the number of Canadian fisheries that have received eco-certification from the Marine Stewardship Council—established in 1997, it's the global leader in fishery certification—has grown to 24. Twenty-four Canadian fisheries are certified, which places Canada near the top in the number of certified fisheries and represents about 50% of the landings of commercial fisheries in Canada. Another eight Canadian fisheries, including inshore lobster, are under assessment now.

Not all markets or buyers within those markets demand products from eco-certified fisheries. Outside of North America and Europe, the demand is weakest but is showing some growth. Seeking fishery certification is a voluntary market-driven business decision. Once a fishery decides to pursue certification, it enters into a contract with a third party organization approved to conduct the assessment against the independent certification standard of the certifying organization.

During the assessment of a fishery, the role of Fisheries and Oceans Canada is an enabling one. DFO provides the management information and the science data that's needed to meet the information requirements of the fishery assessment. When a fishery is certified, DFO works with it to make any improvements identified as a condition of the assessment of that fishery. No fishery in the world has received MSC certification without some conditions to undertake improvements. The central aim of eco-certification organizations, they say, is to make use of the market to drive improvements in the sustainability of fisheries.

[Translation]

As the results to date have shown, Canada's fishery management system including its stock assessment program, science-based decision making, new sustainable fishery policies and management plans and tools have placed Canadian fisheries on a solid footing to achieve ecocertification.

Ecocertification has put pressure on fisheries and on DFO to meet demands for improvements but for the most part these have been consistent with DFO's own direction on sustainability.

[English]

While the Marine Stewardship Council standard has been the leading fishery certification standard for more than 10 years, demanded by more retailers and buyers than any other in the world, other organizations also now have a growing influence. The responsible fisheries certification program, which has been adopted by the Alaska Seafood Marketing Council and Iceland, is a third party certification model that's starting to gain some recognition in European markets.

[Translation]

Other organizations are using different methods to try to encourage improvements in fisheries through campaigns to influence the seafood buying decisions of consumers, restaurants, retailers and others. The Monterey Bay Sea Aquarium (U.S.) Seafood Watch Program assesses and rates fisheries and aquaculture in North America and elsewhere and publishes its recommendations on fish species to buy or avoid.

[English]

It's important to note that certification for aquaculture is different. For aquaculture, the unit of certification is the individual operator, and the elements being certified may be more wide-ranging. Aquaculture certification encompasses food safety, animal welfare, and socio-economic aspects, in addition to environmental issues. In addition, fishing companies can combine resources to pay certification costs, whereas aquaculture producers must pay individually for certification of each farm site, hatchery, feed mill, or processing plant.

Among the different groups, and there are many of them, the Global Aquaculture Alliance's best aquaculture practices standard has had the most uptake, especially among salmon farmers. All Atlantic salmon farmers in B.C. and several in New Brunswick are certified under that program. This standard was developed by a committee that included industry representatives as well as environmental groups such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Marine Conservation Society.

• (1540)

[Translation]

With aquaculture's standards now fully developed, Fisheries and Oceans Canada continues to track the companies that are moving into or adding to their certifications. The latest information indicates that the majority of aquaculture production in Canada is certified to one or more internationally recognized programs.

All salmon farms are certified, as is the entire mussel industry in Newfoundland and Labrador and most of Ontario's rainbow trout production. There are 22 companies in Canada that have achieved organic certification.

[English]

In sum, the market demand for proof of the sustainability of products from wild capture and from aquaculture facilities, primarily through eco-certification, has been with us for the last decade and has continued to grow. Eco-certification, many believe, is here to stay. It has become, many people in industry believe, a cost of doing business for many fisheries and aquaculture operations and has become increasingly important for market access.

We'd be happy to answer any questions. We are at your disposal.

Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Stringer.

We're going to start off with a 10-minute round with Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Stringer and your colleagues, for speaking with us today.

I'm curious about the eco-certification of seafood products, and in particular the role of government. It appears that the Government of Canada was involved in the establishment of the FAO guidelines, but then backed off or didn't step forward in taking any direct role in our own industry. I'm trying to understand what that means.

