



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans**

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FOPO • NUMBER 049 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, May 28, 2015**

**Chair**

**Mr. Rodney Weston**



## Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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•(1105)

[English]

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

I'd like to thank our guests for joining us today. As you are now doubt aware, we are studying recreational fisheries in Canada. We certainly do appreciate your taking the time today to meet with the committee members to share your comments and to answer their questions.

As is part of our practice, we generally allow about 10 minutes for guests from each organization to make comments and remarks. Then we'll go into questions by committee members and your answers. I'd ask, gentlemen, that you try to keep your responses as concise as possible, as members are constrained by time limits on their interventions. To allow as many questions as possible in that timeframe, I'd ask that you please respect that. Having said that, I once again say thank you very much.

Mr. James, maybe we'll lead off with you, and then Mr. Wood and Mr. Haley will follow with their presentations. Whenever you're ready, Mr. James, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Blaine James (As an Individual):** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank everybody on the committee for offering me this opportunity to speak. I appreciate it.

Let me start by telling you a little bit about myself. I've been a sport fisher in Nova Scotia for over 25 years. I should clear this up: I'm mostly a saltwater angler and am not considered a freshwater expert. I've done most of my years on the salt water, mainly fishing for shark and tuna.

I've promoted shark fishing in Nova Scotia since 1993, when the shark tournaments began. I have been on most of the committees for the shark fishing tournaments that took place in Halifax and Dartmouth since their inception. The first recreational tuna tournament in Canada was started by me and others in 1998, and we've promoted it around the world. We had as many as 15 teams from as many as five countries competing for the Sharp Cup here in Halifax. We've donated 100% of all the proceeds of the shark and tuna tournaments to our children's hospital, the IWK Health Centre, which make up close to \$1 million to date for the sick children of the maritime region.

We've also promoted Canada on the world stage by means of the IGFA Offshore World Championship worldwide. Approximately 72

countries are invited to compete in that championship. It's usually held in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, because that's where most of the sport fish are to this day, and it's the easiest to catch for a tournament.

I've also been very active in the tag and release program with BIO, the Bedford Institute of Oceanography, and scientists in the Atlantic region, including the tuna tagging for your research centre in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, where we've done the pop-up tagging program to see where the fish travel in the off season.

I have a few ideas as to what could be done to increase the importance of the recreational fishery in the Atlantic region. One is a tag and release program for the recreational fishery, if it could withstand it, for the bluefin and some other species, such as swordfish, which to date has been a totally commercial entity. We recognize that, but at the same time, we also recognize the potential for a great economic contribution to the area by opening up a much-needed new fishery.

I propose, and I also believe, that we can go as far as to say it is possible to open a completely new fishery for sport fishing in Nova Scotia for marlin, dorado and swordfish. To date, those have not been actively sought-after species, because of the logistics to get there. As we all know, things have changed. Boats are faster. Boats are bigger. If we take, for instance, the past 25 to 35 years, they've been going 75 to 150 miles off Hatteras, North Carolina, with 50 to 75-foot boats to catch these species. Well, we can do the same here in even less time. Within 75 to 100 miles, you would be in the line of the Gulf Stream. Where it is depends on the time of year. It can move in and out within a distance of 40 miles. Certainly, the further north we go from Halifax, towards Cape Breton, the closer it gets at most times of the year. So it is very viable and we can reach these fish in our waters, which, to date, have been untouched.

The information we will collect through such a process will be free of charge for the scientists who report daily to BIO, through the tagging program for those new species. I would say we'll save hundreds of thousands of dollars in scientists' time and money to cover Coast Guard ships and other parties involved. This would be free of charge through the recreational fishing people. We would certainly align ourselves with science. We've always worked with them, and we encourage continuing to work with them.

The economic contribution to the region would mean millions in the upcoming years to Canada and put Canada on the stage as one of the best places left in the world to fish for large pelagics. Because I am from the area and have many commercial friends, I have been told endless stories of catching the marlin and the dorado on their longline expeditions. I'm going to say that when we go south, we catch these all on a rod and reel. There's no reason why we can't do it here. If things were progressing, and somebody decided that this was an idea for an exploratory licence to study the viability and sustainability through science, I would certainly encourage that.

•(1110)

I would also like to mention one more thing. We have large species of sharks in the water, and it is a very deep concern to me how they're being caught by the word "bycatch". I've been told by many commercial fishermen that on every hook or every second hook there's a shark and that they're discarded, killed, or otherwise, all of which is decimating the shark population. We need sharks to have viable, healthy oceans. Without them, without the top predator, there will be a collapse of all species sooner or later, because they are the cleaners of the ocean. If you remove the cleaners, disease and decay set in.

