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Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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EVIDENCE

Tuesday, February 16, 2016

—
Chair

Mr. Scott Simms

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1545)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. David Chandonnet): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

[English]

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, cannot entertain points of order, nor participate in debate.

[Translation]

Therefore, we can proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

I am ready to receive motions for the chair.

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Clerk, I respectfully nominate Mr. Simms to be the chair.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Mark Strahl has moved that Scott Simms be elected chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Scott Simms duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I invite Mr. Simms to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)): Thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

Perhaps the honourable members from the government side could move down a bit and be a part of the conversation.

I want to thank you very much. I've been part of this committee for quite some time. This is quite an honour for me.

Thank you to Mr. Strahl for nominating me.

If the committee is in agreement, I invite the clerk to proceed with the election of the vice-chairs.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

[Translation]

I am now ready to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to nominate Mr. Robert Sopuck as chair for the official opposition.

[Translation]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Don Davies that Robert Sopuck be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Robert Sopuck duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition party.

[English]

I am now prepared to receive motions for the second vice-chair.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I would like to nominate Fin Donnelly for that position.

[Translation]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mark Strahl that Fin Donnelly be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

• (1550)

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Fin Donnelly duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

The Chair: As per protocol, because I certainly don't want to be the one accused of breaking protocol, we will suspend for five minutes to confer with the clerk about the proceedings of the finance committee meeting.

•(1550) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1555)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone, to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. We're running very quickly and very efficiently, which is great.

The following is a list of routine motions adopted by the committee during the second session of the 41st Parliament. We're now going to proceed through these motions, and I'll ask for someone to put them forward. Then we'll take a quick vote and proceed from there. We have quite a few. I think most of you have the list in front of you.

Just to refresh your memories, then, the first motion concerns services of analysts from the Library of Parliament. It is that the committee retain as needed, and at the discretion of the chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist in its work.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: At this point I would like to ask our analyst to please proceed to the table, now that we've passed the motion.

Before I go to the next one, sir, would you like to say hello and introduce yourself?

Mr. Thai Nguyen (Committee Researcher): Good afternoon. My name is Thai Nguyen, analyst for the committee. I started here three years ago. I've been with this committee for the past three years. It's good to see returning and new members.

The Chair: All right, thank you, sir.

Concerning the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, the motion is that the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of the chair, the two vice-chairs, and two members of the government party.

I call for some discussion.

Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would move that when we're dealing with things that a subcommittee might proceed with, we simply operate as a committee of the whole. I know that has been undertaken at the trade committee. They have decided to make those decisions as a group. That would be my recommendation, that we not strike a subcommittee on agenda and procedure and that the decisions that are normally made by that body be made by the entire committee.

The Chair: That means you would have to move an entirely different motion. Is that correct?

We can adopt the subcommittee on agenda and procedure motion as is and just not bother to use it and always have our discussions about committee business in the whole committee., or, if you prefer to have a vote, we can do that as well.

•(1600)

Mr. Mark Strahl: I prefer to have a vote to make sure we're all on the same page.

The Chair: All right.

What you're proposing is...?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Essentially, I'm proposing that this is not a routine motion, that there is no subcommittee for this committee and that those decisions that would be made at a subcommittee would be made by all of us together.

The Chair: What is being proposed is that we put the motion forward, we vote on it, but we vote it down, if you agree with Mr. Strahl's....

Mr. Mark Strahl: In the absence of that motion, what happens? If we vote against this...?

I guess I'm not understanding. If we're moving motions to be approved and if the motion is simply not moved, what happens? The question becomes, if we simply agree that we're not going to have a subcommittee, do we just go merrily along? I would say that's probably easier than saying please vote against a motion that no one has yet moved.

The Chair: I thought you wanted a vote.

Mr. Mark Strahl: In discussion, I don't think we need to have this as a routine motion, so I would encourage us to not....

The Chair: Mr. Davies, do you want to speak?

Mr. Don Davies: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Procedurally, I thought this motion was moved and I just took Mr. Strahl to be speaking against adopting the motion.