You said the Department of Fisheries shares its research and science with these companies or with the industries. I'm trying to clarify the role of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. In that respect does this also include the small-scale fisheries and some of the work that's been done? The Chedabucto Bay shrimp fishery and the Off the Hook line in Nova Scotia are examples. Could you explain to me why the Government of Canada decided to respond the way it has to help establish international guidelines but then backed off? What role does it play in this business?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Thanks for the question. I'll start, and then I'll ask Nadia to add to my comments.

First of all, you're absolutely right in terms of FAO guidelines being the core of this and DFO or the Government of Canada being involved in establishing the guidelines. Guidelines are established from time to time. There are the responsible fisheries guidelines, conduct of fisheries, eco-labelling guidelines, and other guidelines.

With respect to deciding to go for eco-certification, it really is a business decision of the fishery. As we say, about 50% of the catch is now eco-certified. DFO's involvement and the Government of Canada's involvement generally, but certainly DFO's..... There are three areas that I'd speak to.

One is part of the eco-certification process. When MSC or another certifier is taking a fishery through the process, a third party group is putting together an assessment team that's putting together a set of questions. There are 31 sets of questions or sets of issues that they're looking at. Many of them require DFO to be engaged and answer questions, provide information. We're providing stock assessment information, monitoring information, so we're virtually always involved in the process, but as an expert, as someone who's answering questions about the management system, etc.

• (1545)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Are you paid for that? Are your services

Mr. Kevin Stringer: No. It's information that we generally have.

Two, once there is a certification, it's almost always—and I believe it is in fact always—with conditions. When you're certified, they say the condition is they want better information on bycatch, or they want the PA, precautionary approach, framework to be clearer in this area, and that inevitably involves DFO. We work with the fishery organization to enable it to keep that certification.

Three, we manage our fisheries based on the same guidelines, those FAO guidelines. We have a sustainable fisheries framework, which has a decision-making framework based on the precautionary approach. We have a national bycatch policy. We have a sensitive areas policy. We have a number of policies largely based on those same FAO guidelines. We have that information and we're all working with the same set of objectives that are established in the FAO guidelines.

We're not the ones who are pushing for certification or sponsoring certification, but we are supporting it when a fishery is seeking certification.

Nadia, do you want to add to that?

Ms. Nadia Bouffard (Director General, External Relations, Strategic Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): I'll go back to the first part of the question in terms of the history. When this movement started, not unlike what happened in the forestry sector, really it was markets and consumers. Mostly it was markets around the world requiring some sort of demonstration that the products that people were buying were coming from fisheries that were sustainably managed. They literally wouldn't take our word for it. We had in the past signed letters for buyers indicating that we felt the fishery was properly managed, sustainably managed. Markets actually demanded more proof, more evidence, in that respect.

Through these pressures, governments got together at the FAO and developed what we call the FAO guidelines on eco-labelling. Part of those guidelines actually insist that eco-certification regimes are independent and third party from industry, from government, from ENGOs, very independent from all of that, to provide credible independent assessment of management regimes and science regimes in support of sustainable fisheries.

I think that explains, in part, DFO's stance with respect to eco-certification regimes. They are third party, independent evaluations demanded by markets. Some markets don't care. Some markets will take information provided by governments. DFO has also played that role in providing information. You'll notice from DFO's website

that there are a lot of layman-terms attempts to explain how we manage our fisheries and the basis of our fisheries management decisions.

It's the same thing on the aquaculture front, where we have a lot of information aimed at targeted buyers to explain how we do things. For some markets that works, but for other markets it's not enough.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Ryan.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Thank you.

How many of these 24 Canadian fisheries that have been certified are on the east coast?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'll get you the specific answer in a moment, but the answer, I think, is most of them.

Am I right?

