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Chair

Mr. Scott Simms

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• (1000)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

First of all, I'd like to apologize to our guests for the delay. We had an issue to deal with in committee business.

This is meeting 69 of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the Oceans Act's marine protected areas.

Before we start, I want to introduce our witnesses. They are both joining us by video conference from the west coast, so it's particularly early for them.

Good morning—I mean that in the truest sense of “good morning”—and thank you for joining us at this early hour.

Kevin Obermeyer is chief executive officer for the Pacific Pilotage Authority, and Donna Spalding is director of administration for the Cruise Lines International Association.

Normally we ask that you provide us with a statement of up to 10 minutes. You don't have to take the 10 minutes, but you certainly can discuss the issue at hand and why we invited you. We'll give you each time, then we'll go to a round of questioning from our members of Parliament representing three parties.

I'll call on Mr. Obermeyer first, please.

Captain Kevin Obermeyer (Chief Executive Officer, Pacific Pilotage Authority): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I'm pleased to have been asked to join you for a brief discussion this morning about the use of marine protected areas in the management and protection of Canada's west coast.

As brief background on who we are, the Pacific Pilotage Authority is a federal crown corporation tasked with providing a safe and efficient marine pilotage system on the west coast of Canada. We supply marine pilots to all vessels over 350 gross tonnes. A pilot's primary duty is to take the conduct of the vessel while in compulsory waters and bring it from open water to alongside a dock in a safe and efficient manner. Pilots see themselves as stewards of the environment, and always have the safety of the vessel and the protection of the environment foremost on their minds.

The compulsory pilotage area on the west coast of Canada extends from Washington state in the south to the Alaskan border in the

north, and includes all the waters of the Salish Sea and the Inside Passage. Basically, as a rule of thumb, if you extend every major point of land on the west coast by about two miles and join them all together, that's our area of jurisdiction. I have supplied a chartlet with these opening notes. Hopefully the committee can see it.

The advantage of such a large jurisdiction is that we have to be consulted on all new projects or significant changes in operation. This gives us the opportunity to conduct risk assessments and/or simulations—firstly, to ensure that a particular project is feasible from a navigational safety perspective, and secondly, to put in place mitigators if the level of safety required is lacking in some areas.

Over the past several years, the authority has been involved either directly or indirectly in the Pacific north coast integrated management area, or PNCIMA, which everybody knows; in a number of marine partnership initiatives, otherwise known as MaPPs; in the Scott Islands wildlife protection area; and in the glass sponge reefs marine protected area, just to name a few. In addition, there has recently been a Parks Canada initiative to institute a national marine conservation area in the southern Gulf Islands and the Haro Strait area. We were not consulted on this initiative at all.

There is an increasing need for a holistic coastal management system that is open and transparent and that meets both the environmental needs and the goals of international and local trade. For several years now, we have seen a multitude of initiatives being put forward by various groups and departments with very little interaction and synergy between those groups and departments. We were therefore gratified to see that the ministers' mandate letters contained a directive to work together on a number of initiatives.

The Oceans Act refers to Canada's promotion of the “integrated management of oceans and marine resources”. To us, the key word in this is “integrated”. This is really the only way to manage the various competing interests and protect the ecosystems. In our view, integrated means managing the ecosystems as well as the various human activities in the area, which of necessity should include commercial shipping.

The protection of the coastal environment is extremely important, and will only be achieved if there is a balanced approach with all aspects, including Canada's need to trade and keeping gateways to our international markets open. The ports of Vancouver and Prince Rupert are the gateways to trade in Canada on the west coast and jointly handle more than 50% of the total trade in the country. As such, they need to be protected just as much as the pristine west coast environment. It is not as easy as some would think to relocate a transportation network.

Part of integrated management should mean conducting risk assessments on the marine traffic corridors, especially if there is pressure being brought to bear to move them as a result of the protection of a particular ecosystem. The assessment should include route planning that considers vessel manoeuvring characteristics, the nature of the geographic area, and the ability of vessels of a particular size to move safely in the new area. It should as well look at spill response planning and reaction times.

