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Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

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• (1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC)): I call this meeting to order and thank our guests for joining us today. We have by video conference Mr. LeBlanc from the New Brunswick Wildlife Federation, and here in person we have Mr. Cusson from the Atlantic Salmon Federation.

As you're well aware, we're studying recreational fishing in Canada. We generally allow about 10 minutes for opening comments and remarks from our guests, and then we proceed into questions and answers. I'd ask that you try to keep your answers fairly concise, as members are limited by certain time constraints. In order to get as many questions as possible in, I'd ask you to please respect that.

Having said all that, I'm not sure who wants to go first, Mr. Cusson or Mr. LeBlanc? I don't think any particular order is needed.

Mr. LeBlanc, if you want to go first with your remarks, we'll later proceed with Mr. Cusson. The floor is yours any time you are ready.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc (President, New Brunswick Wildlife Federation): Thank you, Mr. Weston.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

New Brunswick is fortunate to be geographically situated along the Atlantic Ocean. This offers a multitude of fishing opportunities throughout the year, be it smelt fishing under the ice, followed by the black salmon fishing and angling, and then the return of our sea-running brook trout. As you see, as the seasons move forward, so do the opportunities and different species.

We now have access to striped bass fishing followed by the return of the king of the rivers, our wild Atlantic salmon, which we hope come in big numbers. In the summertime, you can find many New Brunswickers jigging for mackerel or cod off our shores. Inland, we're blessed with many species. We have 22 species of fish, and the New Brunswick Wildlife Federation has a master angler program whereby we monitor angling throughout the province. Anglers are asked to send pictures of released fish, so we try to get the weights and lengths of different species that we have under this program, those being eel, Atlantic salmon, land-locked salmon, brook trout, catfish, and many others.

All of these fishing opportunities are steeped in tradition, and they all have a very important economic value to our province—that is, people are building cottages along waterways and building camps and buying boating equipment, as well as fishing and angling equipment. The Atlantic Salmon Federation had Gardner Pinfold

come up with a report in 2010 that showed that the Atlantic salmon alone was worth \$255 million and provided 3,800 full-time equivalent jobs in eastern Canada. That was in 2010. That's just one species for which we were able to get the exact figures, and if you would combine all the other species we have in our province, you could see how important financially these fish are.

The biggest threat to recreational fishing in my mind would be the environment. We have climate change that we have no control of—well, that's disputable. Whether or not we have control of it, we should try to do better as humans. If we are having an impact on climate change, we should be having better practices. Also, we need to protect our rivers. We also need to manage our forestry practices better and to look at other ways of siltation. We have to be very aware of the way we do things around our river systems.

The problem in New Brunswick is that we have invasive species. People are moving fish. It's not a new thing coming in. People have been moving fish, and a lot of the species we have today in our province, such as small-mouth bass, have been introduced. They are moving in waters where historically they have not been, so people are moving fish. In that respect we have our Miramichi Lake, which has small-mouth bass that could be very detrimental to our Atlantic salmon that come to this Miramichi Lake area to spawn. Invasive species are a big problem.

Right now we have a decline in our Atlantic salmon populations. All I'd like to say is that we're doing the best we can. I want to thank Minister Shea for her recent actions of putting a board of very qualified people to look at the situation with the Atlantic salmon stocks and to come up with some immediate action. This year in New Brunswick the Atlantic salmon will all be released and there will be no retention of Atlantic salmon. I know a lot of members of my group harvest. We have a traditional harvesting and our families enjoy this wild fish, but everybody has to contribute. The numbers are low, so we have to contribute in helping the stocks to rise. For that I thank the minister for her insight.

That's about all. I'm very happy to be invited here today to talk about this topic; it's important to our province. I hope that in your deliberation you may find some ways to help.

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

Mr. Cusson, the floor is yours now, sir.

Mr. Charles Cusson (Quebec Program Director, Atlantic Salmon Federation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll endeavour to get through all this in the allotted time.

I'm the program director for Quebec of the Atlantic Salmon Federation. We've submitted a brief to you that I understand has been translated.

On behalf of the ASF, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the committee for the opportunity to present some facts and recommendations with respect to the importance of the wild Atlantic salmon sports fishery in eastern Canada.

The subjects I will speak on this morning will be in regard to who we are as an organization, the value of wild Atlantic salmon, the state of our wild populations, issues related to the management of the resource, research on high marine mortality, and the Greenland and Saint-Pierre et Miquelon fisheries.

ASF was founded in 1948 in Montreal. We carry out research, advocacy, public awareness—

•(1115)

The Chair: Mr. Cusson, I'm sorry to interrupt you for a moment.

Mr. Cleary.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): I understand that Mr. Cusson's presentation is not in both languages. I'm sorry to hear that, but I understand that there is an English version. Can we get a copy of at least the English version?

The Chair: It would take unanimous consent. Are you seeking unanimous consent?

Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: There's no consent.

Thank you, Mr. Cleary.

Mr. Cusson, please proceed.

Mr. Charles Cusson: Thank you.

We carry out research, advocacy, public awareness, and community outreach to confront the threats throughout the salmon's life cycle. We have seven regional councils and 125 affiliated organizations throughout its range in North America.

Our research department has five full-time biologists on staff. We are internationally recognized for our research capabilities, have published many peer-reviewed scientific articles, and are invited to participate in scientific exchanges locally, nationally, and internationally.

Our main research programs are based on the marine survival of wild Atlantic salmon and interactions between Atlantic salmon and escapees from aquaculture stations. We conduct also research on the feasibility of freshwater, land-based, closed containment aquaculture in cooperation with The Conservation Fund's Freshwater Institute in

West Virginia, and we also promote the benefits of live-release angling in all the Atlantic salmon regions of Canada.

In regard to the value of the wild Atlantic salmon, as Mr. LeBlanc stated a few minutes ago, in 2010 we contracted Gardner Pinfold to conduct a socio-economic study on the value of Atlantic salmon. Given the fact that from 1985 to 2009 DFO's budget decreased 75% relative to inflation, the actual amounts fell from \$24 million to \$12 million. On the other hand, the Pinfold study indicated that NGOs such as ours and others spent \$15 million, plus another \$12 million in kind, for salmon conservation activities in 2010.

The study also calculated the value of the recreational fishery itself at \$115 million, which as Mr. LeBlanc also indicated earlier creates quite a few jobs in regions that depend on sustainable economic development.

The study entailed sampling of 1,324 anglers and 995 non-users of the resource in Atlantic Canada and Quebec. There was support for investment in the range of \$4.50 to \$12.50 per tax-paying household from 80% of the non-users. These are people who don't even fish. The support was conditional, though, on demonstrating progress in restoration and was based on economic, intrinsic, and ecological values.

The \$12 million budget for DFO is far below the annual value of \$105 million perceived by the Canadian public. When salmon populations are restored, the value of wild Atlantic salmon could very well surpass the 2010 value.

In regard to the state of our populations right now, we recently received the 2014 ICES report, which confirmed what we already knew about how terrible the runs were last year. The total estimate for two-sea-winter spawners in North America for 2014 decreased 13% from 2013 and did not meet the total two-sea-winter minimum conservation limits for North America. North American returns were near record lows for Quebec, the regions of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Scotia-Fundy, and the U.S.A. In fact, only 30% of the 60 assessed rivers—that's 18 rivers out of 60—met their minimum conservation limits last year.

To put this into perspective, a minimum conservation limit is a threshold gauged after harvests by anglers and first nations have taken place and below which biologists warn that salmon should not fall. In order to achieve a sustainable salmon run, the number of spawning salmon must consistently stay above the minimum conservation limits. The Miramichi, for example, which has historically produced 20% of North American Atlantic salmon, last year only reached 69% of its minimum spawning requirements on the southwest and only 21% on the northwest.

At the very least, there should be no harvest of salmon from populations that are not surpassing their minimum conservation limits.

In regard to issues related to the management of the resource, Canada monitors fewer than 10% of its Atlantic salmon rivers, a level that is insufficient to make effective management decisions.

● (1120)

Allocations to all fisheries must be based on the health of individual salmon populations and their ability to sustain an individual river's salmon run in perpetuity. Progress has been made in reducing the number of retention licences in the recreational fishery, but DFO and Quebec still issue retention licences to angle salmon populations not meeting minimum conservation limits.