So I applaud anyone's efforts to come up with some new ideas of how it would be possible to still commercially fish for these sharks they are licensed for, but maybe come up with some new ideas on how to release these sharks live. That to me is a very important thing, because without them, we are all in serious trouble. It's not just here in Atlantic Canada but a worldwide problem. It is our problem. We have a lot of commercial fishermen here and if you knew the number of sharks that were being discarded, it would make you really think: it's thousands and thousands and thousands of sharks a day. We need to look at this as a country and see where we can go with that.

If you have any questions at all, I'm open to discussion. That was just to bring you up to speed on where I came from.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. James.

Mr. Wood, Mr. Haley, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Lester Wood (President, Margaree Salmon Association):** On behalf of my colleague and my organization, let me thank you for this opportunity.

I am the president of the Margaree Salmon Association, a volunteer recreational body situated on Cape Breton Island. I have with me my vice-president, Mr. Bill Haley, who will be the main presenter. He will talk to you at length in a moment.

We are located on Cape Breton Island on the gulf side. The Margarees are a heritage river, one of two heritage rivers in Nova Scotia, and we are a not-for-profit charitable organization that has been in existence for some 35 years.

We have a membership of 200 recreational fishermen, half of whom come from either across the country or from the United States and who travel to the Margarees. Our prime objective is to further in all ways possible the conservation, protection, propagation, and perpetuation of the Atlantic salmon. The Margaree rivers are the only rivers in Nova Scotia that have sufficient fish in their waters to be able to offer a season-round, catch-and-release fishery. The majority of the 2,300 Nova Scotia salmon license holders fish on the

Margarees and contribute considerably to the economy of the small rural area in the Margarees.

That's my introduction of this organization. I will now turn the presentation over to Bill Haley, who will talk to you at greater length on the technicalities of our interest.

Thank you.

**Mr. Bill Haley (Vice-President, Margaree Salmon Association):** Good afternoon.

My name is Bill Haley, as Lester mentioned. I am the vice-president and a lifetime member with the Margaree Salmon Association. I'm also a lifetime member with the Cape Breton Anglers Association. As this is concerning recreational fisheries, I would like to go over some of the things that the Margaree Salmon Association is doing to improve recreational fishing in the area.

In particular, we're working with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on two projects this spring. One project is the catch and release of slink salmon. For those who aren't familiar with the term "slink salmon," Atlantic salmon enter the river in June to probably November; they'll spawn in later November and December, and unlike Pacific salmon they do not die in the river. In the spring, they will return to the ocean.

In the fall of the last two years, DFO has trapped and tagged and released salmon with the hope of catching some of those salmon in the spring so that they can do an assessment of the actual number of fish in the river.

As a volunteer organization, we applaud the opportunity of being approached by DFO to be involved in this. We had 29 individuals who came forward to work on a voluntary basis to catch and release Atlantic salmon with DFO staff from Moncton—25 experienced anglers and four high school students. To become involved in that type of activity was a pretty positive experience, .

The second activity we're involved in with DFO is a diet study of the striped bass. It's going to be a five-month study, again through our organization. It's all volunteers. We're going to catch and retain 30 striped bass per month so that their stomach contents can be analyzed by DFO.

The concern here is the explosion of striped bass on the east coast of Canada. You're probably aware that in 2013 there were more than 270,000 adult striped bass spawners in the Miramichi estuary. Those fish spread across the east coast of Canada, and they feed in all of the estuaries, in all of the harbours. They eat everything from salmon parr to small trout and even small lobsters. That's why DFO want to study the species: to see what the impact is going to be on both the commercial fishing and the traditional recreational fishing on the east coast of Canada.

Speaking of the striped bass, we had the pleasure of attending a meeting on January 6 in Margaree that was chaired by DFO. There were other interest groups there in addition to the Margaree Salmon Association. There was the Cheticamp River Salmon Association, first nations representation, Wild Salmon Unlimited, and the commercial fishermen as well. DFO's concern is adjusting the regulations, the length of the season for fishing striped bass, and the bag limit for striped bass in response to this population explosion.

At the end of the morning, by consensus we put forward a suggestion for DFO consideration. That was to have a striped bass fishery open from June 1 to October 31, with a bag limit of one bass per day per fisherman with a size of 50 centimetres or more.