We fully expect that the oceans protection plan will include several new planning initiatives that will manage vessel movements, including the possible introduction of navigational corridors that take into consideration the concerns of coastal and indigenous communities.

• (1005)

In closing, I'd like to offer the following thoughts with regard to any marine protected areas under consideration.

First, any decisions to designate a particular area must be made based on factual scientific information, and not as a result of pressure by a particular community or interest group using the process for their own agenda.

Second, the use of technology should be embraced and utilized as a means of addressing specific issues of concern and for the protection of a species.

Third, we must ensure that the integrated management process is fully inclusive and addresses environmental concerns, indigenous and community concerns, as well as the need to ensure that Canada remains an international trading nation with access to the international market through the ports system.

Fourth, all relevant departments must work in an integrated manner in the planning process as soon as an area is considered for designation. There have been failures in the past as a result of federal departments operating in silos. While I do not believe this will happen again, given the various mandate letters, it needs to be kept in mind.

Last, I want to mention that the ports are vulnerable to U.S. competition now more than ever. Any deterioration in our level of service as a result of increased costs due to an MPA implementation could be utilized to erode the Canadian competitive advantage.

Thank you for the invitation to address you. I appreciate the opportunity.

The Chair: We thank you very much, Mr. Obermeyer.

Now we go to Ms. Spalding from the Cruise Lines International Association.

Ms. Spalding, you have up to 10 minutes, please.

Ms. Donna Spalding (Director, Administration, Cruise Lines International Association): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for allowing me to address you this morning.

My comments are provided from the perspective of the member lines of the Cruise Lines International Association, and more specifically us here in Vancouver, where we manage, across Canada,

North West & Canada. We represent the geographical areas of Canada, Alaska, Washington state, and Hawaii. In this role, we are afforded the opportunity for consultation and the ability to offer comment on a wide range of similar scenarios in various areas. Currently we have 13 member cruise companies, with 28 ships sailing on the west coast and 27 ships sailing on the east coast of Canada.

Collectively, the economic benefit of the cruise industry and its passengers was \$3.2 billion in direct and indirect spending in Canada in 2016, providing 23,000 jobs and paying just over \$1 billion in salaries and wages.

Protection of the environment, both coastal and ocean, is one of the most important considerations for the member lines of CLIA. They support the objective of cohesive planning and management approaches that protect important resources. This outlook goes hand in hand with the environmental objectives of our member lines, and ensures that their guests can enjoy and appreciate the beauty of the Canadian coast. The importance of recognizing the need for a balanced approach ensures a predictable and stable business environment, which is imperative as decisions and management plans are made and developed.

Within the current focus of western Canada, we have been involved in past consultations related to the MPA network objectives for the northern shelf bioregion. We recognize the importance of the goals to protect Canada's oceans, coasts, and waterways to ensure that they remain healthy and in place for future generations. Through these consultations, we have come to understand the objectives of the principles for developing and implementing a sustainable management plan, although at times in the past we have seen the process appear to be fractured and without synergy across relative departments.

Our member lines' policies and practices toward environmental regulation and stewardship meet and often exceed those of the regions they visit. The cruise lines have participated in the development of regulations with the Canadian federal government around the use of advanced technology in areas including recycling and solid waste management, waste-water treatment, and the use of low-sulphur fuels and emission purification systems to improve air emissions. This represents a small number of the initiatives employed by the cruise lines to protect the important ecosystems where they sail. We believe it is imperative that plans or decisions are based on factual scientific information, the availability of technology, and consideration of the challenges that the lack of this planning would bring to bear on the operations of our member lines.