An issue related to management is the reporting. The overall harvest in Canada last year was 105 tonnes, made up of 51 tonnes from the recreational fishery, 53 tonnes from the aboriginal fishery, and 1.6 tonnes of the bycatch from the Labrador resident trout fishery. The harvest was reduced compared to 2013, when it was 135 tonnes.

The Listuguj Salmon Summit in 2014, which I attended, provided material that indicated that the harvest in the Atlantic salmon fisheries on the Restigouche has been underestimated. It provided recommendations for improvements in reporting harvest that included the need for mandatory reporting and survey returns and a system that links reporting with licence purchase.

A recommendation we put forward recently would be to improve reporting of catches in aboriginal and angler harvests by disallowing the reissuing of tags or licences to individuals who failed to report their harvests from the previous year. This is something that is being tried to be implemented for the Greenland fishery, which I'll touch on in a second.

Enforcement is another important issue in regard to management. Our unreported catch in 2013 was 24 tonnes, which is most likely underestimated. Our recommendation is that there be an increase in surveillance, protection, and enforcement to control illegal harvest of salmon in rivers, estuaries, and along our coasts.

The wild Atlantic salmon conservation policy, which became a policy of the government in 2009, is a blueprint for the conservation of Atlantic salmon. The only problem is that it's never been funded, so consequently it cannot be put into effect.

We are recommending that an independent review of progress in achieving the goals of the Canadian wild Atlantic salmon conservation policy be developed, that an action plan identify the priorities for implementation, that timelines be carried out, and that it be funded.

In regard to research, in the marine environment, based on the ICES advice to NASCO, the continued low abundance of salmon stock across North America—despite significant fisheries reduction and generally sustained smolt production from the limited number of monitored rivers—strengthens the conclusions that factors acting on survival in the first and second years at sea are constricting the abundance of Atlantic salmon.

We therefore recommend there be an increase in resources, staff, and funding for research on low marine survival rates of Atlantic salmon to provide a more meaningful contribution by Canada to ICES, to NASCO's Salmon Research Board, and to other marine

mortality research programs that are going on, such as ASF's tracking program.

Lastly, in regard to Greenland and St-Pierre and Miquelon, the Greenland government has become very aggressive in its harvesting of salmon, especially since 2012 when it instituted a fishery. From 2002 to 2011, the harvest at Greenland stayed below 20 tonnes, which was for personal consumption. That changed in 2012 when the Greenland government announced that it was fed up with watching NASCO parties, such as Canada, carry out a huge retention fishery.

In recent years the Greenland fishery harvests have been consistently made up of 80% to 95% of North American salmon, most of them obviously Canadian. The total reported salmon harvest at Greenland rose to 34 tonnes in 2012, to 47 tonnes in 2013, and to 58 tonnes in 2014, along with an estimated unreported catch of 10 tonnes. A NASCO monitoring and control group working with Greenland ascertained the unreported catch is likely very underestimated.

The commercial fishery is conducted by about 320 professional fishermen who apply for a free licence each year, which permits them to fish with 70-metre gill nets, 20 at a time. In 2013 only 66 out of the 320 reported their catches.

● (1125)

Our recommendations are that we strengthen Canadian influence and diplomacy to reduce and control the harvest of Canadian salmon in Greenland; to improve management of Canadian salmon fisheries to show leadership to Greenland; to work aggressively with Greenland both bilaterally and through NASCO; to limit the Greenland fishery to no more than 20 tonnes for personnel consumption; and to work aggressively, both bilaterally and through NASCO, toward effective monitoring and control of Greenland's salmon fisheries.

Finally, with the question of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, this fishery harvests mixed stocks of salmon primarily of Canadian origin. The harvest in this fishery reached 5.3 tonnes in 2013, the largest since reporting began in 1970. It consisted of 588 large salmon and 1,764 grilse. The preliminary genetic research shows that 37% of these fish originated from the Gaspé region of Quebec; 34% from Newfoundland; 22% from the Maritimes, including the Miramichi; and 7% from the Quebec upper north shore. France, with respect to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, has consistently refused to join NASCO. France's membership in NASCO would allow a more robust discussion and planning to control this fishery. On that, we recommend that we work aggressively bilaterally with France to join NASCO as a party with respect to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, and/or control this fishery through agreements between Canada and France directly.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cusson.

We'll go into questions at this point.

We'll start with Mr. Cleary.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

My riding is St. John's South—Mount Pearl in Newfoundland and Labrador. I've seen a lot of changes in the salmon fishery, both the recreational fishery and the commercial fishery, in my 25 years as a journalist and as a member of Parliament. Back in 1991 when they introduced a moratorium on commercial fishing of Atlantic salmon, we thought that would be the start of a return of the salmon stock. That did not happen. The most recent news in Newfoundland and Labrador is a story, just this week, about a catch-and-release policy being implemented for Newfoundland and Labrador rivers similar to what's going on in places like New Brunswick, which is unheard of in Newfoundland and Labrador. We've never had that before. We understand, as you just outlined, that the salmon are not coming back from the sea. I'm sure as you just outlined there's an impact on the fishing in the Saint-Pierre corridor off southern Newfoundland. There's an impact, as you outlined, with 58 tonnes being caught in Greenland plus probably another 10 tonnes poached. Then on top of that you have the Greenland and the aboriginal harvest as well.

We are federal members of Parliament, Mr. Cusson, as you know. One of my big concerns here is whether or not...and you outlined a number of concerns from a federal perspective in terms of Canadian rivers not being monitored. Fewer than 10% of rivers are being monitored. DFO's budget has been cut in half, I thought you said. You also mentioned that we need more enforcement. You talked about an independent review or an action plan funded.

My specific question has to do with the role of the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans in doing all it can do to ensure that our Atlantic salmon stocks are where they should be. Can you elaborate on that? I know that a few years ago there was the Cohen Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River. We've had a disappearance of Atlantic salmon in east coast rivers for decades. Some problems are known, as you've outlined, but nothing's being done to address them. My specific question has to do with the federal government and what it can be doing more of to make sure our Atlantic salmon stocks are where they need to be.

• (1130)

Mr. Charles Cusson: DFO could become the partner in research that it once was, I'd say, dating back to the 1980s, when the funding levels were a lot higher. We, as an NGO, have been doing a lot of research on the marine environment to try to find out where the "murder site"—a term we commonly use—is in the ocean. We've done a lot of work in the rivers. Our affiliates in all the provinces and our councils have been supporting work in rivers. We seem to have a pretty good handle on what's going on in the rivers. There are still a lot of issues to be addressed. Sometimes logging activities are not done the way they are supposed to be and they obviously affect the salmon's freshwater environment. But we know that the vast majority of the mortalities is happening in the estuaries and in the salt water. To be able to find that murder site we've been tracking

juveniles and also adult salmon for a number of years. We are starting to get a better picture due to—

Mr. Ryan Cleary: I'm going to stop you, Mr. Cusson.

Again, just to reiterate the point that the chair made. I've only got a few minutes so I need you to cut to the chase.

What more can the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans do to ensure that our Atlantic salmon stocks are where they should be?

Mr. Charles Cusson: Get involved again in research in the marine environment.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Now, can you elaborate on that?

Mr. Charles Cusson: They could be supporting our research activities in the marine environment, tracking juveniles, and tracking adult fish.

We have a very good idea of what route the juvenile fish take to make it back to Greenland. We're starting to have a much better idea of what route the adult fish take when they leave the rivers and this is based on the technological advances that we've been able to use. But it's an expensive proposition.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Can you put a dollar value on it, sir?

Mr. Charles Cusson: To give you an idea, the satellite tags that we use to track the adult fish cost \$2,500 each, but the payoff is that we know exactly where they go.

We know how long they stay along Anticosti Island, how long it takes them to go from there through the strait of Belle Isle, and where they end up west of Greenland.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: When you talk about an independent review or an action plan, are you talking about an independent review of the role the DFO plays with regard to Atlantic salmon?

Mr. Charles Cusson: First of all, I think what needs to be done is to put the financing in place so that it can be applied. A review was scheduled for 2014, which would have marked five years, but the policy has never been implemented.

The money has to be put into getting the policy implemented and putting into practice what we find within the policy, which will have a beneficial effect on the salmon.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: You mentioned the cost of putting a tag on one salmon as \$2,500, but in terms of a more global figure for the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, what kind of figure would it take for DFO to do what it should to conserve salmon stocks?

Mr. Charles Cusson: Bring back funding levels from the 1980s.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: How much were they compared to now?