If it wasn't moved, I move will it. After you get the procedural thing sorted out, I'm happy to say why I think it's important to have this subcommittee, unless you want me to speak to that now.

The Chair: Okay.

Are you moving the motion?

Mr. Don Davies: I'm moving the motion.

The Chair: It has been moved.

Now, further to that, is there any discussion?

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): I don't know if this is the proper procedure or not, but to Mr. Strahl's suggestion, is it possible to amend this motion? Could it instead be established and be composed of the committee of the whole?

The Chair: We'll going back to Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: What we're doing at this stage is setting the routine motions that will govern the committee business. This is the proposal to establish a subcommittee on agenda and procedure. If you didn't have this motion, then it would be the committee that does this as a committee of the whole in the absence of anything else.

I'm going to speak to why I think a subcommittee on agenda and procedure is a good tool for a committee like this. As Mr. Chair already pointed out, you don't have to use it but it's there for you if it's adopted in routine motions.

I sat on the trade committee for the last three years, which did not have a subcommittee on agenda and procedure. It was not a happy experience.

When that happens, a couple of things occur. First, there is no ability to meet in advance of the meeting, work things out, and discuss them as part of a more informal procedure—and by the way, every decision that's taken at a subcommittee has to come back before the committee anyway, where it would be ratified, so the decisions have to be taken here. By having a subcommittee, it allows a smaller committee to meet and do a little bit of that legwork in advance of the committee.

Second, the practice of the previous government in committees was to go in camera for anything to do with committee business. Anytime you wanted to discuss a potential item of business, the government went in camera and everything was secret and off the record. That's how committee business was dealt with. I hope that's not the practice of this government or of this committee, but by having a subcommittee, you can talk about the committee business and then come before this committee and have an open public discussion about whether the committee wants to adopt the recommendations of that subcommittee.

I think it's very helpful to have a subcommittee. Again, it's up to the chair and the committee itself when to use it, but if you don't have it in your routine motions then you don't have the subcommittee. I think that's a lamentable absence.

• (1605)

The Chair: Very well.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): I'm a fisheries committee veteran. I've been on it during my entire time as a member of Parliament, four-plus years. The fisheries committee has a reputation of being quite a collegial committee. Essentially all reports were unanimous.

We did have a subcommittee, but as subcommittee members we all had a lot of meetings to go to, and that was an extra one. The chair at the time made the subcommittee work but everything the subcommittee did had to be brought back to the committee of the whole anyway. I always felt that it was a bit redundant, and quite honestly, as I said, the collegiality of this committee, or at least what I've been used to, means that I think we'll come to some pretty easy agreement on what needs to be done with a fairly efficient use of our time.

I honestly don't think this is a very large question for us, and quite frankly, I think that if we find the idea for a committee of the whole to set the agenda doesn't seem to be working that well, we can always form a subcommittee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Does anyone else want to weigh in on this issue?

Okay, right now we have to vote on the motion, as moved by Mr. Davies, that the subcommittee on the agenda and procedure be established and be composed of the chair, the two vice-chairs, and two members of the government party.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We now have a subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

The next item is reduced quorum. The motion is that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three members are present, including one government member and one opposition member.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We now have the distribution of documents. The motion is that the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the committee and only when such documents exist in both official languages.

That is moved by Mr. McDonald.

(Motion agreed to)

An hon. member: Now we're on food.

The Chair: As was duly noted by my honourable colleagues, we now have working meals. The motion is that the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangement to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

That is moved by Mr. Finnigan.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Now we have witnesses' expenses. The motion is that, if requested, reasonable travel accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two representatives per organization, and that in exceptional circumstances payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the chair.

Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to propose an amendment and seek the unanimous consent of the committee to add a sentence at the end of this paragraph that says.... I'll just read it, and I'll go slowly so you can write it down.

The proposed amendment is "However, each witness shall be offered the opportunity to testify by video conference."