We are encouraged by the coordinating objectives of the oceans protection plan, and see it as the opportunity to develop integrated, holistic coastal management plans that are open and transparent, bringing together a range of relevant stakeholders and governments to collaborate and develop practical and actionable plans. We believe the integrated management of oceans and marine resource planning, including marine protected areas, is an important initiative to manage sustainable human activity and conditions to support the continued economic benefit of the cruise industry in Canada.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning. I look forward to any questions you might have.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Spalding, for that. We appreciate it.

We now go to our MPs, to my colleagues, to ask questions. They will each get seven minutes in the first round, followed by a round of five-minute questions. We'll go to the government side first, the Liberal Party.

Ms. Jordan, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Actually, Mr. Chair, I'm going to pass to Mr. Hardie first.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Hardie, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you very much, and welcome. I hope the weather remains good out on the west coast. We had that nice downpour of rain there for a few days to lighten the load a little bit. I'll be on my way out on Friday to take in some things.

The intent of this study is to really examine the criteria for setting up a marine protected area. This is the essence of the motion that our colleague Mr. Arnold put forward a number of months ago. Looking at the world through your lens, what do you feel should be the criteria when government looks at setting up a marine protected area?

We'll start with you, Mr. Obermeyer.

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

I think the criteria have already been laid out quite adequately. My concern is that they are not always followed. If it's going to be integrated and inclusive, I think it's going to be an extremely good process. But unfortunately in the past, even though those words were out there, they were not always followed, and the majority of the projects that we saw handled were handled in silos without any interaction between the various departments.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'll come back to that point in a second.

Ms. Spalding, can you comment on just the general criteria, from your vantage point, that we should use when we're considering a marine protected area?

Ms. Donna Spalding: I would echo what Kevin said, but I would add that it's very important when identifying a marine protected area and applying criteria to do that to ensure that we're using sound scientific data to identify the reason we're looking for a marine protected area, and at the same time the economic benefits and/or challenges. Important to our membership is that this has to be a predictable environment that allows them to continue their business. They set up their itineraries 18 months to two years in advance. If the sand shifts underneath them, so to speak, then those assets can be moved very quickly, and then we lose that business.

Mr. Ken Hardie: To go back to the point you were making, Mr. Obermeyer, can you give us a more concrete example of something that happened for which there appeared to be disintegration of various government departments and interests?

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: Absolutely.

A few years ago, we had huge success with the Asia-Pacific gateway, but at the same time, PNCIMA was being run by a different department. Initially PNCIMA did not involve any of the Transport Canada people. The result was that it came across the board to the marine industry as being very one-sided. While everyone understands and believes that protection of the environment is paramount, we can't forget about the fact that we are a trading nation and that the two need to be hand in hand.

Mr. Ken Hardie: When we were visiting Prince Rupert a few months ago now and speaking with some of the interests there, I got the impression that there are not necessarily finite shipping lanes, per se, where the bulk of the traffic is going to go. That may be more a function of there being more open water up toward Prince Rupert, whereas going through the Inside Passage or the straits does tend to constrain your traffic.

Mr. Obermeyer, is there a well-managed shipping lane present in the south coast? And what do you see as the future pressures on that if trade continues to grow?

• (1015)

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: There are actually two parts to that. The two parts are those vessels under marine pilots' care and those that are involved in the domestic trade, such as the tug and barge traffic. The larger vessels under pilotage do have specific shipping lanes that they tend to follow. That is not always the case with the domestic traffic with a shallower draft and the ability to move in many other areas.

We are presently working with the pilots group to actually formalize the traffic areas so that as you move forward through the MPAs, those can be presented and everybody will be able to see exactly where certain-sized vessels will be able to travel and where they won't be able to travel.

In Prince Rupert specifically, there are three traffic lanes that we use, but they are not formalized. They are not IMO approved as they are in the south.

Mr. Ken Hardie: All right.

When we look at marine protected areas, certainly one of the things we think about is having zones, either across the entire area or at least in part of it, where there is no activity, period. In other cases, certain activities can take place, such as fishing at a certain depth, and certainly for the passage of larger vessels such as the ones you two represent.