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: I think so.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: More than 50%—

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Is it shellfish? Is it groundfish?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It's all of them, a mixture: many of the shrimp fisheries, a couple of the crab fisheries, some of the groundfish fisheries—

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: Scallops.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: —and scallops. The lobster fisheries are currently in assessment, and don't have it yet; one does have it.

• (1550)

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: There's swordfish, flounder—

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Maybe you can provide the full list.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: We can get you the list, certainly.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: This is more of a statement than a question, but in terms of eco-certification and the criteria for having something certified, do they take into account the state of the fisheries management or the state of the fisheries science? If so, I would ask, how do we get anything certified? But that's just me. Being from Newfoundland, where most of the commercial fisheries have been decimated, again, that's just me.

The FFAW, the Fish, Food, and Allied Workers union in Newfoundland and Labrador, had an event last weekend in St. John's where they announced a program called trace your plate. It literally traces where the fish on your dinner plate comes from and who caught it. They even put the skipper's name on it.

What's the difference between eco-certification and a program such as trace your plate? Are they one and the same?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: You have asked two things. I'll start with the first one, and then I'll ask Nadia to answer the second one.

In terms of the tests, there are really three sets of tests. Test number one is the health of and the management of the target stock. What is the state of that stock, whether it's flounder, shrimp, or whatever, in terms of stock status, reference points, recovery, rebuilding? Is there a harvest strategy, etc.?

The second set of tests is around the fishery's impact on the ecosystems. What kind of bycatch is there? What kind of impact is there on habitat? What kind of impact is there potentially on endangered species? It's those types of things: the impact of this fishery on other fisheries and other things.

The third one is the overall governance and management system of whoever's managing that fishery. It's looking at the legal and customary framework and long-term objectives. Are there integrated fisheries management plans, or are there consultative processes in the fisheries management system itself?

With respect to the distinction between eco-certification and traceability, I'll ask Nadia to jump in on that one.

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: As Kevin pointed out, certification is to provide some evidence of the sustainability of whatever is being certified, in this case, seafood. Tracing is to actually trace the provenance of where that seafood comes from. There's a connection between the two. If your certification involves some sort of label that you want to put on your package, then you need to be able to demonstrate, when you're selling that product with that label, that the product actually comes from the fishery that's been certified. A system needs to be put in place to track it from its origin all the way to the plate.

The work that the FFAW has done in terms of tracing fish is slightly different. The objectives are different because you can track and trace fish for other purposes. Certainly people here will know about tracking and tracing for purposes of seafood safety, which is very important, but also for demonstrating the traditional source, particularly in the context of the FFAW. Also, other inshore harvesters around the country have wanted and have marketed the notion of fish and seafood coming from small inshore coastal fisheries, and their traditional ways. They've attached some sort of marketing and market-access benefits to tracing the fish all the way to the boat and to the captain of the boat.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cleary.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): In the notes we were given, under "eco-certification", there was a point that said, "Eco-certification is a third-party labelling scheme whereby an accredited independent certifying body...".

Who accredits the certifier?

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: I can only answer the question in the context of one program, the marine stewardship program. They have an accreditation body independent from the Marine Stewardship Council, and it accredits certifying bodies according to a set of rules.

There are other certifying organizations, such as the responsible fisheries certification program which Kevin alluded to earlier in his opening remarks, that use the ISO process for accrediting. The ISO process has an accrediting body that accredits those who do the actual work under ISO, whether it's certification or otherwise.

There are different types of accrediting bodies out there that accredit firms to do this kind of assessment work.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Could you describe for the committee the quota-setting process and regulation-setting process used by DFO to

either monitor a fishery or establish the regulations that govern the fishery? What do you do to make all of that happen?

● (1555)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'd start with integrated fisheries management plans. I think we have 170 formal fisheries, and we have formal integrated fisheries management plans for 130 or so of them across the country. We do it through consultation with the industry and other groups.

It starts with the Fisheries Act. The Fisheries Act provides the overall approach in terms of enabling the minister to establish a total allowable catch. The conditions decide who can fish it and under which conditions you can fish it. Then the plan for the fishery is the integrated fisheries management plan. The plan for the fishery basically says what the season is, who can fish, what the location is, and what the rules are for that fishery, and then the licence conditions outline those things.