The point of the paragraph that's been proposed, the routine motion, is that if requested by a witness we allow them to come testify to the committee. It's getting increasingly common at Parliament to allow testimony by video conference. It's more efficient. It's sometimes more convenient. The reason I think both have to be there is that you still want to maintain the ability to have witnesses come to Ottawa to testify for a number of reasons. Sometimes it's easier to have them in person. Sometimes what happens is that witnesses who live in regions like British Columbia, or farther away, tend not to be able to come to Ottawa, so you get people that live near Ottawa coming to testify before committee more frequently. That's why I think if we preserve both options, it's important.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I'm wondering if Mr. Davies agrees with the sentiment that it needs a "where possible" in there? If he could read it again. I'm wondering if we can add "where possible" to "they should be given the opportunity". I don't know. There are times when people don't have access. If they're from UBC, for example, they're going to have access to video conference and facilities. Is there a proviso in there to give us some flexibility as well? I think we still want them to come. Is this the preferred option then of the committee, or is it giving the witness the option?

The Chair: If I may interject for one moment on a procedural thing before we get too far into the weeds on that one. Sorry, I'm not diminishing your point.

We have to move the main motion first. Someone has to move an amendment to it, so the main motion consists of this: that, if requested, reasonable travel accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to a witness not exceeding two representatives per organization, and that in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the chair.

That's the main motion.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I so move.

The Chair: It is moved by Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Don Davies: I will now move my amendment.

If I could speak briefly, I take Mark's sentiment. I know what he is trying to say. What I don't want to do is set up a hierarchy of one over the other. They should be offered both. If a witness can testify, and if they request to come before the committee, we'll pay their expenses. At that time we should also say to them, "If you want to testify by video conference, you can." Mark's point, I think, is if someone can't do it—

Mr. Mark Strahl: Your wording is probably adequate, I just wanted to....

Mr. Don Davies: If it's not possible, then it's just not possible.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: Do you want me to read my...? It says, "However, each witness shall be offered the opportunity to testify by video conference."

We could add the words "where possible" at the end of that, if you like.

An hon. member: It's pretty clear anyway.

The Chair: All right, "where possible", just so we're....

Mr. Don Davies: I think we'll just stop at "video conference".

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: That is done.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): We haven't voted on the amended motion.

The Chair: Oh, sorry, yes, you're right. I'm new here.

Okay, so now we're voting on the whole thing. Do I have to repeat that?

A voice: No.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next issue for motion is staff at in camera meetings. The motion says that unless otherwise ordered, each committee member shall be allowed to be accompanied by one staff person at an in camera meeting, and in addition, each party shall be permitted to have one party staff member attend in camera meetings.

It is moved by Mr. Strahl.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll turn to in camera meeting transcripts. The motion is that one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee.

It is moved by Ms. Jordan.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We turn now to notice of motions. It is that 48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, and that the notice of motion be filed with the clerk of the committee and distributed by 5 p.m. to members in both official languages.

It is moved by Mr. McDonald.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We turn to allocation of time for questioning. It is that witnesses from any one organization shall be allowed 10 minutes to make their opening statement, and here is a proposal for the rotation as put forward. It is that in round one, the first question is to the Conservative Party for six minutes, the second question is to the Liberal Party for six minutes, and the third question is to the NDP for six minutes. That's round one.

In round two, the first question is to the Liberals for six minutes, the second question is to the Conservatives for six minutes, the third question is to the Liberals for six minutes, the fourth question is to the Conservatives for five minutes, and the fifth question is to the NDP for three minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

•(1615)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Yes. I would propose some changes here, and I'll just go through them and then we'll discuss them briefly.

The PROC committee adopted a slightly modified version, which is closer to what we had in the last Parliament, so I would propose, and I don't know how we do this but this would be my proposal. Round one would go Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Liberal, and those would be seven-minute rounds; and then the next round would go Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Liberal, NDP, five-minute rounds, with three minutes for the NDP at the end.