Talk to me about the vessels. What is the age of the fleet right now? What technologies or advancements have come along, particularly with respect to noise, wake, and some of the other things, and even the use of depth sounding equipment? All of these factors could disturb populations like our southern resident killer whales and other groups. What is technology doing in your industries to reduce your footprint?

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: The technology being used is going to go across the entire gambit, because we get some very old ships that are still safe and still meet all the requirements and transportation regulations, but they are not as technically advanced as some of Donna's cruise ships.

With respect to the noise, it will vary significantly from ship type to ship type. The cruise ships, as an example, have a lot of Azipod vessels. They are electrical and have smaller engines producing electricity that powers a podded system. It's much quieter than an older bulk carrier, with a very large single-propeller engine, coming in to pick up grain.

It will vary. Right now, there is a voluntary study going on in the Haro Strait area and the Georgia Strait where these things are being measured.

All of the industry has been participating at very high percentages to try to get a true sense of what we are dealing with.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

Thank you, Mr. Obermeyer, for your intervention there.

Before we go to the opposition side, I want to welcome our guest Mark Holland.

I know that "Ajax" is in your riding title, but I forget the full title.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax, Lib.): It's just Ajax. That's it.

The Chair: My goodness. That's very good.

Mr. Mark Holland: It keeps it easy for you.

The Chair: Yes, it is easy for me. You can always judge the value of the MP by the size of the riding name.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: No offence.

Mr. Mark Holland: That hurts.

The Chair: Now we go to the opposition side for seven minutes.

Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our guests. I am a B.C. member of Parliament, so I know that it's early for you there.

I know both organizations very well, coming from the transportation industry formerly and having worked with both organizations in terms of the promotion of trade and tourism opportunities for Canada.

I'll direct my first question to you, Mr. Obermeyer. In your presentation, there were a few points that you would like this committee to consider in putting forward our study. On the first point, you said that "any decisions to designate a particular area must be based on factual scientific information", and should not be the result of, I believe the words were, outside "pressure" by a particular community or by special interest groups that were working on "their own agenda". I'm wondering if you can expand on that.

• (1020)

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: Yes, absolutely. Thank you.

The west coast seems to be a little different from coasts across the country. We have a lot of communities that are building up around coastal areas such as the southern Gulf Islands. As an example, we have had anchorages in those areas for over 50 years, but as the gentrification of these areas takes place and we have more

population moving in, people are organizing themselves—in very well-organized groups—and they are opposed to certain activities taking place in what they call their "backyard".

I understand where they're coming from, but what we need to do is ensure that if a group or a trade is moved out because of pressure from groups like these, it really needs to be based on scientific information and not just because they don't like to see a rusty ship sitting in their backyard.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Would you go as far as saying that you're seeing outside influence from other organizations or groups that are influencing perhaps the local community?

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: I think there's been quite a bit of literature on that. We do seem to have a number of NGOs who do receive outside funding. On the west coast we do often wonder what the agenda actually is behind these groups. It's well documented. It's not something that I just suddenly brought up. It's actually taking place—

Mr. Todd Doherty: I appreciate that. Thank you. Pardon the brevity, but I have a number of questions and I only have seven minutes.

This question is to both Ms. Spalding and Mr. Obermeyer, perhaps to Mr. Obermeyer first.

How familiar are you with the proposed legislation that is coming before the House, that being Bill C-55?

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: I have read it a number of times. It's not something that is part of my daily routine, because I operate under a different set of legislation, but I do keep abreast. I know what's in it.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Will that impact your operations, potentially?

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: Potentially, depending on how it is conducted, but we support the tenets of what is being proposed.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Okay.

Ms. Spalding, I pose the same question to you.

Ms. Donna Spalding: I'm not that familiar with it. I have read it. I have tried to assimilate it. My concern is that the ability is wide-sweeping. The result can be unpredictable, and thus we would be faced with changes that would not be beneficial to keeping the business here.