Mr. Charles Cusson: Compared to now, the latest figure I have for Atlantic salmon is about \$12 million, and that's down. If I can find my figure again...you mentioned \$24 million.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: So doubling DFO's budget of \$12 million to \$24 million.

Mr. Charles Cusson: There are things that the DFO did in the past that were complementary to the work we were doing.

In the initial days of our small tracking program, they provided transportation on some of their boats for us to be able to perform our research. Those boats were going out there anyway, so that was an in-kind contribution that is relatively easy to do.

Starting up that type of activity plus some real dollars to become a true partner in salmon conservation and research will help us find out exactly what's going on.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Conservation is obviously critical in Newfoundland and Labrador, in the Maritimes, and in Quebec in terms of Atlantic salmon. I feel that we're doing our part in terms of retention, in terms of the tagging system and the whole nine yards. But that's hard to swallow when you have a Saint Pierre corridor where Atlantic salmon is being harvested, and Greenland, for example, where probably around 70 tonnes is being taken.

I know that you outlined what Canada should do in terms of coming down on Greenland and asking France to become a member of NASCO, but how much harder of a stance should the DFO and the Government of Canada take on this? It seems like we're at a critical point.

• (1135)

Mr. Charles Cusson: We are indeed.

If we are going to try to ask other people to do what we're telling them to do, we not only have to talk the talk, we have to walk the walk.

What I mean by that is that we have to reduce our harvest of the fish at all levels until we have a better handle on exactly what is going on. We believe quite strongly in managing rivers on an individual basis, but to be able to manage them that way, you need data on those individual rivers to take proper management decisions.

Earlier, I stated that only 10% of our rivers are being monitored and/or assessed, and so we can't do a proper job to ascertain what the situation is. Until we show concrete results in the reduction of our harvest, it will be difficult to sit down with the people on the other side of the Atlantic and ask them to do the same thing.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: You have a minute left. One minute.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Cusson, what you said about Saint-Pierre and Miquelon was interesting.

As you see it, how does the fact that France is not a member of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization prevent us from working with that country? Is Canadian diplomacy doing as much as it should to bring France into NASCO?

Mr. Charles Cusson: As I see it, up to now, Canada's diplomatic pressure on France to become a member of the NASCO has not been as strong as the pressure brought to bear by the people within NASCO. If France were part of NASCO, it would be governed by the same rules as the other countries that have signed the agreement.

Mr. François Lapointe: If I understand the reasoning correctly, we must do better in being able to say to our partners: here is what we are doing and please do as well as we are. Setting aside what we are doing, a stronger diplomatic effort to bring Saint-Pierre and Miquelon into NASCO would still be an improvement. But you are saying that the diplomatic effort is not sufficient to attain that objective.

Mr. Charles Cusson: That is correct.

Mr. François Lapointe: That is quite serious, I must say.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Lapointe.

Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, gentlemen, for your presentations this morning. They've been very interesting.

I think a couple of months ago this committee determined that we would undertake the study on recreational fishing in Canada, something that hadn't been studied at this committee before, I don't believe. There were a lot of questions the committee had, and we felt they needed to be answered.

We've been hearing from witnesses right across the country and different things from different areas of the country. But what we're really want to know is the cultural and economic impact of recreational fishing is in different parts of the country, who participates in it, whether those numbers are rising, decreasing, or staying the same, how the fishing stocks are being managed, and whether they can be managed better to improve the recreational fishery.

So, I'm going to ask Mr. LeBlanc a question, please. You talked quite a bit about your organization, the New Brunswick Wildlife Federation, and you mentioned many species of fish that are caught recreationally. You talked about 22 species alone, I believe, inland, and you also talked about a master angler program. I'm wondering if you can explain that, enhance that statement, and tell us what that's all about and how your organization is involved, if you implemented it, if it's based on a model from somewhere else, if it's something innovative that you have put in place, and how it relates to and enhances recreational fishing.

•(1140)

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: It was not invented by us at New Brunswick Wildlife but an initiative started by the Department of Natural Resources in our province in the 1990s, I believe. It was a promotional tool. The province wanted to encourage people to fish for trout or other species. The main target in our province is speckled trout, and we wanted to take some pressure off that. There were other people fishing other species. The province was trying to get people out fishing for different species of fish. This was a mechanism where we would give an award, a hat or a pin, or some kind of recognition that you were out angling: you captured a fish, you have a picture of it, and you gave us some data on that fish. It was the science part—the length, the girth, the weight—that the program was initially about.

That has evolved into saying that we shouldn't be harvesting all fish now, so let's release them. Now the component is that we'll give you a little better prize if you release a fish alive, but let's get the data we need, the biological data, and let's release the fish for it to live and to be hooked and released again. That's how this program goes about it.

You asked if fishing is on the increase. Yes, people are trying to get to the outdoors. Every group that I know of is trying to get kids off computers and outdoors. Fishing is a family activity. Ladies are now participating. We have companies in Moncton investing in this today. Tomorrow we have a big retail store opening up in our area geared to families and to fishing equipment and hunting equipment.

Fishing is not a dinosaur. It's not decreasing. It is a wonderful activity that we cherish here in New Brunswick. In my group it's more salmon fishing and trout, but on the marine side we have all kinds of other fishing that families do.

So yes, I believe it is on the rise. We have this little program trying to encourage people to participate some more.

That's all I can give on that aspect.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you very much for that answer. I'm glad to hear that recreational fishing is on the rise and that families are involved. I think it's a great family activity, and one that my family has been involved in for many years.

We certainly are wanting to promote it for younger children as well. Does your organization do anything in particular for young folk to get them interested? For example, this weekend I'm taking my grandson to our local hatchery where they have a fish pond that is stocked. The kids learn how to cast. They are able to catch a fish, and do catch and release. They promote events like this a couple of times a year.

Do you do anything like that?

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: We have a program within our organization that's called Becoming an Outdoors Woman. On June 15 they'll have 70 women participating in a weekend of different aspects of the outdoors. Fishing is a component of it. Be it fly-fishing or fishing with bait, they will do both. They talk about that, and it's specifically geared to women.

We have 24 clubs in our association across the province. A lot of them have kids camps. They will take kids in camps and introduce

them to angling specific to the region in the province that they belong to; in the northern part it could be a lake or a small brook. They try to bring in children who might not have an opportunity, who because of economic or whatever else circumstances would not be exposed to that. There are mechanisms within our individual groups that do this kind of activity.

They actually do have some programs that are geared to families. If families are already doing it, you don't have to motivate them. We can't help what's already being well done by a family member. We encourage adults to take the children out. When we see mom and dad and the kids, it doesn't get any better than that.

•(1145)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: That's good.

You also talked about some of the threats in your area in particular. You talked about the environment and about invasive species. I would like you to elaborate a bit on both of those areas, if you could. I think an invasive species you particularly mentioned was the smallmouth bass.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: It's unfortunate. Smallmouth bass is a great sport fish that we have in the St. John area or the southeast of the province. It's been there for a hundred years. It's not native to our province, but people have been moving it within the province into lakes or areas they shouldn't be, because these fish will threaten native species of salmon. We don't know the effect. We don't know how long. We just know that the salmon aren't bred, or they don't have the genetics, to defend themselves against a new predator. This is a concern of ours. The Fisheries Act has changed and we don't have the regulatory means to fix a problem. We have a threat to our Atlantic salmon in one particular lake and we do not have the regulatory means to eradicate that fish.

DFO and the Department of Natural Resources have been containing these fish for five years now, and what we find is that there are more young every year than we started with. We have fewer fish in the lake, but we have more smaller fish, which means they're still breeding. The eradication plan of electrofishing and gill netting is not working. We need to eradicate them chemically. We need to get rid of that threat in the Miramichi area. It's difficult for me to say on the one hand that it's good to have smallmouth bass in one area because it's a great fishery—a world-class one, I would say. I'm not part of that, but I know individuals who participate in that sport. I'm not one of them, but I know it exists. I don't want to say it's not wonderful, but to move it to another area could be detrimental to our Atlantic salmon, which already has a lot going against it now at sea. At sea we have a problem, and here we find in the pristine area that the rivers are healthy except that we might not be able to fix the threat if we don't get onto it soon.

So that's this....

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Okay.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: I'm sorry.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I was just going to ask you another question. You explained that your master angler program was started initially by a provincial ministry, by the MNR.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: That's correct.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: We know that the management of recreational fisheries in Canada is a shared responsibility between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. How would you assess the coordination of the federal and provincial strategies?