The reason for this is that, if you look at the rotation by time, there would be, in round one, slot four, and round two, slot one, 12 consecutive minutes of questioning from the government side. I think the seven-minute rounds give that first round a little more weight, a little more opportunity for every party to be represented, with the government getting two cracks at it there. This is what we did in the last Parliament, and I think the rotation is a little better in that there is constant rotation between the parties and not such a long stretch for one side to have the microphone, but still the same number of minutes in total, and the same proportion of questions.

It is my hope that we could get some agreement on that.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Davies for discussion in just a moment. But first, let's not forget, we have to accept this motion as is and then amend it afterwards.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I move it.

The Chair: Do you move it?

Mr. Mark Strahl: I move an amendment, then.

The Chair: We haven't accepted it yet.

Mr. Mark Strahl: No, I'd be moving an amendment.

I'm sorry, I don't want to fight with the chair on the first day. I don't think we vote in favour of a motion and then essentially vote against it by voting in favour of the amendment. It can be moved, but not voted on.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I move it.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Retroactively, my entire argument is to amend the motion that Mr. Arnold has moved.

The Chair: That's duly noted and thank you for the explanation.

Is there any discussion on that?

Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I understand that it's Liberal, Conservative, NDP, and Liberal for seven minutes each for the first round.

Is that right, Mark?

•(1620)

Mr. Mark Strahl: That's right.

Mr. Don Davies: Then for the second round you've gone Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Liberal, and NDP. Is it for five, five, five, five, and three minutes?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Yes.

Mr. Don Davies: Okay. I'm going to speak in favour of that. I think it is consistent with PROC, and it's what we adopted at the health committee too. Seven minutes is.... I looked at your last committee. I think you had 10 minutes for the first round. Is that right?

A voice: No.

Mr. Don Davies: No? Okay.

The Chair: Opening statements were 10 minutes. We usually have seven—

Mr. Don Davies: I just wanted to ask a question. At this committee do you typically have two panels per two-hour meeting, or do you usually have one meeting of two hours each?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Let me answer that question. As I said, I've been on the committee for four years.

We've done both, and we found that two panels of an hour each worked very well, if the discussion warranted it.

To the members who haven't been on a parliamentary committee before, concerning the allocation of time it's astonishing how fast the time goes, and seven minutes is measurably better than six, believe me. In terms of the second round of five minutes, you get most of the testimony out in the first round, and the second round is often just to clarify it. This type of rotation, as I said, works quite well.

The Chair: Is there any more discussion on this?

Okay. We're going to vote on your amendment, sir. We're voting on what was in—

I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Do we have what the amendment reads, or do we just go by this?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I will clarify again.

For rotation by time, my amendment is to.... If we're modifying the table that you have in front of you, in round one, slot one, would go Liberal; slot two, Conservative; three, NDP; and four, Liberal. All four would be seven-minute rounds. Then round two is Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Liberal, NDP, five-minute rounds, and then three minutes for the NDP at the end.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I hate to be a stickler, but I'm going to be because we have a motion on the floor that we accept this, the initial one. It was moved by Mr. Arnold, isn't that correct?

The Chair: But what he is doing is proposing an amendment to that motion.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Yes, but as a point of order, don't you have to vote on this and vote it down, and then vote on a new motion?

The Chair: No.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I'm aware that it's an amendment.

Mr. Don Davies: You vote on the amendment first.

The Chair: That's why we go back to the main motion "as amended".

Mr. Don Davies: It does make sense.

The Chair: Okay.

Are we ready for the vote now? Does everybody understand now what the amendment—?

Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Just so we're clear, what are we voting on here, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You see what's in front of you right now.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You mean the one that originally came in, with the six-minute allocations.

The Chair: That's right, with six-minute allocations for round one

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Which has been moved....

The Chair: —which has been moved.

What Mr. Strahl has done is amend it to what he just described earlier.

Would you like me to read it out again?

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: No. I don't need you to do that.

The Chair: Okay.

Well, he's put forward an amendment to it, so the next item is to vote on Mr. Strahl's amended table.

Before I do that, would anybody else like to weigh in on this?

Mr. Finnigan.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): If it was voted down, then we'd have to vote again on the original motion.