Included in the plan is how we're going to monitor it and what information we require from the fishers, whether it's carrying a log book, VMS, observer coverage, or dockside monitoring. There's always some kind of monitoring and an information system. Then we pull all of that information together. We get science advice before the next year, and then we go through the process all over again. There's a regular annual cycle to ensure that we have proper management of fisheries.

I would also point out that this is that third test that the MSC and others look at. They look at the effect on the fishery and on other fisheries, and at the management plan. That management plan, as I've just outlined, is something that is always considered, and it's something that always needs a passing test. I know Canada has always had a passing test.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Would you undergo that same process regardless of whether there was a certification scheme in place or not?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: We do it, and when the certification process is under way, that's just a test to see if we indeed have it, but so far we've always done it.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: We had a witness in an earlier study, an industry representative. I asked him about Canada's place in the world in terms of the status of our fisheries management. He said basically it's world-class. Would you agree that we have a world-class fisheries conservation system in place?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: We would agree. I think, though, there are independent third party reviews of it that show, as I recall, we're in the top three in some reports that we've seen. Nadia?

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: I've seen reports stating that we're in different places, but definitely in the top 10 around the world out of approximately 70 countries that actually fish around the world.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I was interested, Mr. Stringer, in your point that when these certifying bodies come to look at what we do in Canada, they're always asking for something more. That just seems to me like a make-work project for them.

I happen to agree with your assessment of Canada's status in terms of fisheries science in the world.

It seems to me that it's superfluous and is a way for them to justify their own existence to ask you for more than you really need to provide.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: They say that there's usually and just about always some conditions on the certification. For the most part, these are things that are in our work plan. It's a question of whether we were planning to do it that year. The challenge is, with respect to extra science work or extra habitat work or extra work on the precautionary approach framework, we have our own plans about what needs to be done which year and what's most urgent.

The challenge is when we get a fishery that's certified, we have these conditions that must be met within three to five years and that sometimes presents a challenge. That said, for the most part it's usually in the same direction that we were going anyway.

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: If I may add to that, your comments are actually something I've heard often from various players in the seafood value chain involved in eco-certification. Often it's an issue of striking a balance between stability through the certificate that demonstrates sustainability and having a regime that actually adapts to changes both in ecosystems as well as in the science and our knowledge and best practices. Often these organizations are struggling between those two. Having a set regime in place that doesn't change doesn't actually reflect the changes that could happen in the way we do things on a science perspective or in management or the actual environment.

Having something stagnant that doesn't change over time is not the best thing for the industry, but having something that changes constantly is not good either.

• (1600)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: My own strong view is that Canada's environmental practices across the board, regardless of what industry it is, are world-class and I find it offensive that foreign entities are passing judgment on our fisheries management practices. I view that as an infringement of our sovereignty. Be that as it may, nobody can over-estimate the cravenness of the business community in terms of pandering to public opinion.

In terms of aquaculture, tell me about the Monterey Bay Aquarium standards. That's a new one for me. What's that about?

Mr. Eric Gilbert (Director General, Aquaculture Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): This is a U.S. aquarium and they're pretty well known around the world. One of their main tasks over the last few years was to establish this seafood watch rating. They use a very simple approach: it's red, yellow or green. If you're on the green side, it means, obviously, without any doubt the product you're putting on the market is sustainable. If you're in the red, the advice they provide to the ENGO committee and the consumer as a whole is that you need to avoid those products because they are not fish that are produced in a sustainable manner based on their criteria.

In the middle, there's the yellow one where you can see improvement. It's not a bad choice, but it could be better.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: In terms of net pen aquaculture, Mr. Gilbert, we're fairly confident that the system we have in place in Canada is as good as anywhere in the world. Is that a fair assessment?

Mr. Eric Gilbert: I would totally agree with that, obviously.