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: I think New Brunswick is doing well. We're managing, except as Monsieur Cusson says, DFO has maybe not been as active or doesn't have the resources to play a larger part. They've been reluctant in response to our request to act more, or to put.... They don't have the resources. It's not the people; it's the funding. The federal government needs to put more into managing salmon specifically. Inland it's a little easier. We're doing it. We have the release. We have limits and it seems to work. We are maintaining good healthy populations of trout.

Inland fisheries are different and it seems to be provincial. We have laws that are doing a service to the fish. The fish are still there. We do not enhance. We have a stocking program. We stock lakes that don't have.... We're helping out in landlocked lakes. We put fish into them that people can fish. You have more fishing opportunities, but our wild brooks are not being stocked. They are not being helped. They're sustaining their populations. The salmon is the only one we have a problem with, and DFO needs to get more involved in what they used to do. We don't see trucks parked for electrofishing. The cutbacks have been hard on research in New Brunswick.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Davidson.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to welcome the witnesses and thank them very much for their information. I also think it's a very important study.

Mr. LeBlanc, if I understood you correctly, you said that basic invasive species became a commercial fishery or sport fishery in one area and then is an invasive species in another area. That's quite a problem, of course. I'd like you to expand a bit on what more we need to do on invasive species and on the climate change issue in general. You had mentioned both of these areas. I'd like you to expand on it.

Also, how do you feel about the catch and release? Do you feel that the catch and release program will diminish the number of people involved in the fishery? I want your opinion on that.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: This is not my opinion. Well, it is my opinion. The environmental part is my opinion.

I guess the environmental part is whether or not we believe there's global warming. I don't know that we can change the big picture. Can we do something about global warming? Our climate is changing. It seems to be changing. Can we do it? I personally think we could do better in terms of our emissions. We should try to do something, if we can do something. Climate is a very difficult thing. Can we do something? I'm not sure.

You made a very good point about the hook and release. My group is opposed to the hook and release. You can ask for a barbless hook. It has no bearing on the fish. It doesn't kill fish, barb or no barb.

Will hook and release save the fishery? I don't think it was hurting it. Under regulations, I could release a fish whether I had a barb or not.

We are opposed to it because we are losing people to the rivers. I know, as a fact, that we had a large decrease in applicants to the crown reserve systems. People say, "Well, if I can't retain them, I'm not going to buy a licence." I am sure that the sales of our salmon licences will go down this year. It doesn't mean there's not going to be angling for salmon. It means people can't see the value in paying for a licence when they're going to release all fish.

We're still in the process of selling licences, so I can't give you a hard number. The numbers will come out only next year. But I will stand here and say that you will see an increase in trout licences. In New Brunswick we have two options, because people can fish for trout at a lower cost and they can accidentally hook a salmon and release it. I would assume that's going to happen.

With regard to all of these regulatory changes, though, Monsieur Cusson made the point that we have to walk the walk. I agree with him. We cannot harvest fish and ask other people to stop harvesting when we're harvesting. He is correct there.

I'm in a position where I try to promote fishing, angling. You have to have those people on the river. Those people on the river and those children on the river are your conservationists of the future. If they're not there, they will not care for the river. There is a social aspect to angling. It's getting to own the river and to take it as yours and to defend it at all costs.

By not having people on the river angling and killing fish, are we going to gain more fish? I would think maybe not. If we lose those anglers and if we don't have the kids fishing, that will be a lot worse than anything that global climate change or releasing fish would do.

We need to keep people on the river. That's important. That's what we're trying to say. Release them. They will come back; we can hook them again. True, if we don't have people on the rivers watching, taking ownership, watching for pollution, watching the foresters.... DFO can't do all the enforcement. We need people on the rivers.

You made a very good point, Mr. MacAulay.

• (1155)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cusson, you mentioned that funding for scientific research on salmon was \$24 million in the eighties and now it's down to \$12 million.

Mr. Charles Cusson: That's the overall budget for DFO for Atlantic salmon.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: But I would think that figure does not need to be \$24 million but \$30 million in actual dollars, of course, if you're going to do the research. Now, you can correct me, if you so desire, but I believe that money is worth a lot less today, and that you need more today than you did in the 1980s.

Mr. Charles Cusson: I agree.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: With regard to the minimum conservation limits on rivers, did I hear you correctly that 10% of the rivers are monitored?

Mr. Charles Cusson: Yes.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Is it just because we do not have enough money or we do not have the people in place or what's wrong? This is what causes the decline, I would expect, in the fishery.

Mr. Charles Cusson: That's partly it.

The thing we need to remember is that, just like the Atlantic salmon itself, rivers, freshwater environments, are very dynamic. In some rivers you can actually count the fish by doing snorkel dives, for lack of a better term. Biologists will go to the top of a river, float down, and actually count the fish, because the water is as clear as what's in my glass here. In other rivers where the water is dark, you can't do that.

In some rivers we are lucky enough to have fish passages, fishways. We can count each fish that comes through individually. In other rivers, there is no possibility of counting fish because of their sheer size, so a lot of times, in the past, they were basing some of their decisions on angling success.

But we all know that the number of fish caught is usually a lot less than the number of fish that are actually in the river.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You're absolutely correct.

You mentioned, of course, the problem with Greenland and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. Unfortunately, for governments in this country, fish have not always been the top priority, in my opinion. They're still not, and we need to make them more of a priority. What do governments need to do to convince countries like Greenland...?

I can understand in a way, though. What they're doing is inappropriate, in my opinion.

When we look at the bluefin tuna being netted, it's a migratory source itself—I'm sure you're aware of that. If we conserve, and we fish with rod and reel, and take no more than one-and-a-half per boat, and do everything right, and then they gather up a whole bunch in nets somewhere else, where the stock passes, it eliminates the purpose of what we're doing here. I can see the same thing that Mr. Cleary was speaking to on this issue.

It's desperately unfortunate. It's annoying for the Prince Edward Island tuna fishermen to have to fish fewer tuna. I think it's pretty annoying for people to have to take fewer salmon because countries like Greenland and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon have decided they're going to take basically what they wish. In fact, we're not sure what they take at all. Is it 58 tonnes? Perhaps they're taking 70 tonnes. It likely is, probably.

Mr. Charles Cusson: And likely more.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: And it's probably even more.

What can the government do? This could go for more than this government. What do governments need to do in order to indicate to countries that we're not going to put up with this anymore? There are measures that, if other things take place in the world, could convince governments to come onside. It's just not fair that Greenland can do this.

Mr. Charles Cusson: Well, for starters, the people of Greenland, to my understanding, have a right that's recognized worldwide to fish in their territorial waters. As a basis, we don't have a problem with that, but—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Can I just interrupt, sir? They can fish in their territorial waters, but if it's a migratory source that we're all entitled to—and we have to have agreements, all of us—the world is getting to be a much smaller place and we have to deal with other countries. I'm just wondering what advice you'd have for the committee to convince countries to abide not just by the laws of their own countries—that's no good—but also with the conservation of the stock. I'd like you to answer it in that way.

• (1200)

Mr. Charles Cusson: At the end of the day it will take some political will for people to realize on both sides of the Atlantic that it's a shared resource. There's an ongoing debate on whose fish they are. Are they ours when they're in our rivers, or are they ours when they're fishing off their coast? I think for the future well-being of the species people will have to come together and come to an agreement to save the fish.

One possibility that could help is there are sometimes side deals that can be made on other subjects or other species.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: On everything else they can.

Mr. Charles Cusson: I know that Greenlanders fish for species other than Atlantic salmon. There are most likely some species that are a source of controversy for other countries, including Canada, that maybe could be concluded with a caveat, with something in there to help the salmon, as an example.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. MacAulay. Your time is up.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you.

I think the Atlantic salmon conservation challenge is fiendishly difficult given the life cycle of the species. I would argue very strongly that Canada has more rights to these fish than anybody else. The country that produces the fish has more rights than anybody else.

It's rather like waterfowl. Canada produces most of North America's waterfowl, and most waterfowl conservation activity occurs right in Canada. Again, I would argue very strongly that Greenland has far fewer rights to these fish than Canada does, given that those are basically our fish that they're harvesting.

In terms of the Atlantic salmon stocks in Labrador and northern Quebec, how are they doing? We seem to talk about the Gulf of St. Lawrence all the time, and the Miramichi and so on. How about Labrador and northern Quebec?

