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Chair

Mr. Ken McDonald

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we will have a briefing on the reports of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, spring 2018.

Before we begin the official part of it, I will welcome some fill-in members.

Mr. Albrecht, member for Kitchener—Conestoga, welcome. It's an area that I am very familiar with. I have family in that area and visit there often.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Come and visit.

The Chair: I certainly will.

As well, we have somebody who is no stranger to this committee, Mr. Sopuck member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa.

Welcome back. I look forward to your participation.

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

The Chair: Today, of course, we have the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, Julie Gelfand. Accompanying her is Sharon Clark, principal.

Ms. Gelfand, I understand you're going to start off with a statement, and then we'll go into a round of questioning. Begin when you're ready.

Ms. Julie Gelfand (Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Office of the Auditor General): Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I am pleased to be here today to discuss my report on salmon farming, which was presented to Parliament in April 2018.

I am accompanied by Sharon Clark, the principal responsible for this audit.

[English]

In our audit, we examined whether Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency oversaw the salmon farming industry in order to protect wild fish. This industry creates

risks for wild fish, including exposure to diseases, drugs and pesticides.

We found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada did conduct research on these and other risks. We also found that the department determined where salmon farms could be located or expanded and under what conditions farms could operate. However, we found that the department had completed only one out of 10 risk assessments of key known diseases that it had committed to conducting by 2020 in response to the recommendations of the Cohen commission.

We have noted that the department announced last month that it has launched a second risk assessment to examine the risk of a piscine orthoreovirus, or PRV, transfer from farmed Atlantic salmon. These assessments do not include addressing the risks of new and emerging diseases.

[Translation]

Fisheries and Oceans Canada was also not monitoring the health of wild fish. As a result of the assessment and monitoring gaps, the department did not know the impacts that salmon farming was having on the health of wild fish. In our view, consistent with the precautionary principle, this gives even more importance to assessing actions that could harm wild fish.

We found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada did not adequately enforce compliance with salmon farming regulations. Enforcing compliance is important since the regulations are designed to protect wild fish.

As well, the department had not set limits on the amount of drugs and pesticides that fish farms can use to treat diseases and parasites. This is important because drugs and pesticides used in salmon farming can harm wild fish, especially those living on the ocean floor. The department also had no national standard for nets and other equipment to prevent escapes from fish farms.

• (1535)

[English]

These findings led us to conclude that Fisheries and Oceans Canada had not managed risks from salmon farming in a way that protected wild fish.

Among our recommendations we stated that the department should clearly articulate the level of risk to wild fish that it accepts when enabling the salmon farming industry. We also recommended that the department establish thresholds for the deposit of drugs and pesticides into net pens, so that harm to wild fish is minimized.

That concludes my opening statement. We'd be pleased to answer any questions the committee might have.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, and with three and a half minutes to spare, that's what we love to see. It leaves more time for questions.

We'll start off, of course, with the government side.

Mr. Hardie, you have seven minutes.

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

Thank you, Ms. Gelfand and Ms. Clark.

Obviously aquaculture is a big, divisive issue on the west coast. People look at the economic benefits. They also consider estimates that 80% of the salmon being exported from British Columbia is farmed, which says perhaps something about the vitality of the industry there, or it may say something about the state of the wild salmon, which, of course, is a serious concern to the first nations and indigenous people, so it's a very iconic species, obviously.

Certainly there are specifics around chinook salmon as the feed for the southern resident killer whales and the health of that stock.

On top of that, you overlay the fact that you have Canada's busiest port there, and shipping traffic is increasing.

The Cohen commission report recommended that aquaculture be basically taken out of the realm of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. There was, in Mr. Justice Cohen's opinion, a conflict between the application of the precautionary principle and an obligation—that's not the correct word—but certainly the role that DFO was supposed to have to basically promote the aquaculture industry.

Can you comment on that?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's a policy question. It's really up to Parliament to decide where the regulation of aquaculture should sit. Should it sit within DFO, or I've heard potentially it should go to agriculture, for example—

Mr. Ken Hardie: —or have its own regime.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: —or somewhere else.