Unfortunately, DFO have put other measures in place. I have to say that the measures that are put in place at times are quite confusing. The season we suggested was June 1 until the end of October. The season that we have to live with concerning retention of striped bass is May 11 to May 31, October 1 to October 23, September 4 to September 7, October 21 to October 31. I'm sure somebody found some scientific reason for fragmenting the season, but it certainly complicates life for people who want to fish.

● (1115)

The next thing I would like to speak on is Minister's Shea's announcement that the Province of Nova Scotia is getting \$400,000 to improve habitat for the Atlantic salmon. Again, we applaud it. We think that's excellent

Of those dollars, \$101,000 is for Adopt A Stream. Adopt A Stream is a critical program, and it's something we have been involved in for more than 10 years. If we do not have feeder brooks and streams into our rivers, then we do not have the nurseries that are necessary to breed and grow small fish, especially nurseries that are safe from the predators we have on the east coast. We'll find seals in our rivers; we won't find seals in our small streams. We'll find fish ducks, mergansers, and cormorants in our rivers; we will not find them in our small streams. The same goes for striped bass. So Adopt A Stream is critical to us here on the east coast.

The other \$300,000 is to repair fish ladders on two of our rivers. One of those rivers is the Grand River on Cape Breton Island. Certainly we've seen a huge decrease over the last decade or two in the number of fish on that river, some of which can be attributable to a fish ladder that doesn't work well and a fish ladder that is too easily accessed by poachers.

There is another aspect to the recovery of stocks in the Grand River. We had hoped that in addition to correcting the problems with the fish ladder, other innovative approaches would be taken.

We have a new conservation group here on the east coast, Wild Salmon Unlimited. They put forth a suggestion. They asked for permits, licences, whatever, to help improve the stocks in the Grand River. They wanted to remove the slinks that were leaving in the spring, most of which will not return to breed again; they wanted to recondition those fish and then have them spawn in captivity, and then return the young salmon and the reconditioned kelts to the Grand River.

From a recreational fisherman's perspective and from a lay perspective—I'm no scientist—it made a lot of sense. Unfortunately,

they're not making very much headway with their suggestion with DFO. It's my understanding that it has been turned down, and it is a disappointment.

I mentioned a few predators. I won't go on at length.

We've been talking about seals for decades, and I don't think anyone has the political will to do anything about seals. Fish ducks, mergansers, and cormorants have a huge impact as well on the Margaree River. The mergansers breed in the fresh water. They raise their young in the salmon pools and they fish those pools with military, if not naval, precision. It's a wonder to watch when you're out fishing. They line up across the pool in single file and go through that pool picking up every fish they can. Again, that's a good reason for our having Adopt A Stream, to get the small fish out of the river and into the small streams.

Not that long ago—I suppose it would be decades ago—we had culls for those particular predators. I don't think we have the political will to go there now, unlike some states in the U.S.

If we can do something about the striped bass through our work with DFO in research, through changing bag limits, etc., then that is going in the right direction.

In closing I would just like to say that I think recreational fishing, be it freshwater or saltwater, is an excellent activity, especially for those of us who are becoming older and more senior in years. I think it's a wonderful way to stay active, to stay healthy. With that in mind, I think that making licences at reduced cost available to fishermen and women over the age of 55, rather than 65, would be warranted.

Thank you.

● (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your remarks.

We're going to go into our 10-minute question period at this point. We'll start off with Mr. Chisholm.

**Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP):** Thank you very much to the presenters.

I'm going to start with Mr. James. From your 25 years as a saltwater angler you've shared with us a little bit about some of the issues you've been dealing with and some of your experience.

I'm interested in access to tuna, for example. Have you been engaged with the commercial sector or with DFO at all concerning how many tuna are available for the sports and recreation sector?

● (1125)

**Mr. Blaine James:** Thank you, Mr. Chisholm.

Yes, I have been involved with DFO from the conception of the recreational tuna fishery. It was a brainchild of Mr. Chris Jones, many years back. He came to me as an active saltwater fisherman with the offer that he would like to marry up the commercial with the recreational guys and possibly have a tuna tournament that would involve both sectors.

Let's not kid ourselves: commercial fishermen had the gear and the boats; they were the guys doing it. To this point, the recreational fishery wasn't really able to touch it, unless they were aboard a boat with a commercial person or down in the U.S., because in the U.S. you can buy a personal licence for bluefin.

Saying that, back in '93 we put together a consortium of people, as I said, and we solicited the Canadian government as well as DFO to give us 10 tags from the existing quota—not added to the quota, but from the Canadian quota. Then I went to ALPAC meetings and we discussed it at length for about a year and a half, and it was agreed by the commercial parties to give the recreational people 10 tags from their quota. This was only on the basis that we create a tournament and that all proceeds go to a charitable organization.