I have something to share with you that may be interesting. At the beginning of all this, the Monterey Bay Aquarium qualified fish farming in Canada on both coasts as being in the red category. From their perspective it should be avoided because, according to their evaluation scheme, it is non-sustainable.

Over the last few years, they went into a revision of those criteria, and we, as a department, participated in that. I'm talking here about roughly three years ago. Based on their science and our advice, that process recommended to the head of that organization that fish farming be moved from red to yellow. After being provided with tons of information on how we're managing the sector, they felt that, from a science perspective, it should be deemed as being in the yellow category. Unfortunately, after some internal discussions, this organization decided not to move it from the red to the yellow.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Surprise, surprise.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Sopuck certainly opened a door for me. That's where my concern is.

Mr. Gilbert, you indicated that the information from DFO would indicate that the open-net concept is world-class and that, in fact, they have it in the red category. Is that correct?

Mr. Eric Gilbert: Yes, and you see some kind of a—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Do you see that as a problem? I do not understand all of this perfectly for sure, but if I understand it correctly, DFO feeds information on the stock and management and all the criteria to a body that decides whether a group can do the certification or not. Am I correct?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: There are two different things. In the case of the Monterey Bay Aquarium list—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I mean in general.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: —they're actually coming up with their own list. That's not certified. The certification process is through MSC or in the case of aquaculture.... What's it called?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: It's different. I know.

Mr. Eric Gilbert: We have the best aquaculture practices under the Global Aquaculture Alliance. We have the ASC that is coming, which is issuing from the same body as the MSC. It is the Aquaculture Stewardship Council.

Kevin is right. The Monterey Bay Aquarium is just providing a list that, in terms of comprehensiveness, has nothing to do with the certification process.

• (1605)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It's not certification; it's their list, and in fact

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I'd like to know what it is, then, if it's not certification.

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: It's their judgment on a fishery.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: In fact, with regard to eco-certification, when you feed all this into the governing body that decides who is the god in this and who issues the certification or who does not, my concern is that this would take a lot of power away from the Government of Canada. As far as the products are concerned, it takes the power away, and even the blame away, from the Government of Canada, but they don't care who the government is. Is that a legitimate concern?

I don't say we're going to be able to stop it. I well understand this is well down the road. It's a world concept. To me, it's kind of like growing environmentally proper potatoes without fertilizer and this type of thing. Certain people want this type of product. Is this where we're heading in the fishing industry?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It really is an independent market-based thing.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: It's a serious one.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: All this certifying body can do is decide that something is certified and they'll let you put their label on it—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Absolutely.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: —or it's not certified and they won't let you put their label on it.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: How serious is that label going to be, Mr. Stringer? Where are we going to end up in the world in 10 years' time?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Some countries, and in particular some retailers, have said publicly that they will only stock or sell certified, and in some cases, MSC-certified, fish. Most retailers have said something about going with fish that they have evidence to prove has been sustainably fished or that is certified or MSC certified. That is the case in North America and in northern Europe for the most part. We're starting to see some evidence of it in other countries, but for the most part, those are the areas that have done that.

There are still many fisheries that go to markets in which that's not the case, and there are many fisheries that are still stocked in many stores. It really is a decision of the retailer, and then the MSC certifier, whether to do that.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Yes, but I can see it progressing down the road. You talk about part of the European Community has accepted this. My concern is, when you look at... I think, in all fairness, that the Government of Canada did the best it could, possibly—I hate to say it, but I think perhaps they did—in the seal industry. Is it fair what the European Community did to us in the seal industry? That's a concern that I have.

The problem we have here is that we have a body that's going to decide. You can say whether it's marketing or not, but people are going to decide.... And I know it's government versus.... I know this is not government, but the fact is, when that seal is not on the product because they decide, let's say....

You're well aware of the lobster fishery on the east coast in zone 26. The lobster fishery for about five or six years was very poor. I just wonder what would happen with this group that comes and probably in a bit of a make-work.... I don't want to seem overly critical, and I know we're down this road, but what can we do?