Mr. Charles Cusson: The regions further north have a bigger challenge because the access is more difficult. Those northern Quebec rivers have, to my knowledge, no proper assessment being done. In Labrador, the Sand Hill River has a counting fence on it. You'll have to excuse me because my specialty is Quebec, but I am aware of what's going on in the other salmon regions. To my knowledge the only counting fence in Labrador is on the Sand Hill River, and they use the results from that river to extrapolate what's going on in other rivers. There's a lack of information to take proper management decisions.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Sure.

I was very intrigued by your testimony about marine survival. From the research you've done and the research you're aware of, what are the specific factors that contribute to Atlantic salmon mortality in the open ocean?

Mr. Charles Cusson: It starts, as I mentioned, during the first two years of the fish's life cycle when it leaves its native river, when it goes to the salt. Those first two years are where most of the big

challenges are, from predation by cormorants or seals or striped bass in the estuaries to predation by predators that are out in the open ocean that weren't necessarily there 20, 30, or 40 years ago, because of changing climate and that type of thing.

One thing that's certain is that we have started to map the route that the juveniles take from the small tracking that we are doing. In a perfect world, we'd be tracking more smolts from more rivers to get a very detailed picture. But we sincerely believe that by being able to augment the amount of research we're doing in the ocean with all partners involved, we will get to the bottom of it as far as that's concerned. What's happening on the other side of the ocean is a big factor that's challenging the survival of the resource.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Recently the minister struck the task force on Atlantic salmon conservation, and your organization is on it. It came out with some short-term recommendations and I think is still working on some longer term recommendations. Could you discuss the specific work of the task force, and I would assume that ASF supports the work that the task force is doing?

Mr. Charles Cusson: We were happy to see the actions that Minister Shea took and also the way the committee was put together with representatives of all the provinces. It was made up of people who are very credible and knowledgeable, with quite a bit of experience in salmon conservation science. People like Mr. LeBlanc's organization were a part of that also.

There have been some interim measures that have been presented to Minister Shea, which she acted upon. The problem right now with part of that directive is that the Restigouche, Matapédia, and Kedgwick are border rivers with New Brunswick and Quebec. So until further notice, individuals who are standing on the New Brunswick side of the Restigouche River have to release anything they catch and use a single barbless hook. Somebody fishing from the Quebec side can keep a grilse using a single hook that is barbless or barbed, or a barbed double hook. We're hoping that there will be some harmonization in place before next Monday, which is the official start of the season.

Another potential problem with that area is that enforcement and surveillance are lacking. Human nature being what it is, some people are obviously not happy that they have to release everything this year on the New Brunswick side, so there could be some abuse. But without having the proper enforcement or surveillance, it will be very difficult to get a handle on that.

• (1205)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

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

Gentlemen, on behalf of the committee I'd like to thank you both for taking the time today to meet with committee members, to share your views, and to answer committee members' questions. It certainly was appreciated and we certainly want to thank you for taking the time today.

We'll suspend for a few moments while we set up for our next witnesses.

Thank you.

- (1205) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1210)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

I'd like to thank our guests for joining us here today and taking the time out of your busy schedules to meet with the committee. No doubt you're aware that we're studying recreational fisheries in Canada and that we certainly look forward to your comments. I'm assuming that the clerk has advised you that we allow about 10 minutes for presentations, remarks, and comments from an organization and then we move into committee members' questions and answers. On that I'd ask you try to keep your responses as concise as possible as members are constrained by time limits.

On that note, Mr. Hambrook, I believe that you're going to speak first on behalf of the Miramichi Salmon Association, and that you, Mr. LeBlanc, are going to follow Mr. Hambrook on behalf of the Restigouche River Watershed Management Council. Is that correct? Can you hear me all right?

Mr. Brian Moore (Vice-Chairman, Miramichi Salmon Association Inc.): Not exactly.

It's Brian Moore here. I was going to make the introductions, okay?

The Chair: Certainly, go ahead.

Mr. Brian Moore: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and committee members.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to present our remarks. My name is Brian Moore and I'm vice-chair of the Miramichi Salmon Association from Saint John. With me today is Mark Hambrook, president and senior biologist of the MSA. We also have Bud Bird, chairman emeritus of the MSA. Bud served as Minister of Natural Resources for the Province of New Brunswick during his time as an MLA in Fredericton, and he has also served as an MP for Fredericton, and at this time he's the Canadian commissioner to NASCO. He was also a member of your committee at one time.

We also have David LeBlanc, and David is from the Restigouche River Watershed Management Council Inc. I think first we're going to have Bud speak, if that's okay, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: That's fine, but please try to remember that we have some time constraints here as well. Any member there who wants to speak, they're more than free to speak please.

Mr. J.W. Bird (Chairman Emeritus, Miramichi Salmon Association Inc.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I've been asked to make an opening statement on behalf of the Miramichi Salmon Association. With my submission I have

submitted three graphs and a page of statistics, which apparently you do not have yet, but I would refer them to you for future reference.

The first one, graph 1, shows the decline of large sea-winter salmon coming to North America from their feeding grounds around Greenland—these are primarily the large female spawners bearing the eggs of the next generation—from 1970, when there was a population of 900,000 of those fish coming to North America, to today. In recent years the figure has been more or less 100,000, representing a reduction of almost 90%.

The second graph will show you those same populations of both large and small fish in the same period. That population peaked at 1.8 million total fish in 1974, declining to fewer than 600,000 in 2009, a reduction of more than 65% in that period.

With respect to the Miramichi River itself, the small graph 3a will show you those populations, and the statistical sheet 3b will show you the numbers. Those numbers can't be compared with the total North American numbers, because until 1984 there was a large commercial fishery in the maritime provinces. That fishery continued in Newfoundland until 1992. So a direct comparison is not possible, but I would refer you to the river statistics from about 1992, when in the Miramichi the run reduced from a total of almost 190,000 fish in 1992 to 17,744 returning fish in 2014, last year. That is the lowest salmon run to the Miramichi in history.

The Atlantic salmon has long been a cultural, economic, and environmental symbol for Atlantic Canadians and has been throughout history very important to sustaining the lives of our settlers, both as food and in the olden days as a commercial commodity to barter for other essential goods.

During those early times, wooden ships were constructed from pristine forests and sent back to Europe, with the first cargo usually being a load of salted salmon. In subsequent decades, Atlantic salmon stocks have been in serious decline throughout North America and have not recovered to their previous high levels, despite reduced consumption and increased conservation efforts.

The salmon's range has also been reduced. The salmon is now on the endangered species list in the United States, in the Bay of Fundy, and along the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia. Atlantic salmon stocks in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence have also been proposed for the endangered list recently.

Stocks in the Atlantic region are now at record lows, prompting the federal government this year to introduce catch-and-release angling only in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia for the 2015 season.

The Miramichi River has long been the largest producer of Atlantic salmon stocks in North America and one of the best salmon rivers in the world. There are no dams in the watershed, very little agriculture, no operating mines, and no large polluters, so it has had a natural environmental setting to become as good a river as it has become. The watershed is sparsely populated and is mostly forested land, so water quality is good. If salmon cannot survive here on the Miramichi, then there seems little hope for other rivers that have so many additional and adverse environmental impacts. But even here on the Miramichi our climate is changing, and there are fundamental actions that must be taken to sustain and improve the productive spawning process.

We believe the major problems are primarily in the ocean, but meanwhile we need a comprehensive recovery strategy to protect and nurture our in-river populations and ensure that new generations of smolts are consistently going each year to the sea. Until the mystery of salmon mortality in the ocean can be solved, the battles need to be waged on the Miramichi, the Restigouche, and other spawning rivers where the chances for success are at the highest level.

The Miramichi Salmon Association, formed 62 years ago to be a voice for the preservation of the Atlantic salmon, has over time been very effective in raising that voice for conservation, a voice that resulted quite directly in the closure of the commercial fishery in the Maritimes in 1984. As well, the MSA has consistently raised funds to assist DFO in research, participating with universities and other non-profits in similar studies, and in 1997 acquiring from DFO Canada's oldest hatchery, at South Esk. We have assumed responsibility to help sustain stocks of wild salmon in the Miramichi watershed since that time. Today the MSA spends about \$1 million annually on its conservation mission.

• (1215)

However, there is great frustration among conservationists everywhere while salmon stocks continue to decline. With returns in 2014 the lowest in history, the MSA joined forces last fall with the Atlantic Salmon Federation to call on the Government of Canada for an action plan to save the wild Atlantic salmon. Subsequently, in 2015 the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans the Hon. Gail Shea appointed a ministerial advisory committee to deeply examine the status of the wild salmon in eastern Canada and to provide her with advice on actions needed to reverse the downward spiral of salmon abundance that has been experienced over the past 50 years.