Is that how it works, or does it automatically...? No, we'd have to vote again.

The Chair: Right.

If accepted, it's automatically amended. Then we vote for the main motion, which would be the amended one.

Is there any more discussion?

I'm sorry, Mr. Arnold, my apologies.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I think the confusion is that the original motion has been moved. It hasn't been passed yet. It's only moved, so it's still up for a vote.

Thank you.

The Chair: These are tools in the toolbox, as the expression goes. We could suspend for a bit if you wish to discuss it and then return in a few minutes.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Okay, so we're ready.

Therefore, I call for a vote of the amended motion.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No, it's of the amendment.

The Chair: Oh, the amendment. I'm sorry.

See, now you've got me confused. It's the amendment, yes.

(Amendment agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

•(1625)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we have to move on to vote on the amended motion.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you. Sorry if I was confused there.

There is one left. It is that the clerk of the committee be instructed to request from the minister's office the curriculum vitae of an appointee or nominee, once the committee has been notified of their nomination, and distribute it to the members of the committee.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have a question.

This is a nominee to what?

The Chair: I'm seeking clarification on that myself.

Okay, some positions get referred to committee for the vetting of particular candidates, so that's what we're doing. We're clearing the way for that.

Mr. Ken Hardie: They're candidates for—

The Chair: Any position. It could be a board position. It could be anyone appointed by the minister or order in council.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay.

The Chair: All right. Is there any more discussion on that?

I'm looking for someone to move the motion.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: I have two short motions for consideration as routine motions by the committee.

I'll just read it and I'll go slowly. It is that all requests to appear before the committee be distributed to committee members.

The Chair: We can have a motion on that.

Would you care to repeat it?

Mr. Don Davies: Sure. I move that all requests to appear before the committee be distributed to committee members.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How was it handled in the past? It seems to be routine.

Mr. Don Davies: I can speak to that.

What will happen is that there will be people in the Canadian public who will write to the committee chair asking to appear. That will go to the clerk, and in the absence of having a motion, committee members are not necessarily apprised of who's doing that. It's helpful for committee members to know who wants to appear before the committee. It's also helpful when we have to suggest witnesses for a particular study to know who wants to appear and not to double up. If you know that someone has written the committee, you won't necessarily waste a spot of your own.

It's just more efficient and a courtesy to all committee members.

The Chair: Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That was most certainly not the practice in the past, and I question this motion now.

Basically, when a study was proposed and agreed to by the committee, each party would put forward a list of witnesses they would want to appear. Again, it was a fairly collegial process that ensured that every party had its witnesses appear before the committee in proportion to the party's representation on the committee.

I don't see what would be served by the motion on the floor right now, at all.

The Chair: Is there any more discussion on this issue before we proceed to a vote?

Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: I will briefly respond to that.

Again, so that we are clear, this does no violence to the normal situation wherever committees are working collegially and are requested to put in requests.

What this does is inform all committee members when a member of the public or an organization has written independently to the committee and has said that they want to appear, just to let the committee members know that the request is there. Otherwise, we wouldn't necessarily know.

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I'd be curious to hear what his motion would take away from the past practice.

The Chair: Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Again, it has the capacity to create unnecessary conflict, because there are going to be members of the public who want to appear before the committee but won't be allowed to because the committee decided not to hear them. I think it would be a source of embarrassment for them.

My experience on this committee for the last four years was that there was a wide range of witnesses. No political party of any stripe on this committee was the least bit shy about putting forward an extensive witness list. As I said, it worked very well. We decided among ourselves which witnesses would come, and a wide spectrum of witnesses appeared before us on every single issue.

• (1630)

The Chair: Ms. Jordan.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I have a question for clarification. You just requested that the names be put forward. You didn't ask to vote on whether or not they could appear. Is that correct?

That would then take away from your argument that it would embarrass people. Am I right in assuming that?

All he's asking for is that the names be submitted beforehand, not that we vote on whether or not they are able to present to committee.