They were all certainly supporting the IWK, because we are from the maritime region. The idea in supporting the IWK Health Centre is that it is a maritime hospital, not just a Halifax hospital, and we all know it, as some of our families—or friends, certainly—had people there.

That's based upon those 10 tags, but it's such a small flash in the pan. We have the tournament, which takes place over three days. Sometimes the fish are caught and sometimes they're not. It depends on the time of year, the weather—there are all kinds of variables. We have just a small window that our licence is open for. What we catch we can retain, and the money goes to the children's hospital. The other existing fish that are not caught go back into the Canadian quota.

In the last two years, the fisheries have allowed the tournament to continue the following week to try to catch all 10 fish, because we are trying to raise money at the same time for the children's hospital. Since we were given 10 fish, we try to catch the 10 fish, but it's fishing, not catching, and bluefin, as you well know.... They don't call it the "elusive bluefin" for no reason.

But I want to go beyond that. It is such a valuable entity, such a world-class fish—and that's just one species that we have off Nova Scotia. We are touching nothing of what we have here. Unfortunately, Nova Scotia is probably the prime place for these species, because we are inside the Gulf Stream. This is probably not a Prince Edward Island thing or a New Brunswick thing; it's more going to be along Nova Scotia, because it is the province that has the access to the waters that these fish live in.

It's not just the tuna: I'm promoting that we look at some of the other species that are today not even touched, not even talked about; yet they're all out there and are all being caught and let go, or eaten, or whatever, because there are really no regulations on those.

The money that could be created for the provinces, the hotels, the restaurants—you know how it works—is phenomenal, when it comes to large pelagics. There are billionaires and millionaires who set their sights on these their whole lives and go all over the world.

They will come here as well. They are coming here for the tuna tournament, and if we had other species, the company would come here all summer long, not just for this particular week. That's what's been in my mind for many years. I think this is something that we can do together.

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** Thank you for that, Mr. James.

The idea of the other species is one that I'm going to try to learn more about. I also want to note the issue you raised about sharks being caught in the bycatch and the problem that creates, which is, as you've said, a very serious problem that needs some attention.

Thank you very much again for your presentation.

I want to move now to the Margaree Salmon Association. Your association, of course, is well known, certainly in Nova Scotia but well beyond it, for the work that you do to protect the habitat and the watershed there in its entirety and to manage the stock in a way that will benefit those communities.

I want to ask you a couple of things. One, I believe you have a fairly strong or close working relationship at least with first nations and the aboriginal fishery. I wonder whether you could elaborate a little on that relationship.

● (1130)

**Mr. Bill Haley:** That would be the Unama'ki group in our area that does representation for the first nations fishery.

The scientific research I mentioned earlier concerning catching the slink bass is done under a special permit. The special permit is issued by DFO. Included in the special permit were both the Unama'ki representation and the recreational representation from the Margaree Salmon Association. They were in attendance at our meeting. They fished separately, not with us, but they're on the same licence and we participated in the same research project.

You probably know that first nations do have reserve property on the river. I don't know if you're aware of that or not. They are in our area, and many times we have first nations fishers, and we fish alongside them and fish with them. Apart from that, we do not have any other projects with the first nations on the books right now. It's just the one project, the kelt or slink salmon project this year.

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** Yes, I'm aware of that, and I'm aware of the fact that the Unama'ki Institute and the first nations that have bought the river take very seriously the protection of the habitat and the stock. I know they are deeply concerned, as you are, with the survival and the sustainability of the stock.

You've both described what I would suggest sounds like a pretty healthy partnership with DFO at a number of levels. Some of us have been a bit critical of the way DFO has pulled back in the whole issue of dealing with habitat protection, in being directly involved in providing their science in some of these areas and science around the whole question of the sustainability of the Atlantic salmon.

I wonder if you would talk for a moment about that relationship. As I suggest, I'm pleased to hear of the positive working relationship you have with DFO, but I'd also like to give you the opportunity, if it's a little more complicated than that, to express that.

**Mr. Bill Haley:** Well, I find that it would be easy to criticize DFO, and I don't find that there's anything to gain by doing that. If I look at what's invested in the east coast—

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** That's my job anyway.

**Mr. Bill Haley:** Good.

If I look at the minister's announcements in April through May, with \$400,000 for Nova Scotia and \$57 million for B.C., are we going to gain anything by being critical? No. We're trying to take a positive approach. We have an opportunity now to work closely with the scientists and with the conservation officers as well. They're invited to our meetings. We want to build inroads with DFO.