What I can tell you is we found in our audit that Fisheries and Oceans Canada is at risk for claims that it prioritizes aquaculture over the protection of wild fish. The reason you could say that it's at risk of this is that, for example, there's no threshold for action when wild fish stocks decline. There's no limit at which point the department then kicks into gear. There's no validation of industry self-reporting on the use of drugs and pesticides, no requirement to minimize the development of resistance to drugs and pesticides, no requirement to monitor the ocean floor underneath these pens, little enforcement of the regulations, and even the funding of research, you could argue.... We found this in our audit. The long-term funding is given to promote aquaculture; the short-term funding is to work on regulations.

I think it's at risk of being seen to be promoting because it hasn't clearly defined these limits so it is at risk.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Let me pose the question in a slightly different way.

Your report highlights quite a large number of gaps between what the DFO should reasonably be expected to do and what they are able to do. I think the capability is there, but the resources have gone through ups and downs over many years. With so much not being done, and so much not known conclusively, it would appear that the risk management regime that DFO is supposed to apply is shot full of holes, which certainly must run headlong straight into the precautionary principle and that obligation.

Would you agree?

• (1540)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Well, I would suggest that one of our recommendations was that they need to articulate the level of risk to wild fish that it accepts when enabling the industry. They need to show us how they apply the precautionary principle. We made a recommendation to that, and I believe they agreed with that.

That's really their call.

Mr. Ken Hardie: If I can interrupt you, what they agreed to, is the department applies the precautionary approach, where appropriate, as a subcomponent within an overall decision-making approach.

This seems to run a bit contrary to public expectation that the precautionary principle should reign supreme. First of all, make sure it's safe before you do anything. Clearly, the risk management regime in place right now isn't capable of determining whether or not these aquaculture operations are safe in and around the wild salmon population.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Obviously, we've identified many gaps. If you're asking what the department should do, or how they respond, that's really a question to ask them. I encourage you to bring them to your committee and ask that very question.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We have and I'm sure that my colleagues and I will.

In your audit, did you consider the role that might be played by organizations and, in some cases, individuals outside of the DFO structure? I'm thinking particularly of indigenous people, where we have long heard that local knowledge isn't necessarily given as much weight as perhaps it should be, given that those folks live there and have a material interest in the health of, not only the wild salmon stocks, but in fact, the aquaculture industry itself.

On an ongoing basis, I'm also concerned that the aquaculture industry demonstrates a very deep lack of transparency. When it comes to critics like Alexandra Morton, who would like to come in and do the testing on things like PRV, basically, she is thrown off the property every time she tries to do that. She has to go and buy salmon at Granville Island, I think, to do the testing. That's a concern.

Did that whole realm enter into your audit of this?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: My mandate is that all I'm permitted to audit is the role of the government in managing aquaculture, so the objective of our audit was to see whether they were properly managing aquaculture in order to prevent harm to wild fish. That was the audit objective and I'm only allowed to audit the federal government. I can't audit industry and I don't audit the aboriginal groups or any other peoples.

In the next audit, you'll see that, for marine mammals, we did talk about how NGOs do help and participate in disentangling large whales, for example. We mention that, but it's not something that we have the mandate to audit.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

We'll move to the Conservative side.

Mr. Sopuck, you have seven minutes.

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

Commissioner, a number of years ago, when I was on the fisheries committee, we did a study of closed containment aquaculture and of course, we got a lot of people who came before us strongly recommending that the industry move to strictly closed containment aquaculture.

In your view, if there was a move to strictly closed containment aquaculture, would any of the issues that you flagged in your report disappear?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Closed containment is already used to raise them to a certain size. I believe that is correct and then they're put into the pens. Closed containment also costs a lot of money. It uses a lot of energy. However, it would probably deal with many of the risks to wild salmon, just because there wouldn't be any contact anymore. It would be logical to assume that, if they were being farmed and there was no interaction with either the ocean floor or any other wild species, including wild salmon, that most of those risks would disappear.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Of course, in terms of the ocean floor, my understanding is that these net pens are moved on a fairly regular basis. From a study that we did those few years ago, I recall that I asked specifically about the ocean floor and the recovery time was about three years for the ocean floor. The effect of a net pen on the ocean floor is clearly temporary, just like a clear cut is a temporary event in a forest.

Given the state of wild fish stocks around the world, especially high seas ocean fish stocks that are in deep trouble, can we make the conclusion that every farmed fish that is sold is one less wild salmon that needs to be caught?