The Chair: Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Correct me if I'm wrong, but the proceedings of this committee are public proceedings, so things will get out. Of course, if someone requests it and it is not possible for us to see them, obviously they will be disappointed and will make sure that their displeasure is known.

Look, I'm as much of a politician as anybody else. I like conflict as much as anybody else, but I'm thinking of the smooth workings of this committee and I'm drawing on my four years of experience on it. As I said, the past practice of each party putting forward a list of witnesses worked very well.

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I assumed the party list would become public as well.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Of course, once a witness list is agreed upon, it becomes public for sure, which is as it should be.

But anyway, we're not in the majority, so if the majority wishes to do what Mr. Davies wants, that's the way it will be.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion before we proceed to a vote on this particular issue, or even seek some clarification, if need be?

Are we okay with it?

Okay, I would like to ask for a vote.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Davies, I believe you have a second motion.

Mr. Don Davies: I do. It's my final motion, Mr. Chair.

It's that whenever the minister appears before the committee, every effort be made to ensure that the meeting is televised.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on this matter?

One second, Mr. Hardie, I'll go to you next.

Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What control do we as a committee have over that? Is it the chair?

Mr. Don Davies: I'll speak to the motion, if I may.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: So that you know, this is a type of routine motion that is adopted quite routinely by lots of committees. It doesn't oblige it to happen. It obligates the chair to, I guess, take reasonable efforts that it be televised.

Whenever a minister appears before a committee, it's an important time. It's probably one of the more important meetings of a committee when a minister appears. Generally the minister wants it to be televised. It's not anything that they're not interested in. What this does is recognize the fact that it's an important meeting, and it's an expression by the committee that we take whatever steps we can to ensure that it is televised, recognizing that it's not mandatory.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: As a new member I question whether this would deter the minister from appearing as often. Since it is more public, we may not be as open with our questions, but that's just a question.

The Chair: Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I think the chair has several options now. I think most rooms now have some capability or we can get to Centre Block where they have the cameras. I think it's a request that the chair pick a room that has that capability, not that it's going to compel CBC or CTV to cover this but that the equipment is in the room. I think it's a room allocation request and the notice indicates that it's televised. I'd be supportive of that.

• (1635)

The Chair: Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Thanks.

I'll briefly say in answer to Mel's question that whenever the minister appears there's a lot of media attention. The room will be full of media. It's public anyway, so it doesn't discourage him one way or the other.

I think it's part of an accountable transparent government that when a minister appears it recognizes that meeting is of broad interest to the public. If it can't be done sometimes, if there's not a room available, then so be it.

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Does that mean we get a room closer to the House of Commons and don't have to walk...?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I believe I can answer that one, and yes.

Just for the sake of clarification, I know in past experiences on my other committees, as well as this one, when a minister comes in, usually at the end of it, that it's televised or what have you.

We're debating this motion here right now, and that being said, this particular room would not be able to cover it. I think somebody asked that question earlier.

The question is on the motion put forward by Mr. Davies—

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Sorry, could you just read it one more time?

Thank you.

Mr. Don Davies: I move that whenever the minister appears before the committee, every effort be made to ensure that the meeting is televised.

The Chair: Is there any more discussion? We're ready for a vote.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know it will require consent, but given Mr. Davies' motion, I would like to ask.... I don't know who to ask on that side because Mr. Cormier is not here, according to the rules. He's here as an MP, but he is not running the show over there supposedly. I can see it, a house divided against itself and all the rest of it.

We would like the minister to appear to talk about his mandate letter and to discuss his priorities for the department in this new government. I recognize there hasn't been 48 hours' notice, but I'm wondering if we could agree that he would be the first witness this committee would hear and that we would talk about his mandate letter and the direction of the department.

I would like to have that friendly suggestion. I heard the minister in the Senate. He's obviously prepared for this, and we would welcome the opportunity to hear from him at the earliest opportunity.

The Chair: Before any further discussion on that one, because you asked about the 48 hours, it's okay. You can move that, seeking a majority vote. However, as a reminder, I had hoped we would be doing committee business on Thursday, unless you want to deal with that right now. I'm assuming you do.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I'm just laying down a marker that this is something we would like to see as soon as possible.