While the Atlantic salmon has long been respected for its cultural and environmental values, the threat of its demise also poses very significant economic losses. A report by consultants Gardner Pinfold on the value of recreational fishing for wild Atlantic salmon estimates an employment potential of 3,316 full-time-equivalent jobs annually and more than \$128 million in spending throughout the salmon's range in North America. For the Miramichi River alone, this means 637 full-time-equivalent jobs and spending of more than \$20 million each year. In the hard-pressed current circumstances of rural New Brunswick, this would easily equate to two new manufacturing plants with a capacity to each employ more than 300 people. Imagine what a powerful economic factor that is indeed.

In addition to the recently appointed ministerial advisory committee, which has now finished its hearings and is preparing its recommendations to DFO, a voluntary coalition here in New Brunswick has come together among conservation groups, large industrials, and university scientists to help further identify issues and propose solutions that will complement future government actions.

It is important to note that while the federal government must take the lead to bring recovery of wild Atlantic salmon stocks, you in Parliament are not alone. There are highly motivated partners with the expertise, dedication, and resources to support and join the federal government in such a wild Atlantic salmon recovery plan. We in the Miramichi Salmon Association are strong partners in that coalition and we are willing to work with all concerned to save this precious resource.

Thank you.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bird.

Mr. LeBlanc, are there any further comments from the group?

Mr. David LeBlanc (Executive Director, Restigouche River Watershed Management Council Inc.): Yes, I will speak on behalf of the Restigouche River Watershed Management Council.

First of all, I'd like to present our organization. The Restigouche River Watershed Management Council is an interprovincial committee that has a mission to work with different partners to protect and conserve the Atlantic salmon in the Restigouche watershed, located in Quebec and New Brunswick—50% in each province. This includes five major rivers: the Matapédia River and the Patapédia River in Quebec, the Kedgwick, Little Main Restigouche, and Upsalquitch in New Brunswick.

There is different management concerning the recreational fisheries for Atlantic salmon, mainly privately operated fishing camps with private waters and fishing leases or licences. Also, mainly in Quebec, there are public waters with a lottery system, and also open water with daily access fees.

Concerning the private fishing camps, there are in total 23 fishing camps on these rivers. As an example, a lease paid to the Province of New Brunswick costs approximately \$541,000 every year for a 10-year lease. An abstract of a study on the economic contribution of salmon fishing camps along the Restigouche River in eastern Canada done by the University of New Brunswick and Dr. Van Lantz in 2010 shows that in 2009, camps directly contributed over \$10 million in expenditures, including \$5 million in wages, \$4.1 million on goods and services, and \$1.2 million in property taxes and government licences. This represents 346 part-time-equivalent jobs. Indirect or spinoff contributions amount to an additional \$1.8 million in output and \$1.2 million in wages, representing another 189 jobs. It is largest of any sector in these rural communities. It could also contribute more since most have not been operating at full capacity. Sixty-five per cent of the economic impact is in New Brunswick. In total, it represents \$11.8 million and 535 jobs.

I just want to highlight that these camps are located in rural communities that have a population of approximately 7,800. These jobs are mainly for guides, cooks, managers, housekeepers, and wardens.

Concerning the Quebec public waters, there is a mix of open water with daily access fees, and also a lottery system for prime waters. It is managed by a non-profit organization located in Causapsal in the Matapédia Valley. This organization manages the Matapédia, the Patapédia, and Causapsal rivers. Per year their revenues from access and daily fees are \$1.15 million, which represents 43 seasonal jobs, plus five permanent employees. In addition, 20 self-employed, independent guides have a commercial licence on these waters.

So salmon angling is, for the Restigouche watershed area, a major contributor to the economy for the little villages from the northern New Brunswick Saint-Quentin/Kedgwick area and the Matapédia Valley.

Thank you for giving us the chance to speak on behalf of the Restigouche River Watershed Management Council. I'm open to any questions.

•(1225)

The Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

We'll move to questions from members. We'll start with Monsieur Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe: Good afternoon, gentlemen.

Everyone is concerned to see that the Atlantic salmon really is below the conservation threshold in most of the rivers in eastern Canada. Last March, Mr. LeBlanc made statements in an interview with the newspaper *Acadie Nouvelle*. He talked about conservation levels that are well below what we are hoping for. Losing that resource would have a major economic impact. Just now, Mr. LeBlanc talked about an impact of more than \$20 million for fishing camps alone.

I heard a comment earlier that personally upset me greatly. Charles Cusson said that Canada's wild Atlantic salmon conservation policy has never had appropriate funding and has not been enforced.

Mr. Bird rightly said that he wanted a Canadian action plan to be established. As our chair said, we do not have a lot of time to go over this issue. So I am going to share with you the most significant problems that have consistently been raised in the preceding testimony. I would like to know how you would establish a priority for these difficulties, in order to come up with a Canadian action plan that will perhaps allow us to save the Atlantic salmon.

We are constantly being told that, in order to have the data we need to be able to work on each of the salmon rivers, we must more than double the research efforts of Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

What are your impressions on that?

Then, there is a lack of any real control on invasive species. We know about ballast water in the gulf, but there are also recreational American boats that go through customs without being checked. We have been told a number of times that this can bring in invasive species.

Does that difficulty exist in the east, in New Brunswick?

Today, Mr. Cusson brought up another important point, namely the lack of effort on the part of Canadian diplomacy to make it possible for France, because of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, to become a member of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization.

Those are all major problems. In the Canadian action plan that we say we want, do all those problems have to be solved? Alternatively, which, in your view, should be solved as a priority and using which resources?

Perhaps we could start with Mr. LeBlanc and then move to Mr. Bird.

[*English*]

Mr. David LeBlanc: Thank you for the question. Our recommendation related to the actual situation of the salmon in the Restigouche watershed area.

We have a lot of concerns related to the protection of the salmon and protection by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans officers. As an example, I would say that in all of the approximately 5,000 square kilometres in New Brunswick, there are only two Fisheries and Oceans officers, and they are located outside the area, in Grand Falls in the Saint John Valley, about an hour and a half from our rivers.

With all the cutbacks and closures—an example is the Kedgwick regional Fisheries and Oceans protection office three years ago—there is a lack of protection. So protection is a concern because poaching is still ongoing in our watershed, and it's something that we need to address.

Concerning the—

•(1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. LeBlanc, you are saying that, even before getting to the matter of the lack of research funding, we have to understand that the current level of protection is inadequate. That is what I understand from your comments. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. David LeBlanc: *Exactement.* Yes, exactly. There is a lack of protection from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. David LeBlanc: Concerning predation, there is the increased population of grey seals that we are convinced is having an impact on the fish not coming back to the river. We also see harbour seals now in the Restigouche River. Last year we had a seal as far up as 125 kilometres from the head of tide. Predation by cormorants is also a concern in the Restigouche estuary. So predation is another issue that the salmon have to face for long-term conservation.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Thank you.

Mr. Bird, you mentioned the call for an action plan. What would be the first urgent steps that the federal government should take?

[English]

Mr. J.W. Bird: Well, the action plan that has been generally requested is first to establish limits on the angling harvest. Here in New Brunswick, for example, we are now totally a hook and release fishery. So there is no harvest of wild salmon at all. We hope that other provinces—Newfoundland and Quebec—will take similar action. We have called on the federal government to introduce a predatory control program with respect to striped bass in the Miramichi and grey seals, as my colleague has said, in the Restigouche and the Miramichi. We've called on the federal government to exercise new regulations with respect to gillnetting. Hopefully the day will come when gillnets can be abolished and trap nets can be used so that large fish can be released for spawning even in first nation fishing areas.

I think the main thrust of our recommendations is that the rivers must be protected and the spawning process must be preserved as we continue to work and find solutions to the mystery of mortality of salmon at sea. That requires a major international effort through organizations such as NASCO, of which Canada is a leading member.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Bird, I understand that you use the word “mystery” to describe the problem of the loss of salmon stocks in the ocean. However, to the best of your understanding of the issue and to the best of your knowledge, are any solutions possible? It is not a total mystery, surely?

Mr. Cusson mentioned the problem with Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, which is not governed by the North Atlantic regulations. Do you see any possible priority solutions to solve the mysterious problem of the loss of so many ocean salmon stocks?