• (1545)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I believe in our audit we indicate that approximately—and I'm going to say 50%, but it might be more—of the fish that we are consuming worldwide are farmed. This industry is an important source of protein worldwide and much of the fish that we're eating is farmed at this point. I can't go that far, but I can tell you it's obvious that farmed fish is important. I can't remember what paragraph it's in—right at the beginning.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's fine. I accept that.

I think this is a devilishly difficult question; it is not easy, given for example that in terrestrial environments, when there are farmed elk we have the outbreak of CWD. I know that's not necessarily germane to this, but when wild animals are put in closed environments, there can be some issues.

That said, however, bison—a wild species—are raised in closed environments, and they seem to do very well. Among fish, the shellfish do well, and we have other fish, such as tilapia and we have this issue.

This is not an easy issue for anybody, and I'm constantly amazed at people who make absolutely definitive statements that a net pen must go based on very tenuous information. On the other hand, I think you have flagged some very important issues that need to be looked at.

Interestingly, off the coast of B.C., net pen aquaculture started in 1985, based on the limited research that I did. Yet in 2010, 2014 and 2018, the sockeye salmon runs in the Fraser were at absolute record levels, and basically in 2014 they blew the doors off, to use the vernacular, in terms of the number of wild sockeye salmon returning there.

Can you comment on this phenomenon, the co-existence of net pen aquaculture and great spikes in fish runs?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: No, we didn't look at that issue.

I agree with you that this is a complicated issue. This is an industry valued at almost \$1 billion just in Canada. It's providing a huge source of protein, yet at the same time, there are risks to wild fish. I did not look at the interaction between them.

All we looked at was whether the department was managing this industry in a way to prevent harm to wild fish, because they're also responsible for the Fisheries Act and thus for managing our wild fish. That's the interaction we were looking at.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Would you agree, though, that the one and only question that means anything is what the effect is on wild fish, that nothing else really matters?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That is what we looked at. Are they protecting wild fish, both on the floor—because even though there are three years of impact, potentially, there's no requirement for any industry to monitor the ocean floor during those three years....

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Well, I'll push back a little bit on that. The fact that there was environmental change doesn't mean it's negative.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: No.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I go back to the clear-cut example: those trees come back. Yes, you may get negative effects on the ocean floor in a very small area for a short period of time, but the recovery time is three years.

In point number seven you said that the department has not set limits on the amounts of drugs and pesticides that fish farms can use to treat.

Let me say, as somebody who represents a farming community, that the farmer decides which legal pesticide to use and uses the amount that's required, based on the infestation of a given pathogen or fungus. How can the department set limits when, let's say, there's a heavy or a light infestation of sea lice and the operator of the net pen has to make a decision on the amount of the pesticide they need to use? How could the department ever regulate that?

I'm making the assumption that the product being used has been tested and is legal and is being used according to the directions.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We made a similar assumption. We did not include that part in our audit. What we found is that Fisheries and Oceans Canada doesn't know whether the current regulations regarding drugs and pesticides are adequate. They don't know, for example, whether they need more rules regarding cumulative effects. They don't actually know whether the regulations are adequate and therefore haven't set any thresholds.

• (1550)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Let me very quickly ask a short question.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Are these pesticides approved by PMRA?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We didn't look into that, but we would have assumed that they were approved by—

Ms. Sharon Clark (Principal, Office of the Auditor General): Health Canada.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: —Health Canada. That's who's responsible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

Now we go to Mr. Donnelly from the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, environment commissioner, and your team for your great work on this.

Obviously, I've been looking forward to hearing the outcome of your report, and I'm alarmed at some of the things you've reported on about what's not happening with the department. I just point to your point four, where you say that the department has only completed one out of 10 risk assessments of key known diseases that it had committed to.

The federal government has been telling Canadians and me for years that there is no proof that the salmon farming industry is harming wild salmon. How the heck can they know that? Because they haven't been doing the adequate testing to prove it. Then you go on to say in your report—and I know others have brought this issue forward—that the department did not know the impacts that salmon farming was having on the health of wild fish. In our view, consistent with the precautionary principle, this gives even more importance to assessing actions that could harm wild fish.

I'm thinking specifically what the issue has been in the public. My colleague referenced researchers like Alexandra Morton and others. Piscine orthoreovirus, PRV, has been brought up as a key concern. It's a concern in other jurisdictions around the world. We're very concerned that if it comes here to the Pacific, it's not only going to

impact the farmed salmon, but it's also going to impact the wild salmon.