The fact is that somebody comes in here and looks at the lobster fishery in 26. There are five years of terribly low catch, 40 to 60 pounds a day that cannot get certified. Now they're getting 300 and 400 pounds, 500 pounds a day.

That's my concern. Is it a legitimate concern?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It is a challenge, absolutely no question. What's going to be very interesting—and I personally think one of the big challenges for these types of certifications—is fisheries such as lobster. In fisheries such as lobster, it is a unique process that doesn't fit easily into the standard approaches. We don't have a total allowable catch for lobster. It's an effort-based fishery. It's managed in a different way, so the MSC certification process, which is under way right now in lobster in Atlantic Canada writ large, is a learning process for the certifiers to understand that there are surrogates for total allowable catch; it's exploitation rate, catch rate, etc. The department is involved in that education process, as are the fishers.

We actually do believe that in our lobster fishery, as in other fisheries, we have good conservation measures and sustainability measures around the carapace size, around the number of traps, around the female egg quantity, around v-notching, etc. It's our job to make sure that they have an understanding of that.

Is there a challenge there? There is a challenge there.

• (1610)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: The only thing I could say to you in rebuttal is that you also feel that we have a sustainable, well-managed, proper seal fishery, and somebody has decided that we can't sell our products in Europe just because they don't like what we do. Norway is in the same boat—I believe it's Norway—but there are other countries in the world.... Perhaps I'm wrong, but anyhow....

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I just note on that—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Am I down the wrong track?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: No, no, no. The issue is it would be interesting to see if the seal fishery, the seal hunt could be certified. No one has ever tested it.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Well, would it ever be? It would be good for the fishery—

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It has a precautionary approach. It has a total allowable catch. It has all of the things you're supposed to have in a certified fishery.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I think I asked this, but do you see eco-certification taking a lot of the authority away? Even when total allowable catches are decided and this type of thing, it's going to have to fit. I think it could take a lot of discretionary power away from the minister.

How do you see that when you see...? Looking at the lobster fishery in zone 26, just what would happen there when all of a sudden...? Fish swim. I know it's easy to say that, and it's sometimes hard to get people to understand that, but what happened with this fishery.... It's quite lucrative in 26 today. Three years ago it was not. I'm scared of this crew over there—or wherever they are—that are going to come in and say that this is not sustainable.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'd point out that so far, Canada has managed, and our fisheries have managed, to be certified. In every single case we've actually achieved the certification, in 24 cases out of 24 efforts. It's actually being achieved, although not easily for some of the reasons that you've just outlined. It is a challenge. It has changed the game. As you and others have pointed out, this is a new reality we're dealing with, but as long as it lines up with the FAO principles, with the principles that internationally we and others have identified as the sustainability principles that we will live by, we will manage on an ecosystem approach, and a precautionary approach, and will have the appropriate monitoring and fisheries regimes, etc. It's something that we were doing anyway. The challenge is that on a case-by-case basis, it does become a little difficult.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: There were a number of products certified that should not have been certified. How would you comment on that? What happened?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'm not sure which ones you'd be referring to.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Well, neither am I, if you want to know the truth, but it's on the paper that I have. It came from the Library of Parliament.

There were a number of products that were certified that should not have been. Research has shown that some fisheries have received certification that do not deserve the label. Why did they receive it in the first place, and how can this problem be resolved?

I don't know if you know about this, and I don't know which products.

I've talked about eco-certification for quite a while not knowing a whole lot about it, but with great concern because my biggest concern is that it's taking the authority from them and giving it to somebody somewhere else that you can't get at. It's like not having the minister responsible for quotas. I think a minister needs to be responsible. If they do it wrong, pay the price. That's my concern here.

There is no way around it, I guess, because this is the world we're in and everybody else is in it. I think it's a very serious problem. We're going to have a group of people who are going to decide what products we can.... You can put them on the market, but I'd like to know where if you do not have the label on it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: They didn't respond.

The Chair: You've used your time up. Thank you. Perhaps you'll get another chance.

Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thanks very much for being with us once again.

I share some of the same concerns that the last two speakers mentioned. You talked about different countries and different retailers who require this. You also said that it's a voluntary market-driven system.

I'm also confused about this three-point plan. If DFO already does all of this, I fail to see how an outside body can come in and say that

it can't be recognized. I guess that comes back to the point that the other two were making.

My question is, as a consumer, what does eco-certification tell me, or what should it be telling me? It's not telling me anything right now. Is it something that the consumers are really aware of, or is this something that's driven by another body that is collecting the fees? I understand it's fairly expensive to be certified. Could you talk a little bit about what the benefits should be to the consumer and what the cost of it is to the fishers?

• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'll start with the last point and I'll ask others to jump in, in a moment.

Class certification, people will tell you, depends on the fishery. The reality is that it's \$100,000 to \$150,000 for a fishery, on average, to get certified, so it's not inexpensive.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Is it a continuous certification, or is that a—

Mr. Kevin Stringer: That's a good point. It's to get certified the first time. Then it costs to meet some of the conditions. Then the certification lasts only five years and you need to get recertified. It's not another \$100,000, but it's.... It's not an inexpensive process.

In terms of being involved in this since it really started, I would say there was enormous resistance from industry about a decade ago. They said that this is nonsense, that they weren't going to do this, that it's way too expensive, and no one was going to tell them...that sort of thing.

The reality is that when retailers started to say—and it was Walmart, some big U.S. retailers, and Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, and a few others in the U.K., Germany, and France—that by 2013 or whatever the year was they would have only MSC-certified fish or seafood on their shelves, that really changed things.

Why did those retailers make those decisions? They know their consumers. They know their stockholders, etc. That's really what drove this. Then the MSC certification and other certification schemes really took off.

It's to the point now where a lot of fisheries really believe this is the cost of doing business now. It's just part of, as was said by others, the reality here.

I'll tell you candidly that a decade ago when this was getting going, governments were of two minds about whether to get involved in it. Part of it was exactly like the comments that are being made around this table that it's the government's responsibility to say whether it's well-managed, etc. On the other hand, these certification regimes were being established and if we weren't going to be involved in making sure that the record was set the right way, we needed to be involved in some way.

We've always said that it is indeed a market-based decision, based on retailers and then individual fisheries groups saying, "We want to get certified and we will support this in whatever way we can."

I'm sorry; you did have another question that I've lost.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: It was on the benefit to consumers.

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: To complement what Kevin has said, I think there's been an evolution in the story and what we've learned through this trend. Retailers and the food service sector have been supporting the eco-labelling and eco-certification movement mainly because of the pressures that ENGOs have put on them. It's not consumers putting pressure on them; it's the ENGOs putting pressure on them. They've developed these demands over time, and the department has engaged with these retailers here in Canada and abroad, in the U.S. and in Europe, to get a better sense, and to give them the story and explain to them how fisheries are managed.

I've seen an evolution in that to the point where they don't necessarily take for granted some of what they hear, which they did in the first place in the earlier days. The consumers themselves in their own shopping centres or in the restaurants are not the majority asking for the information. In fact, consumers are looking to retailers and to restaurant owners to do the job for them.

When you buy a lamp at a store and there's a little sticker on it, do you read the sticker? The sticker's about the CSA—

• (1620)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Yes, I do.

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: The majority of people don't.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: My husband is a fireman.

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: Good for you, but the majority of people don't read that. They take it for granted that the sticker is there and that the retailer selling the lamp has done his or her job making sure that those rules are met and that they're selling a safe product.

I think the sustainability movement will eventually get there. I think that's why the majority of consumers are not necessarily paying attention to this. The benefits to them are unknown for the most part. Some consumers will know and will identify certain check marks given by the MSC or other organizations, but the majority of consumers will go for price and quality way before they'll ever look at sustainability. I'm saying this not because DFO has done studies on this, but industry has and has given us the results of those studies. They may be able to provide you with that information.