[English]

Mr. J.W. Bird: There have been major steps taken. In recent years there was a five-year program called SALSEA, conducted by NASCO organizations, in which Canada was a major player. We have to continue to do that kind of collaborative research, and that's ongoing.

With respect to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, we have to try to get France to engage Saint-Pierre and Miquelon as a member of NASCO. That has not happened yet. Saint-Pierre and Miquelon are really observers at NASCO and so there has been some difficulty in holding them to account for the harvest at Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, and the Canadian delegation to NASCO is continuing to work on that objective.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: I would like to go back to another problem that Mr. Cusson noted, namely the lack of financial support for research. For example, tracking an adult salmon by satellite may cost Atlantic salmon research organizations \$25,000.

It has been calculated that current funding represents only about 60% of what it was 10 or 15 years ago. What are your observations on that? Should a decision to reinvest in research be made as soon as possible? If so, which direction should we take in order to get the best possible results?

•(1235)

[English]

Mr. Mark Hambrook (President, Miramichi Salmon Association Inc.): Certainly the Miramichi Salmon Association has partnered with the Atlantic Salmon Federation on some of this research, tracking salmon out into the ocean with satellite transmitters on them. It's very expensive and we would like to see the federal government participate in this research. So far it has been done entirely by the non-profit sector, and we're able to raise that money.

So we need the federal government to work with us as a partner. We're not asking the government to fund everything, but we need the federal government to be more of a partner with the non-profit sector to achieve the goals that we're all looking for, and that's to find out what's happening to the salmon in the ocean.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur Lapointe.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thanks.

Thank you to our witnesses.

The Miramichi Salmon Association was on the task force that the minister struck recently. Are you supportive of that process? Since you're on the task force, I would assume you would support the recommendations as well. Can you discuss your experiences on the task force?

Mr. J.W. Bird: None of us at this table were on the task force, but we all were involved in one way or another in helping to promote the call for the task force. We think the task force is a very good response towards uncovering the needs and making the strong and right recommendations to the minister. We're waiting with great hope that some of the recommendations will result in early action to address solutions that are required, some of which I described to your colleague in the last few minutes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes. I was very strongly supportive of the recommendation to increase the striped bass take. I think we could have gone further on that one because I agree with the comment made earlier that unnatural “predation” is a big factor in the Atlantic salmon decline.

The Miramichi Salmon Association has conducted a number of projects under our recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program. I've spoken to some of you personally about that. Could you describe some of the projects you've done under the RFCPP? Have they been effective?

Mr. Mark Hambrook: Yes, very much so. This has been a great program for us. I think we've received almost \$150,000 over the last three years, which has generated another \$150,000 in our spending, to accomplish some of the projects. Some of those have focused on habitat issues.

We are going into a period of global warming. We're getting warmer water events. What we're using this money for is to create cold water sanctuaries where salmon can go to survive, during periods of hot water conditions. We're also removing obstructions to spawning.

This has been a very good program. It's not free; it's 50% cost-shared. We have to come up with the other 50%. But it's programs like this that allow work to happen. This is the kind of program we need.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I'm very pleased to hear that. Of course, as you know, in our last budget another \$30 million was added to the RFCPP, making a total of \$55 million for the conservation of habitats that are important to the recreational fishery. I think it's going to end up with roughly 800 projects across the country when all is said and done. It's truly remarkable, and it's a testimony to the conservation ethic of the angling community, which you should all be very proud of.

In terms of freshwater habitats for salmon, what more could we do to enhance, conserve, and protect freshwater Atlantic salmon habitats?

• (1240)

Mr. David LeBlanc: I can speak on behalf of the Restigouche. We have concerns about the peak flows related to forest activities. There are models that exist that we can calculate this. It's called the equivalent cut area calculation, which will demonstrate the percentage impact on the watershed by the forestry...so to relocate the blocks and not to overpass the 50% equivalent cuts in the watershed, because that's what we see in the Restigouche system. Ice runs are earlier in the spring and the bigger ice is doing more damage to the banks. In the summer, it's the opposite; it's really dry, so there is no water. There's a big difference between peak flows and low water periods. That's something that should be looked at, that is, the entire impact of the forestry on the river systems.

Mr. Mark Hambrook: If I could add to that, one of the programs we've identified is to do a thermal image of our whole Miramichi watershed. We could identify all of the cold water inputs and, with the cooperation of the forestry companies, protect those cold water inputs by increasing the buffer zones around them and, in cases where we can do some enhancement work, improve those cold water flows into the river.

The habitat is good and our watersheds are forested land, underdeveloped. I mean, we have good watersheds, except that we can always make small improvements, making better access to spawning grounds through removal of obstructions and protecting the fish while they're there.

Mr. David LeBlanc: Maybe I can add something on the recreational protection program. In the Restigouche we had a project last year that allowed us to reduce the silt load from potato farms in the Saint-Quentin area by 120 tonnes per year with all the work that was done, based on LIDAR technology. This is one of the projects we did last year.

Siltation is still an issue, and that's why we were approved for another project for this year, with a major saw mill in Saint-Quentin, to do some drainage work to reduce the impact of the woodyard on the Five Finger Brook. That's another example of projects that were funded by the DFO program.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's most impressive.

Regarding freshwater habitats for Atlantic salmon, it strikes me that you can work on the problems that exist in fresh water and remediate over time. We actually know what we're doing in the freshwater areas. To me it seems like the problems are largely from the estuary into the open ocean in terms of returning Atlantic salmon.

Is that a fair conclusion for me to draw, based on everything that we seem to have learned, that the estuary and the open ocean are where the problems really lie?

Mr. Mark Hambrook: I think that's been a conclusion of Fisheries and Oceans and most of the non-governmental agencies, that that's where the problem lies. Really, for a river organization such as ours, going out into the Atlantic is a stretch from what our mandate is. Our mandate is our river. We are participating in some of that research because it's so essential that it has to be done to find these answers.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Right. I think the open ocean problems are truly fiendish in their complexity.

In terms of Greenland, we had a discussion earlier, and my strong view is that Canada has more rights to these fish than other countries, given that we produce the fish and own the areas where these fish are born and raised.

Would you share that conclusion?

Mr. J.W. Bird: I think that everybody agrees that the Greenland fishery is an intercepting fishery. All the fish that Greenlanders catch are products of other countries. Yet, it is very difficult to deny them a fishery of some subsistence nature. The key is to try to keep the level of that subsistence fishery at, say, 20 or 30 tonnes, where it has sort of been agreed upon at NAFO, and where it has now bloomed to what we think is 50 or 60 tonnes.

The difficulty in negotiating with Greenland—and it's a diplomatic process, not one that we can pursue in a military or any aggressive way—is that our own consumption of wild Atlantic salmon is significant, such as our Labrador fishery, our Quebec fishery, and our overfishing in the Maritimes in the past. Greenland is very quick to point to Canada and its continuing consumption of wild salmon as a foil in our negotiations to reduce their quotas. It's something that we all have to continue to work at. Maybe some day there will be sanctions involved. Maybe there will be a trade like shrimp for salmon or some more substantive diplomatic process that will bring about answers and solutions.

•(1245)

Mr. David LeBlanc: If I could something concerning this topic, I was in Quebec City two weeks ago attending the advisory committee chaired by Mr. Greg Roach. There I became aware of why Quebec had not reduced its tag allocation on Quebec licences, which is still seven salmon per licence. We were told that it's because of the 1922 agreement with Canada. The Province of Quebec cannot decide by itself to reduce the number of tags. The red tape caused by that agreement postponed the decision to reduce them, even though most of the associations and major federations in Quebec have been supportive of reducing the number of tags, which would have perhaps given Greenlanders or other provinces a better view concerning Quebec fisheries. It was not possible because of that agreement. The recommendation to the advisory committee was to put it on a fast track so Quebec could reduce the number of tags for 2016.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome the witnesses.

I want to particularly welcome—I suppose I could call you the honourable John Bird but nobody would understand who it was. When you come from Atlantic Canada—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: It hasn't changed much up here, just a few different faces really. It's still the same problem.

Bud, I would like you to elaborate a bit. I'm quite interested in what's going on in Greenland. I'm thinking about what goes on in the tuna fishery too. Bluefin tuna are fished in different ways around the world. You know the way we fish them here, rod and reel, and we're quite restricted and all that.