I believe you're telling us that the government isn't doing the proper testing to even know this. Maybe you could comment on this.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We found they had committed to completing 10 risk assessments of two diseases. At the time of our audit, they had only completed one of them, but they apparently have a plan to complete the other nine by 2020. We made a recommendation that they complete their planned health risk assessments. That is absolutely an issue.

There are a couple of other issues. I believe that not monitoring the health of wild fish to see whether there is an impact when you have a big industry going on is a huge issue, if not one of the biggest issues. There was another issue I was going to bring up, and of course it has slipped my mind.

They are doing research. I don't want to give you the sense that they're not doing anything.

They're not looking at new and emerging diseases. They are doing some work. They've done research on the effects of disease and parasite transmission. They are looking at the effects of drugs and pesticides, drug interactions. They do have a plan to complete these nine out of 10 risk assessments on these key diseases, but they have a year and a half left to do it, and they have only done one in the last little while.

There is reason to be concerned.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: A plan is one thing, but I go back to where the government has been telling Canadians already that it's not a problem because there's no proof that it's a problem. However, they don't have a leg to stand on if they aren't able to say they've been doing the testing and the testing shows conclusively that there is no impact.

I'm not talking about the last three years. I'm going back to the last nine years. Some of my colleagues on this committee will remember in different Parliaments we had studies on sea lice and then we had studies on—we were at that point talking about new and emerging diseases and viruses like PRV and others that were impacting.... At that time, researchers were saying that this is a concern. That should have been a flag for the department to be on that and being able to say conclusively.... You're telling me that their plan is now to start looking at this issue in 2018. That is a concern.

The last point I want to ask for your comment on is the precautionary principle. You raised it here. Is it not the law that businesses and industry need to be operating within the precautionary approach if there isn't the evidence that they know this is harming or may not be harming wild salmon?

• (1555)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I want to make something clear.

They do look at diseases. They've looked at one out of 10, and they have a plan to get the other nine out of 10 done by 2020. They're not looking at new and emerging diseases. That is obviously a concern, but to say they're not doing anything on that issue I think goes a bit too far.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: That's on PRV.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: On PRV, yes. They've just announced it last month.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Could you tell us the other eight?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Off the top of my head, I can't. We could get that for you.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: That would be great.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We think, and we made a recommendation, that they need to articulate the level of risk to wild fish that they're prepared to accept, given that they're also allowing this aquaculture industry to operate.

I think they're at risk because they have, as I said before, no action for when wild fish stocks decline. They have no threshold at which point they say, "Stop." Other jurisdictions have stopped on the west coast. Alaska has stopped and Washington has stopped. The only place where we can have aquaculture now, off the entire coast of North America, is off the coast of B.C.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: The south coast.

The last point is that the Province of British Columbia is also looking at turning to the federal government and relying on it, because it has the majority of the jurisdiction in the area of salmon farming, for accurate science and proof that it's not harming the wild salmon, the commercial fishing industry or the sport fishing industry and recreation. They play a key role. The province is recognizing it. First nations are turning to good science and the federal government to be able to say that this industry is not harming wild salmon. As my colleague has raised, it's a key issue on the west coast, for sure.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: And your question is...?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: It's more of a comment.

I have probably five seconds to make the note that Kuterra, which is an operation on the west coast, says energy costs are not even in their top three major operating costs.

You made a comment about the energy costs being high. They don't even have it in their top three. Things have changed and they're going quickly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

We're going back to the government side, Mr. Finnigan.

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

Thank you to the commissioner for doing this important study.

I am from the east coast of New Brunswick. It's an important industry for my region. Having said that, was part of your mandate to look at the impacts of land-based versus the whole environmental impact that would bring, whether it's energy use, other environmental effects, or waste?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: No. That was not part of our audit. We did not compare land-based. We're just telling you what is out there in the public domain. We did not look at that.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: In New Brunswick and elsewhere, there have been several incidents of pesticide events and escapees. I'm really

surprised to hear that there are no standards for escapees, for instance.

I'm from the Miramichi region where the original stock of authentic salmon still exists, although it's being threatened and the numbers are going down every year. That can always be a threat to that species. I'm really surprised by that.

Can you tell us why that hasn't been done? How come there are no standards or regulations to cover that?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's a great question to ask the department. What we can tell you is that it's operated differently on each coast. It's regulated differently. On the east coast, it's the provinces that are regulating aquaculture, and on the west coast it's the federal government.