The Chair: Okay.

If I read this correctly, what you're proposing is that the minister appear before the committee to discuss his mandate letter. Do you propose a particular date?

Mr. Mark Strahl: As soon as possible.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on what has been proposed?

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: It might be worthwhile for the committee of the whole or otherwise, the subcommittee, to meet and talk about the direction in which we want the committee to go. That may help to inform the kind of discussion we want to have with the minister when the minister does appear in front of the committee. Just a thought in the sequencing of things, I suggest that we take care of some housekeeping first and then go forward.

• (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I think that regardless of what our path might be, having the minister come to the committee would be the very first option no matter what we've discussed. I do agree that we want to discuss the potential studies and witnesses we want to bring before us. But no matter what we decide upon, the minister will probably be the first witness that we ask.

I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion before we have a vote on his motion?

Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The minister will be appearing before this committee and can speak to any issue. This motion identifies one specific issue for him to speak to at that particular time. I'd prefer that be dealt with when the minister does appear because as you point out, he is going to appear before the committee. To have a motion bringing him in to speak to one particular issue, which is his mandate letter, I don't think is necessary at this stage.

The Chair: Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I beg to differ. The mandate letter relates to his entire duties for his department.

The other point that I wanted to bring up is that time is passing. It's the middle of February now and we have a number of constituency weeks coming up. From my experience on both the environment and the fisheries committees in my first four years, it takes quite a long time to line witnesses up. It's not like you decide on a Tuesday to do a study of fisheries project X and the witnesses are all there on the Thursday.

I think it behooves us to move fairly expeditiously given the time frames. It will be May before we know it, and I think it's quite important that this committee get a number of briefings and studies under its belt, given some of the very serious issues that are facing Canada's fisheries and coastlines.

The Chair: Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I might have misheard what Mark was saying.

I thought that it was your intention that he be absolutely the first person we talk to at the next meeting.

Mr. Mark Strahl: The intent of the motion is that this committee request that the minister come and speak to us regarding his mandate letter as soon as possible.

Having been on that side of the table before, I know that sometimes takes time. I wouldn't expect him to be here on Thursday, but I would expect him to receive our request in the spirit in which it's given, and to propose dates to us that the subcommittee or others could consider. The fact that we make the request as soon as possible means it's not a hard deadline. It indicates our desire to hear from the minister and to ask questions of him on his mandate letter, which, to Mr. Morrissey's point, is quite expansive. It covers what the Prime Minister expects of him and lays out a number of key priorities for him and his department.

I think that's not a very narrowly cast invitation. The mandate letter is quite significant and will give us many avenues to speak

with him about. It's not that it will be the first meeting, it is that at his first opportunity, as soon as possible, we'd love to hear from him.

The Chair: Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: It would be helpful to me if the motion were read again.

If I understand it, the motion is to extend an invitation to the minister to appear before the committee as soon as possible to discuss his mandate letter.

My experience, when ministers appear for things like mandate letters, is that it's similar to when a minister comes and discusses the estimates. You're actually not limited to the estimates because invariably the questions come up. You can ask about what's not in the estimates. So if you were to invite the minister to discuss the the mandate letter, generally that's unrestricted questioning on anything, because you can always question a minister about what's not in the mandate letter and why it's not in the mandate letter. I'd want clarification on what exactly the scope of the questioning is that Mark proposes, recognizing that generally when you call the minister you can ask the minister almost anything because of that general approach to questioning.

● (1645)

The Chair: Okay, is there any further discussion on this particular motion? For the sake of clarity I'm going to read that motion again for everyone. It is that the minister appear before the committee to discuss his mandate letter as soon as possible.

Should I say, "the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans" or should I just say, "the committee"?

A voice: That's okay.

The Chair: All right. I have to make sure I get this right.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: All right, before we conclude, Thursday, I propose we talk about committee business.

Good.

All right, folks, thanks for putting up with me for the first one. We'll see you on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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