I understand quite well that Greenland has a right, but they're probably taking two or three times what their right is. There is some way, and I know you touched a bit on other methods for governments to take, but quite often—I want to be careful what I say to you—governments, all governments, do not put enough emphasis on how important it is to deal with these issues. It's not fair at all; Greenland takes probably up to 70 tonnes when they should be taking about 20 tonnes.

I would like you to elaborate on that.

Mr. J.W. Bird: First of all, hello, Lawrence. I remember you well from my days in Ottawa. It's nice to see you again.

I'm going to be very careful as well, because as a member of the national delegation I'm really only an advisor to the head of our delegation, who frequently doesn't take much advice from me. It's just a very frustrating problem to get Greenland, first of all, to admit to the fact that controls are necessary. Also, it's a little easy to understand, given their complex geography, the difficulty they have in exercising control, because they're dealing with hundreds of miles of shoreline and very small fishing villages and so on, where it's almost impossible for the government to exercise any real control—any real count, let alone control. But I think we're making progress. I think there is a consensus developing that Greenland has to reduce and control its count, so that the figure is in the area of 25 or so tonnes. But so long as they can point at Canada and say we're taking five times that many in Labrador, let's say, or the combination of Labrador and Quebec and elsewhere, we have a pretty tough argument to make. It's just a great frustration to all concerned.

•(1250)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much, Bud.

Does anybody else have a comment?

Mr. Hambrook, the government now spends about \$12 million on salmon activities in the maritime region. It was \$24 million back in the early eighties, so that figure would have to be close to \$30 million today. I expect you would feel that it's pretty important for the government to step up more with programs and partnerships and whatever needs to take place in order to make sure that we save this Atlantic salmon.

Just looking at the minimum conservation limits and all the stuff that's going on that's really causing a decline in the salmon stocks, something has to be done or we'll not have a salmon fishery at all. Would you agree?

Mr. Mark Hambrook: I would agree.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Also, Mr. LeBlanc, you were referring to something about tags in Quebec and what they can or cannot do. I'm not sure the committee fully understood, but somebody has to be able to sit down some way. As Mr. Bird and other people have said, we need to be able to indicate to Greenland that we're doing something different on an international scale to make sure that we're able to reduce the take in Greenland. There must be some way, if everybody wants to reduce the number of tags, that we can reduce the number of tags.

Thank you.

Mr. David LeBlanc: Concerning what I was saying about Quebec and the number of tags, I was kind of caught in the middle in representing an interprovincial watershed. We received an announcement from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for the New Brunswick side of the watershed to implement a full live release of all fish and using a single barbless hook, whereas just after that Quebec announced they would maintain the status quo of seven tags per licence, which can be placed on large salmon or grilse. There's a big difference on the two sides of the river. There is not yet harmonization on the boundary waters, but still this year the New Brunswick river anglers will be asked to put all fish back into the water, while in Quebec they will be allowed to keep seven large salmon. It's a big difference.

As I said, Quebec was probably willing to reduce the number of tags per licence, but because of that 1922 agreement with Canada, they were not able to work solely on this reduction. That's why the Province of Quebec was not able to reduce the number of tags. There needs to be a priority discussion between the federal government and the Province of Quebec to discuss how tag reduction could be implemented for Quebec licence-holders for 2016.

Mr. J.W. Bird: If may add to that, Mr. Chairman, many people do not understand that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans exercises authority for the Fisheries Act in all provinces except Quebec. I think it's under this 1922 agreement that Quebec has the authority, which is ordinarily held by DFO. For the first time this morning I understand from Mr. LeBlanc that there may be a hitch in that 1922 agreement that requires both governments to agree in making any change to that. As a result, in order to reduce the licence quotas in Quebec, there needs to be federal intervention or participation or collaboration. That's news to me, and surely that is something that can executed.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Well I certainly hope so.

Bud, you mentioned the damage that the gill nets do to the salmon. Do you have something to add to that? Do you hope for the elimination of the gill net?

• (1255)

Mr. J.W. Bird: Well, yes. There are other methods of fishing. Trap nets in particular allow for the [*Inaudible*]. In a gill net, everything that enters is killed. With a trap net, everything that enters is released, one at a time, through a trap door. So large female spawners can be put back in the river. There's a first nation in Red Bank New Brunswick that employs that practice. For some years now they've been using trap nets instead of gill nets.

Also, we saw an illustration recently from Finland in the Baltic Sea where there is a trap net that works in ocean waters. Outside the rivers, trap nets can be used to catch fish one at a time and moderate the size of the fishery.

So, we have to move in those directions in Labrador, for example.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I just think it's important, Mr. Bird, that we get the differences on the record here. This committee is trying to improve the situation with the recreational fishery across the country, so it's good to have that on the record. I thank you very much.

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

Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We were waiting for Mr. Leef, but he hasn't returned.

I just have one comment, and I think, one question. Then perhaps Mr. Sopuck, who always has lots of questions, if he has time....

I appreciate your input on this topic. We haven't talked about recreational fishing in general in New Brunswick, but almost entirely about salmon. But let me talk about salmon too.

My comment is this. Several times, I think, I've had the opportunity to lead the Canadian delegation to the North Atlantic Fisheries Ministers Conference, and at each of those, I've taken the opportunity to have a bilateral meeting with officials from Greenland on the topic of Atlantic salmon. As I think Mr. Bird has indicated, it is a challenge. It's a challenging conversation because they are well aware of what we do in Canada with respect to that resource, as well. But we continue to raise it and will again this year.

We've talked about what's happening in Canada and in the ocean, and that is a difficult problem to solve. Then, of course, it will take some money. Within Canada we've talked about the fact that in New Brunswick, for example, it's all catch and release this year—but not the same in Quebec. Those are both legal fisheries. But what kind of problem do we have with illegal and unreported fishing of Atlantic salmon in New Brunswick, for example, or elsewhere in Canada?

Mr. J.W. Bird: There is a significant unreported catch that the DFO records each year. I can't remember the figure. I think it might be in the range of 100 tonnes. I must say that, for the life of me, I don't quite understand where that is happening. I could perhaps bother Mark to expand on that, but I don't think that poaching in the rivers is any longer a serious problem. I think incidental catch in the ocean is quite, well.... It's illegal to have possession of salmon without tags on them. And now, with total release, it's illegal to have possession of fish at all. So, I'm not sure where the unreported catch really exists. Do you know Mark?

Mr. Mark Hambrook: Well, I think there's an unreported catch from a lot of first nation fisheries where there's not the proper monitoring. There is still the occasional angler who will take a salmon and not tag it, but I think, as Mr. Bird said, that it is less now than it used to be. Certainly, over my lifetime it's gone down dramatically. There's a social conscience and people are aware that if they take a fish illegally, there's someone who's going to squeal on them or they'll be an outcast. There is that peer pressure now.

Also, there are incidental catches in commercial fisheries. If you're bringing in a gill net with a catch of mackerel and you get a salmon in it, you're supposed to return it dead back to the water. Most people say, "it's dead anyway. I'll keep it." It happens.

So, there is an unreported catch. There is a mortality.

• (1300)

Mr. Brian Moore: We also have farmed salmon, which has come on even stronger in the past few years. It's not worth people's while to go out and fish and take the chance of getting caught, when they can just buy farmed salmon at a reasonable price.

Mr. David LeBlanc: For the Restigouche, poaching is still an issue on some of the rivers. As an example, the Little Main Restigouche River is hardly reaching spawning escapement, mainly because of poaching in that area. As I said earlier, there are very few protections over this area, and there are signs of poaching, such as nets found along the river and boxes of worms.

It's also a concern that poaching is still a minor offence for the first instance. It takes, I think, two or three offences before it becomes a major offence under the laws in New Brunswick.

As an example also in Quebec, they are managing with that \$1.15 million raised from the daily access. They have a task force to

provide their own protection. They are operating fish barriers. They will hold the fish all summer until the spawning and will release the fish only in October. These rivers are showing very good, successful returns.

As an example, the Causapsca River in the Matapédia Valley has a spawning escapement of between 200% and 300% every year because of the success of the barrier. They will hold the fish there until the end. Compared with other rivers where there's no protection barrier or rivers that only have a barrier some years, such as the Northwest Upsalquitch, they will show much better results when a fence or barrier is operating on the river.

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

Gentlemen, on behalf of the committee I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you once again for appearing before our committee today and taking the time to make presentations and to answer questions of committee members. It was greatly appreciated. Thank you, and have a great day.

There being no further business, this committee now stands adjourned.

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