Looking at the past, it was certainly very disappointing when they let go and downsized their officers who were responsible for conserving the environment, their environmental officers or whatever their titles were. Things have been made simpler and simpler, it appears, for big business and industry to get around the laws and regulations in working on environmental issues. We're not pleased with that at all, but as I say, we have to take the opportunity to build positive relationships, for the Atlantic salmon, for the citizens of the Margaree area, and for the citizens of Canada. We want to look forward and be positive.

• (1135)

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** I appreciate that, and I appreciate hearing from you and presenting to other members of the committee what a strong recreational fishery we have in Nova Scotia.

Thank you to both parties.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chisholm.

Now we'll move to Mr. Weston.

**Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC):** Mr. James and Messrs. Wood and Haley, if you could only have sat in on all of the other statements we've heard from kindred spirits across the country, you would have heard five themes, I think, into which your statements play very strongly, all of them relatively surprising. They include the robust revenues that arise from the recreational fishery; the number and intensity of volunteers, and all three of you have spoken to that; the importance of partnerships between volunteer-driven groups, DFO, and other stakeholders; and the role of culture and how the recreational fishery creates a culture. Also, I was really intrigued by your closing remarks. I think it was you, Mr. Haley, who referred to the recreational fishery as an excellent activity to keep people active and healthy.

As well, there's something you haven't really referred to, I don't think, and that is participation in the recreational fisheries partnership program, which is a fairly new program that got wings from the members of this very committee, was taken up by our fisheries minister, and is now quite popular. I would start by asking you, has there been participation in the recreational fisheries partnerships program by any of the groups you're associated with?

**Mr. Lester Wood:** At this point in time at the Margaree Salmon Association we haven't participated. We've concentrated on working through the Adopt A Stream program. Recently, the Nova Scotia Salmon Association estimated, and presented to Minister Shea's committee in March, that some \$4 million is contributed to the

community through the recreational fishery in Nova Scotia. That's substantial, as a lot of that money obviously comes into the Margaree area, which has our only open river.

**Mr. John Weston:** Is there any reason why your group hasn't looked at ways that habitat and the fishery could benefit from participating in the program? Or does it just not apply to your circumstances?

**Mr. Lester Wood:** I think it does apply, and I think we should participate and we will do; however, we recognize the fact that we're just a small volunteer group, and there's a limit as to what projects we can get involved in.

**Mr. John Weston:** I encourage you to look at it. There are small groups around the country—I think there are 400 already—that are participating. Many are small. Anyway, that's a theme that has come up.

On the role of partnerships, you referred—

I'm sorry, Mr. James. Did you want to comment on the recreational fisheries partnerships program?

**Mr. Blaine James:** Again, I applaud anyone and all parties, as long as they're on the same page and going in the same direction, to make it better for the whole. I'm welcoming any party and any organization or group for the saltwater fishery.

To this point, it's been mostly scientists with BIO or local scientists who have been harnessing the information that we've brought in from these fish. To date, the shark tournaments are the only sampling that was being taken of the sharks offshore. The scientists went through the entrails and checked to see what they ate and so on, on the basis of the tournament.

That was another reason the licences were even allowed: to cut down on the cost to DFO for doing sampling themselves. We can go as a community, as a tournament, and actually have something that we can give to others. In this case, it's the IWK. It's a win-win, so I applaud anyone that would like to be involved in the saltwater fishery, no matter what organization it is.

**Mr. John Weston:** Let me move to another theme, and that is the partnership theme.

Mr. Wood, you were gracious in your constructive criticism of DFO, but you also alluded indirectly to the importance of the partnership between people in the recreational fishery and DFO. I'm increasingly of the mind that no amount of enforcement officers will do the job we all want in terms of enhancement of the fishery.

Do you want to speak a little more about the importance of recreational fishers in terms of tending the fishery, making it stronger, and building a culture of people who respect the rules of nature as well as the rules of law?

• (1140)

**Mr. Lester Wood:** Mr. Haley will respond to that.

**Mr. Bill Haley:** I believe it's my comments you were referring to.

We certainly agree that having responsible fishers on any river adds to the security of that river. I agree with your comments. We can't expect enforcement to be policing our rivers and to just forget about them, and having responsible anglers on the river certainly is a great deterrent.