Mr. Todd Doherty: My colleague Mr. Hardie mentioned this study being about the criteria of marine protected areas when considering marine protected areas. It is also about the process that we are looking at. We're studying the process and criteria when the government and stakeholders are considering marine protected areas. Would you say it is a fair comment that the process has been maybe a little fractured in this process overall?

Ms. Donna Spalding: I would agree with you wholly. We faced some five years ago an initiative by Parks for the southern Gulf Islands. We've seen an initiative for the Scott Islands. We see that there are several others on the board. These were followed by PNCIMA, and now we have the northern bioregion biodiversity. Somewhere along there, we didn't identify the whole area and then try to figure out what the individual areas within it were in relationship to how we continue to be who we are in British Columbia.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Okay. I really appreciate that comment.

I'll go to the other comment, and this again is to both of you.

Mr. Obermeyer, you mentioned, and I'm glad you did, domestic versus international, because our large ships follow the international shipping lines, and for domestic there is really no.... I mean, there are paths that they follow, but they're under a lot less strict guidance.

You both mentioned competition. Ms. Spalding, you noted that your carriers, and Mr. Obermeyer, you noted that your customers have opportunities to go south of the border. Canada always must remain a trading nation as well as have our tourism opportunities. Would you say that every consideration must be given in terms of, as we move forward, being very careful as to the steps we take, because both organizations and industries could choose to go elsewhere?

•(1025)

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: That would be a fair statement.

Ms. Donna Spalding: I believe we've already seen it. With regard to cruises, we used to have all of the cruises for Alaska going out of Vancouver. With the changes in ships and the ability to go further in the same amount of time, we've seen half of our business in Vancouver go to Seattle. As we move forward even more, and ships become larger and people's itineraries change a little bit, we're seeing even some of that go further south than Seattle—to San Francisco and Los Angeles.

So yes, they go outside, and then we lose it altogether.

Mr. Todd Doherty: With the measures on the east coast that have been taken to date, are we seeing a reduction or stoppage in cruises, at this point?

Ms. Donna Spalding: Are you referring to the mandatory slowdown for the right whale?

Mr. Todd Doherty: That's correct.

Ms. Donna Spalding: Yes, we are. We've seen a number of ships that have had to change their itinerary and drop ports of call. They simply can't make it in the time they have for the cruise overall. We're seeing that. That's a difficulty with making itineraries. It's a difficulty in providing the itinerary that the guests on board have already paid for and are expecting.

The other thing is that it's unpredictable. We have ships and companies who are looking at it and saying what's going to happen next year, and we don't know. We need—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Spalding. I'm sorry, but you can clarify your statements later, if you wish to add to that. There's no problem there.

Folks, the acronym "PNCIMA" has been thrown around quite a bit here. Just for the sake of clarification for anybody who doesn't know, either here in this room or listening through the vast reaches of our Internet, PNCIMA is the Pacific north coast integrated management area. It's 102,000 square kilometres. It is about conservation and management of human activities on the northwest coast of B.C.

That being said, we'll now go to Mr. Johns for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you.

Good morning to fellow British Columbians. I'm on your time zone; I just got in this morning too. Thanks for joining us today. It's great to see you and to hear your important feedback.

My question is going to be about marine debris and ocean plastics and the significant impact they're having not just on MPAs but on all coastal British Columbians and coastal people and our oceans. We know that the UN and the European Commission and the World Economic Forum all recognize the urgent need to radically design the way we use plastics. Certainly this has an impact on MPAs.

I'll start with you, Donna. Perhaps you could talk about the cruise industry and what actions you're taking to mitigate the single-use plastics and waste going into the important sensitive ecosystems that we cherish.

Ms. Donna Spalding: I've worked with the cruise industry for 20 years now, and the changes I have seen in much of their operations are hugely significant. They take steps as little as.... We look at aluminum beverage cans that usually come with a plastic ring around six cans. Cruise lines won't accept them that way. They simply don't purchase them that way.