At the end of the day, retailers and food service are getting the pressure from ENGOs. There's a decision to be made by industry on where to sell their products. Some of their buyers are saying, "We won't buy it unless you have this eco-label or this eco-certification." It's up to them to decide that if they want to sell into northern Europe, if they want to sell into some parts of the U.S., they're required to meet their buyers' needs and demands. Some of them require these certifications, and some of them don't. Alternatively, not going through an eco-certification process and selling to different markets is always an option.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Is there standard eco-certification labelling, or are there different systems? Is there a general rating system, such as a sustainable labelling program as opposed to the eco-certification program?

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: Not really. The basis of it all is the FAO responsible fishing code, so the MSC standard, the responsible fisheries standard, many of the standards including those which were referred to earlier. The Monterey Bay Aquarium, the New England Aquarium, all use the FAO code of conduct as the basic set of what

you need in the fisheries or an aquaculture management regime. Those are general rules developed by governments. What these organizations have done is fleshed them out into performance indicators with more specificity to be able to assess whether or not the industry and the fishery are meeting them.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: You said that this eco-certification started in Europe in the forestry industry and then moved into fisheries. Has it developed in other areas as well?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: What examples would we give?

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: In other areas other than forestry and fisheries? In agriculture, yes; in other sources of food products, yes.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Davidson.

Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: I find this very interesting. I have to say that a couple of hearings ago, when my colleague across the way raised concerns about eco-certification and giving up control to foreigners or third parties, I didn't understand where he was going with that and why there was concern. I think that the more I learn the more I disagree that this should be a concern. It's not that.... I mean, DFO is doing the best it can under the circumstances, and the government and so on, but I don't see why it's a problem for industries and/or consumers, whoever drives it. Ultimately, it's consumers, I guess, who want to know certain things about the products they buy or who think they want to know certain things about the products they buy. The standards in effect all come eventually from the principles set by DFO, so I don't quite get that concern.

I thought it was interesting, Mr. Stringer, in response to one of the questions and the comments on what kind of a boat and the MSC and these other eco-certification groups always looking for more.... I think what you said was interesting, that almost always, whenever there is a certification done, there are conditions put on, and those conditions often relate to things that are already on your plate, that are already in your plan, but as a result perhaps of budgetary considerations or whatever, you haven't been able to get to them.

• (1625)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I would say—

Mr. Robert Chisholm: I haven't asked my question—

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'm sorry.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: —but you probably know where it's going.

Does the fact that those conditions and therefore whether or not that certification will be granted to that particular industry...? Is there pressure brought to bear on the government to ensure that the additional work is done to meet that condition?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Sure there is. It's absolutely the case.

I'm going to quickly do a parenthesis: 18 of the 24 certified fisheries are in Atlantic Canada. Absolutely, that is a challenge. The challenge for us is.... What's good about it is that as long as it's all based on the FAO guidelines, which we helped develop and we absolutely believe in, and our sustainable fisheries framework, it's generally going to go in the right direction. That has generally been the case with most conditions.

The challenge is that we sit together every year and say what are our five priority fisheries in terms of establishing a bycatch policy application, but that doesn't happen to be the fishery that went into certification. Even though that is the priority fishery for various reasons, we sometimes have to move our priorities. That's where I would say the challenge is in terms of.... It's not throwing us way off our game, but it does actually take us in directions that might not be the priorities given the resources we have.

That said, there are not many things that you would look at.... There are a couple of cases where we would say, "I don't think they got this right." That's in very, very few cases, and we've had discussions with the certifiers on that. For the most part, you look at it and you say yes, that would be a good thing to have. It's a question of how and when, etc.

Ms. Nadia Bouffard: I could add a personal experience involved in some of the assessments with the department. I think that in the earlier days we were scrambling, but today, with greater awareness, both in the industry and in the department—

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Bouffard. I have to interrupt here.

The bells are ringing. As per the Standing Orders, we have to recess, but actually, this committee will adjourn at this time.

Thank you.

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