Look at our little area down in the Margarees. We used to have fishery officers in an office on the Margaree River. Unfortunately, after a few decades, that closed. Last year, the fisheries office for the fishery officers in Port Hood closed. We're left now with four officers out of the office in Chéticamp to look after recreational and commercial fishery. They look after probably five different harbours, 150 vessels, and seven different species that are harvested. They do not have time to wander our rivers to get to know the fishermen, to get to know the rivers, and to get to know the angling techniques, if you will.

Responsible anglers are certainly what we need out there on the river.

**Mr. John Weston:** Thank you for those comments.

You also referred to two initiatives, one related to I think the striped bass or the fragmented season and the other to the Wild Salmon Unlimited proposal about taking into account the predators. What I thought was interesting wasn't so much the conclusion—I know you were unhappy with the conclusion—but the obvious partnership that is engaged there, with DFO people and recreational fishers talking to each other.

Do you want to comment on that relationship? We've seen that theme in Swan River, Manitoba, and in British Columbia and across the country.

**Mr. Bill Haley:** Yes, certainly. The meeting was called by Leroy MacEachern from the Antigonish DFO office. He called a number of interest groups. As far as I know, all who were called did attend.

I've already mentioned who was there, but I think that having the recreational and commercial people and the first nations there in one room, all speaking and trying to come to a consensus on this particular problem, says a lot. It's no longer just the recreational people who have one perspective or one point of view. I think we're all on the same page when it comes to dealing with things such as the threat of striped bass, and we can move forward on a united front and try to convince DFO to take the appropriate action.

Now, my frustration isn't that DFO didn't take action. They've increased the number of days that you can retain a striped bass by seven over last year. My comment—and again, it is a criticism—is that it's putting together very critical or very fragmented periods of time when you can fish. You can fish three days in September and you can fish eleven days in May. It would be much simpler—

**Mr. John Weston:** Mr. Haley, if I can interrupt, we understood the nature of the criticism, but I was intrigued about the partnership and the relationship. The fact that the parties are talking to one another I think is very valuable. It doesn't mean that you get the answer you want, but obviously there's a listening ear, and hopefully that will continue.

If I can just touch on the investment you mentioned, I was with the minister when she announced the \$57 million in B.C. last week, but in the same week, I noticed that there was a \$40-million investment

in coast guards located in Newfoundland, so I would encourage you to look over time at the investments and the attempt to consolidate resources to make them more effective. Otherwise, what I find is that my constituents in British Columbia will be upset about what is announced tomorrow if they look only at that day in time, not at the trend.

I think there's a genuine attempt by this minister to listen to people like the three of you and people who care about recreational fisheries across the country. I think she really gets it, and it's important to look at the overall trend in investment, not just a one-off.

• (1145)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Weston.

Mr. MacAulay.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, gentlemen. Thank you for your contribution to this committee. We want to hear it.

Mr. Haley, I'd like you to comment on the striped bass, on the times you can fish and not fish and what a problem that creates. When you're responding, I also would like you to touch on enforcement and the need for enforcement. We need to have fishers out there who are concerned, but we need enforcement too.

I just want you to elaborate on those areas, because the committee wants to know.

**Mr. Bill Haley:** I can tell you about the complexities of the regulations for recreational fishing.

Let's say you were fishing in the Margaree River. I don't know if anybody is that familiar with the Margaree River, but you could be fishing in a pool in the river that has a tributary entering it. If you caught a trout in the pool that was 14 inches, you could retain it. If you were standing 10 feet over and happened to catch that trout at the mouth of the brook, you would have to release it. If you caught five trout in that pool, that would be your limit for the day. If you went over 10 feet and caught three trout in that brook, you would be finished for the day. So you could be 20 feet over from the fellow next to you and different rules would apply.

In terms of enforcement, we have fewer and fewer enforcement officers, as far as I can see. I do know there's recruitment going on, but when we had the meeting in January, it was Leroy MacEachern who mentioned to me that he used to have a staff of 17, I think, and now he has a staff of maybe seven. There certainly have been cutbacks and cutbacks. For the enforcement officers we do have, the majority of their time seems to be taken up looking after commercial fishing. We see them on our river mostly after the lobster fishery has closed and the crab fishery has closed. Usually late in the fall we'll have some visible fisheries officers on our rivers.

Apart from that, as I mentioned, we have four fisheries officers in Cheticamp who would have their hands full just to look after the commercial fishery, let alone recreational.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Basically we're short of manpower in the enforcement area. The committee needs to know that.



I'd also like you to comment on the predators, such as the cormorants, and what can be done. I represent an area in eastern Prince Edward Island—I hope I also get a chance to talk to Mr. James on the tuna—and the commercial fishermen are upset about those predators too. Is there any suggestion or recommendation to the committee? It's like the seals and the cormorants eat all the fish, and we're such a good society we can't do anything about it.