We take people on ship tours, environmental ship tours. When we take them to the solid waste handling area, their eyes.... It's amazing what they suddenly realize. Everything that is collected on a cruise ship goes to the solid waste handling area. Every bag, every can, everything is sorted. Everything that can be recycled is recycled. Everything that can be offloaded is offloaded. No plastics go in the ocean.

Mr. Gord Johns: Has there been any consideration given to going straight to an all-out ban, or for the industry to look at that, on single-use plastics? I know that resorts are doing that around the world, and certainly communities are doing that in coastal British Columbia.

•(1030)

Ms. Donna Spalding: I was surprised; I was on a ship tour as recently as last Saturday, and the coffee cup I was handed was made out of paper, not plastic.

Mr. Gord Johns: Excellent. Good.

This is a question along the same thread, Mr. Obermeyer. We just had the largest marine debris spill on the west coast in decades. There is no mention of ocean plastics and marine debris in the ocean protection plan. There is no mechanism to help clean up debris spills. We found that out. We know that we've increased trade with Asia by about 6% a year over the last decade, or probably couple of decades.

Are there any leadership initiatives—I know that you need to be competitive with those ports south of the border—or ways that maybe we could capture a small eco-fee on each trans-cargo shipment unit that could go back into coastal communities to mitigate the impact from marine debris from the shipping industry?

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: The shipping industry right now is under so many fees and levies, including the pilotage fees, which most people think are too high, that with one more fee, I don't know if it will be the one that breaks the camel's back, but I'm sure we will probably get push-back.

I think there are other ways to do it. There are very good associations that have membership on this coast. There is also MARPOL, the IMO regulations to prevent pollution at sea. All of these things are in place and could be followed up on. I'm not sure if an eco-fee going to the communities would greatly benefit those communities. The plastics that I see when I walk along the beaches in Haida Gwaii are not usually from ships and shipping. The plastics that I see in Haida Gwaii are a result of the tsunami in Japan.

Mr. Gord Johns: I don't think it's just the tsunami. I live in a coastal community, and I was born and raised on Vancouver Island. I find running shoes from containers that spilled off, and fridges, as we recently found on our beaches. They are from the shipping industry, actually. We have ghost gear, you're right, and human use, and various different things that are contributing to ocean plastics, but certainly the shipping industry does contribute to it. We do need to find a better way, because coastal communities are on the front line of this increased trade. We're all very proud of the trade, and we want to see it continue to grow, but we need to find a better way to protect marine protected areas and coastal communities so that they can help contribute to cleaning up the fallout from that great success story that we have.

I'll go back to you, Donna. Given the industry's commitment to sustainability, how would the cruise ship industry be able to adapt to ensure that discharges do not affect the ecological integrity of MPAs?

Ms. Donna Spalding: The discharges from cruise ships are highly regulated, from the international level right down to our own Canadian laws. In the use of technology, the cruise ships are ahead of anybody else, and have been for many years, in adopting a technology that cleans waste water to the point where it's like drinking water. Food waste is macerated. It's not mixed. Their discharge lines are not mixed. You have black water, you have grey water, and you have food waste. The rest of the discharges are highly regulated. They have significant standards, and they are managed.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you. I think I have less than a minute left here.

The last question is for you, Mr. Obermeyer. I appreciate Mr. Hardie, my colleague from British Columbia, bringing up the resident killer whales on the south coast. Would it be beneficial for the industry to look at more opportunities to do short-sea shipping, to lessen the impact in terms of noise going through the Juan de Fuca Strait and the Strait of Georgia? Is that something the industry is looking at in terms of expanding, just in terms of reducing the size of vessels that are coming through?

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: The difficulty is that there is not another port at the moment, anywhere other than Vancouver, that can handle the volume and size of vessels.

Mr. Gord Johns: I think Port Alberni has a deep-sea port. Certainly there's a project that's being talked about there, PATH. I know that there are a lot of ideas around that, which would help lower the noise in the strait.