**Mr. Bill Haley:** Well, I think man is a top predator there as well. Look at Atlantic salmon in particular. Just stop and look at the data that the new committee is looking about what's happening in Iceland, Quebec, and in Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. Tonnes and tonnes of Atlantic salmon are being harvested that either don't make it to our shores or are being retained for the wrong reason, in my opinion.

With regard to seabirds, just look at yesterday's announcement in Oregon. They have 15,000 cormorants at the mouth of the Columbia River. They will be culling 10,000 over the next two years. They've gone through the court process, the complaint process, and the appeal process, and they're going ahead with it. The marine corps will take out 10,000 cormorants from the mouth of the river.

Scientifically, they say, that will allow 11 million more salmon to breed in that river, because the smolts that come down the river are eaten by the cormorants. What can I say? We could do something similar, but I don't feel we have the political will. We don't have the science to back it up, either. To this day, I haven't heard a scientist who's working for the government get on a news report and say "Yes, the seals are eating all of our fish." But they are. You know, they're eating something....

• (1150)

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much, Mr. Haley.

Scientists aren't on the news much lately anyhow, I guess. We're not sure why, but they seem to be not on the news very much. A lot of us would like to hear from the scientists.

Mr. James, you mentioned your tuna fishery and what you're doing with the IWK. That was very interesting. It's fabulous work. As you know, I represent eastern P.E.I., and North Lake is in my area. You know all about it. We have a recreational tuna fishery too.

I'd like you to elaborate a bit on your shark fishery and also, if you have time, these other species in terms of 75 to 100 kilometres or miles offshore. With regard to this kind of stuff, these billionaires coming from all over the world have the money, and it's so important to the economy of these areas. Please elaborate on it. The committee needs to know it.

**Mr. Blaine James:** Thank you very much.

It's nice seeing you again. You were an old neighbour of mine on P.E.I. Anyway, I'm one of the Jameses of the Church Road.

Saying that, I applaud anyone who would like to come onside with this new species. This is a new fishery. It's not very often that we get an opportunity to open a new fishery in Canada. These fish have gone by our shores long before any of us walked on this earth. To this point, no one has ever touched them because they're not really desirable eating fish. But it's not the idea of eating the fish; it's the idea of the catching of these fish. People go south, to Mexico, Hawaii, and down to the tip of the Baja for these large pelagics.

Anywhere at all these fish are found in numbers, you will find there is a huge recreation-based fishery.

I suggest that this certainly is a real, 100% possibility for us here in Nova Scotia. It's an untouched industry. It's never been touched, so the fish are still there, other than the fish that are being caught as bycatch on the longline fleet. They're certainly not targeting those species. It just happens that they're catching these species in the area where they fish. To me, that is not an unattainable area to reach from Nova Scotia—and that's from the Canso Causeway, down as far as Liverpool, or whatever, or Yarmouth, because it's even closer to the Gulf Stream in these areas than Halifax is. But Halifax has such a big base of hotels, restaurants, and so on; it's the main city for the province. It certainly would be a good spot, with all the yacht clubs and so on, to run such a fishery or start an expanded marine fishery from here.

The upside is that it would be not millions but billions of dollars to this province. That is what it really means. The recreational fishery, as everyone well knows, is certainly in the billions. It's not in the millions. It's billions of dollars to other countries, and we can have the same thing here. We're just not doing it.

Getting back to your comment on the recreational tuna, that is something that was never allowed. We were the first consortium of people to apply for such a licence. As I told you, it took about a year and a half, through the ALPAC and all those organizations, to have it approved. It was based upon it being a tournament to bring in other countries and promote our country, promote our fishing, and so on. It was a marriage of the commercial fleet and the recreational fleet, because we also need the commercial guides. They have the boats, the will, the rods, where a lot of the recreational people do not. Since the conception of this tournament in 1998, there are a lot of recreational boats here in the city, and other places through the province, that also have these rods and reels, and are getting quite good at it. We promote that as a mainstay, and we look forward to adding to that with these new species.

I know it's something that no one's ever discussed. I've thought long about this meeting, and it is probably the most important thing to our province: to reach out and to try, even with an exploratory licence through Fisheries and Oceans, and of course with scientists. Without them, you're nothing. You need everyone together as a whole, and you need to explore this even if it's a year or two years of an experimental thing, to actually see what numbers are going to be there, at what times of the year. We may look at opening a licence for that. There's work to be done, but I'm throwing it on the table because it is a very viable industry, and it's something that Canada has not....

Canada really has salmon on both coasts, and some halibut. That's another thing that also could be catch-and-release. Sport fishermen do not care about killing animals. They care about catching and releasing them for the greater whole. The thing is, we support that. We just want to be on the water and to have the opportunity to catch these wonderful species and to release them live so they can come back with others.

• (1155)

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much. Being from Midgell, I appreciate you, Mr. James, and your input.

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

Now we'll go to Mr. Sopuck.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC):** I assume the bells are going to start fairly soon.

To Mr. Wood and Mr. Haley, I don't think you should be so pessimistic about the opportunities to control predators. As the federal government, we're actually doing wolf control in British Columbia right now to protect woodland caribou. Again, we produced a report in the fisheries committee a few years ago on snow crab, and it was a unanimous report by all parties that some kind of seal reduction program should be put in place to improve snow crab recruitment. So I don't think the system is as bad as you might think. I think there's a greater appetite for this than many people appreciate.

Mr. James, in terms of the time you've spent out there, you expressed great concern about sharks. But how are the stocks of marlin, dorado, and swordfish doing? Are they all quite abundant?

**Mr. Blaine James:** They still are, in a large number of areas. In certain areas, such as Hawaii, they probably have lost more species for some other, unknown reasons. As we all know, our oceans are not as well as they used to be. There are some other issues with that.

In terms of the population in this part of the world, it's been untouched. These fish have been able to come and go here as they please for hundreds of thousands of years—or for however long fish have been here. There have never been licences to catch or release or retain them in any commercial value. Again, it's mostly recreational value. The value of the recreational fishery will outweigh 100 to one the commercial value of the fish, so we are certainly believers in catch and release. I'm certainly a believer that these fish can be attained at an optimum time. I still say that we need to do some more research on the time we should be harvesting those—or not even harvesting them, but actually catching and releasing them—or for when a recreational licence should be permitted.

Basically, I think this fishery is a strong fishery. I believe it can be sustained through science and with good-minded anglers. I personally believe that anything that can be released live certainly will come back and pay the country and yourselves many times over. One fish released live is worth 10 or 20 on the wharf. That is a fact when it comes to sport fishing.

As well, these species that I'm talking about are world-sought. They're not sought just here or Mexico or Florida, but people around the world are seeking out these species. We have them here, and we're not even doing it. It's a brand new thing we could be doing that would certainly go down in history as a money-maker for our country and put us on the world stage as one of the premium places to go to catch these species.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Great. Thanks. Your enthusiasm is commendable. I will probably be one of your first customers.

As an avid angler myself, I'd like to ask about the Margaree. What's the size of the run in the Margaree? Do we have a reasonable estimate of the Atlantic salmon run?

**Mr. Bill Haley:** Depending on the year, it's somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 fish. In an exceptional year, such as 1996, I think, we had 5,600 fish. That's all; we have a small run.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** You're at roughly 3,000 fish now. Is that correct?

**Mr. Bill Haley:** Probably.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Just getting back to the issue of predation by the mergansers and cormorants, has anybody ever done a literature search on the stomach contents of mergansers and cormorants? Are they primarily feeding on salmon parr and smolts when they're in the stream?

**Mr. Bill Haley:** Most of the research I've seen was done in Europe. I haven't seen any research done on the east coast of Canada.

Many places in Scotland and England have programs where they cull cormorants on an annual basis. You have to do it in an organized fashion. You decide the maximum population that a river can sustain, and every year you reduce the number to that.

But no, with regard to stomach contents, I'm not aware of that being done in Canada.

● (1200)

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** It does stand to reason that they are major predators of salmon.

I was very interested in your report about Oregon, where they plan to take out 10,000 birds. It's a fairly robust analysis, then, that they estimate another 11 million salmon will survive?

**Mr. Bill Haley:** That's based on their science, yes. That was in the paper yesterday.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** I'll have to look that paper up. I find that very interesting.

Actually, there were cormorant culls in Canada in the past, I think in Ontario and Quebec, that were fairly small. Being on the fisheries committee, we do hear on a regular basis the need for predator control to improve recruitment.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, I have to interrupt here, gentlemen. The bells are ringing, calling members for a vote.

As per the standing rules of the House, the committee must suspend at this point in time. Actually, this committee will adjourn at this point in time.

I want to take a moment to thank you gentlemen for taking the time today to present to the committee and to answer questions from our members. We certainly do appreciate it.

Again, I apologize for having to cut this short.

This committee now stands adjourned.







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