•(1035)

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: Well, from a tug size, and the noise from a tug in barge towing, I don't know for sure whether that is less than some of the very efficient new vessels that come through. I'm

just not sure we have the scientific data to actually say one way or another.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obermeyer.

Thank you, folks. With time dwindling, it looks like this may go over time, so I hope I get your permission to do this. We have time for two more questions, one to the Liberals and one to the Conservatives, to round out this meeting.

First of all, do I have everyone's permission to carry on with the two remaining questions? It will run a few minutes over our time.

Okay. Seeing no objections, we'll go to Mr. McDonald.

You have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'll defer to Mr. Finnigan.

The Chair: Mr. Finnigan, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses for being here at such an early time of day.

I have a couple of questions. On the east coast, as you know, we have had deaths of about 12 or more right whales. I know that has affected your industry. We know that going forward this is not going to go away, due to different reasons. We have large mammals getting injured, and maybe smaller ones that we may not even know about. I guess we haven't determined exactly what the cause of death was, but we know that some of them may have collided with the larger vessels.

To Ms. Spalding, has your industry proposed any solutions, or technology, or anything that can mitigate the harming of those species?

Ms. Donna Spalding: Thank you very much, Mr. Finnigan, for bringing this up.

The use of technology on cruise ships is far and away advanced from a lot of the other shipping. We have proposed to Transport Canada and DFO on both coasts the use of technologies and procedures that are already in place on the coast of Maine with regard to the right whales and in Alaska with regard to larger grey whales.

This involves apps and bridge watch, both of which watch for whales. There's also the use of hydrophones, which listen for the whales and translate that information up to a satellite and down to the ship, so that they know where the whales are and the whales can be avoided. The use of technology is the way forward in managing this resource that we all want to protect on both coasts, whether it's southern resident killer whales or the right whales on the east coast.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you.

I don't know if you have any comments, Mr. Obermeyer.

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: I do. On the west coast, with respect to the resident killer whales, we were proposing that pilots' personal portable pilotage units, which they carry, could be adapted so that if you had an array of sonobuoys, we would be able to know exactly where the various pods were located. Right now we are slowing down virtually every single ship through quite a large area, significantly adding to their time through the water and hopefully reducing the noise signature, but you don't really know whether there are any whales there at the time you are doing this.

Hopefully, if we can get this technology moving ahead, we can then differentiate and slow down when we have to slow down or else keep the speed up if there is nothing in the immediate area.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Obviously the large mammals, and the smaller ones, do not know if they are in U.S. waters or Canadian waters. How do you find the different regulations from one area to another? As it stands now, is it much different from one country to another in terms of being able to practise your trade?

Ms. Donna Spalding: On the protection of whales, whether it's the U.S. or Canada, the specific instances we're discussing are very similar. NOAA is ahead of us. They are the ones who have put some of this infrastructure into place.

On the east coast in Maine, in the right whale sanctuary, there is a system of hydrophones that tell you where the whales are. That information is bounced via satellite, not only to the ships through an app, but to NOAA. When the whales are evident, then they can say to shipping, as we do in Alaska with the grey whales, "The whales are there today, and you need to slow down. This is what's in place." Then, as they move away, the rules are changed.

• (1040)

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you.

Do you have any comment, Mr. Obermeyer?

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: No, I would agree with that.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: With regard to dealing with the first nations on both coasts, what line of communication do you have? Do you find that your industry can certainly work within their traditions and their traditional fishing grounds? Perhaps you could elaborate on that. Both of you, I think, have talked about the first nations.

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: I'll jump in first, then.

The Pilotage Authority and the BC Coast Pilots have been working with the coastal first nations groups for probably the last eight to ten years now. We explain who we are, what we do, and why we do it. It's also a bit of an education and a recruitment program. We do have very good relationships with many of the indigenous groups along the coast.

What I've found is that they are very supportive of marine pilots and what we do. We will act as a conduit. If there's a question or a concern about a particular ship in a particular area, they know who to call, and they frequently do. The relationship is sound and is working.

The only time I had some anxious moments was when the northern gateway was being considered. We had some very good debates around that issue.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Ms. Spalding, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Donna Spalding: No, thank you.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Okay.

That will be all, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the final question, we have Mr. Arnold or Mr. Doherty.

Okay, Mr. Arnold, you have five minutes, please.

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

To our two witnesses, thank you for your early start this morning.

Both of you, Ms. Spalding for sure, made a statement that decisions should be based on factual science. I agree with you that we need to know what it is we're doing, and why we're doing it, before we do something. But I want to draw your attention to a line in the summary of Bill C-55 with regard to the Oceans Act. It states:

This enactment amends the Oceans Act to, among other things,

(d) provide that the Governor in Council and Minister cannot use the lack of scientific certainty regarding the risks posed by any activity as a reason to postpone or refrain from exercising their powers or performing their duties and functions under subsection 35(3) or 35.1(2);

Does this raise a concern for you that the minister or the Governor in Council could implement changes, restrictions, or MPAs in an area without scientific reasoning to do so?

Ms. Donna Spalding: Mr. Arnold, thank you for the question. Without being critical, I think we've already seen that happen with regard to the right whales on the east coast. Transport Canada has indicated to us, as has DFO, that they don't have a lot of scientific data. We know that there are 12 whales who have met unfortunate ends this year. Many of those are entanglements with fishing gear, not necessarily ship strikes.

We respect the action that has been taken. Don't get us wrong for one minute. We work with it as much as we can. Our concern is for going forward. If we don't take the scientific data that we have, as little as that may be, and try to work with those people who actually are out there, the shipping companies, the ships themselves.... The use of technology and the use of monitoring by individual ships can add to that data, and we can mitigate some of those impacts.

When we get to an MPA on the west coast, it's a little different. We have some initiatives going forward on the west coast that many people do not agree with. They don't agree with them... because it's not what they agree with. We'll talk about oil tankers; just put it out on the table.

Things in shipping have changed drastically over the years. I remember 30-odd years ago we had a ship in Alaska that was a single hull and there was a horrendous oil spill. We don't have those ships here anymore. We don't have ships that dump waste that hasn't been treated. We don't have ships that dump garbage. Everybody is watching now. We see people on cruise ships taking pictures of things as they happen, and it hits social media. You can't afford to dirty the waters where you sail.

• (1045)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Have you been consulted on, or have you been able to provide, information and data, such as whale sightings and locations, to DFO, Coast Guard, and so on? And have you offered up other technology you might have?

I'll leave that open for either of you to reply to.

Ms. Donna Spalding: We have offered it up, and yes, we do it in other areas. We do it in Alaska, through a system similar to what Mr. Obermeyer was suggesting for the pilotage units. We do it with outlooks on bridge watch teams. They see the whales. It goes to the forest service in Glacier Bay. The forest service has a blog. Everybody signs up for the blog. It's an immediate notification on the ships system and on the pilots system.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Have you offered that same type of information up in Canada, and has it been accepted or refused?

Ms. Donna Spalding: Yes, sir, we have. They appreciate knowing about it, but we're not getting anywhere past the idea. We just have to slow ships down so they make less noise. The use of technology, for that to happen, will take years to install on ships.

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: I would concur with those remarks. We've also offered it up.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Has it been accepted or used?

Capt Kevin Obermeyer: So far, no.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. I have to stop you there.

We now come to a conclusion. We want to thank our special guests from the Pacific Pilotage Authority, Kevin Obermeyer, and also from the Cruise Lines International Association, Ms. Donna Spalding.

You were early risers this morning. We thank you for doing that and for helping out in our study.

To our special guests—Mr. Holland, Mr. Badawey, and Mr. Johns—thank you.

Colleagues, we'll see you on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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