The federal government and B.C. require their companies to follow standards for net support structures and for anchoring systems, but this is not the case in Newfoundland and New Brunswick, which are the two provinces that we looked at, because the provinces are responsible for licensing those operations. We actually made a recommendation that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada should initiate discussions with their counterparts in the Atlantic provinces to address the quality and maintenance of equipment to prevent fish escapes because, yes, there have been more fish escapes on the east coast than on the west coast. There are no national standards, but that's because there are two different levels of government.

I should just add that we didn't look at the issue of salmon aquaculture in Nova Scotia, and the reason is that the Auditor General of Nova Scotia has recently done an audit on that. If anybody's from Nova Scotia, that would be the place to look. That's why we didn't look at it, because it had already been looked at by the Auditor General of Nova Scotia.

•(1600)

Mr. Pat Finnigan: To me, that is where a lot of the problem lies. It's the administration and regulations, who does what, whether it's provincial or federal jurisdiction, and it's different in every province. Was that part of your recommendation, that we standardize who looks after what?

We hear a lot of the aquaculture industry saying that they should be under Agriculture because they do farming. If it's land-based, I can understand, but if it's in the water, I'm sure that there are other impacts from the DFO.

Do you think that would be a good, valuable recommendation, to make it one policy across the country?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It would really be up to parliamentarians to decide that. That's your job.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: It would be up to us.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: My job is that once you tell me there is a law, I can tell you how well it has been implemented.

You could pick up a law that says we want monkeys to jump all over the buildings. Let's say you pass that law. I could tell you how well monkeys are doing jumping around the buildings, but I can't actually make a recommendation that says you shouldn't have monkeys jumping on the buildings. That's your job. You pass the law.

When Parliament passes the law, my job is to tell you whether or not it's being properly implemented.

In this case, I'm allowed to audit the federal government. I can make a comment in our audit, which we did and which said we can't really look too much at the east coast because the feds are not really involved very much on the east coast. It's mainly the provinces.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Have you looked at other countries and jurisdictions? How do we compare? Are we the bad industry? How do we compare with the industry in Europe and elsewhere?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I don't believe we did very much benchmarking in this study. We audited our government and how well our government is doing implementing the rules that it has initiated.

Ms. Sharon Clark: Given the different situations with different countries, it was difficult to compare apples and oranges.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: In your opinion, do you think that we can regulate the industry to be sustainable and safe? Do you think it's possible? Can we prevent the escapes? Can we make sure there are no illegal pesticides? Can we monitor the waste on the bottom? Is that possible to a point where we could say that we finally got it and it can be done?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's a great question. We didn't audit that question.

We audited how well the federal government is implementing the regulations that it has already put in place. We've identified a series of key risks and we made a series of recommendations. If those recommendations were implemented, if we were monitoring all of these things and if we had regulations that we knew were working, perhaps we could get there.

It's not for me to opine on that. I can only tell you what's in our audit, and what we looked at was how well the federal government was doing implementing the aquaculture regulations that it has in place.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Are we increasing the land-based production side of it? Do you know if it's ever going to be a viable option?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We didn't look at that. We do indicate in our audit that many fish farms start off with small fish in those land-based containment areas and then they are transferred into the big pens, but we did not audit that specifically.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you so much for your work.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Finnigan.

Now we'll go back to the Conservative side for five minutes.

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you both for being here today.

I'll cut right to the chase. How quickly are net pen aquaculture practices changing? How much is government trying to catch up to those changes and best practices? For example, on the treatment for sea lice, I've heard recently about moving the fish into a barge filled with fresh water to shed the sea lice, or hydrogen peroxide treatments. How much catch-up is being done and how quickly is it changing?

• (1605)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Again, I can only audit the federal government's role in this, not necessarily the industry's role.

It's possible there are new techniques being used by the industry, but that's not something I can audit. I can only say, "Here's what the government said. Here are all the regulations. Are you following those regulations? Are you properly implementing what the government has already put in place?"

Mr. Mel Arnold: We don't know if the government is up to speed with the latest best practices—

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I don't think I can say that, but—

Ms. Sharon Clark: We looked at what they have in place to control for diseases and pesticides including sea lice.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Just pesticides?

Ms. Sharon Clark: We looked at diseases, pathogens and pesticides, so we comment on how well they're doing that. That includes controlling for sea lice.

Mr. Mel Arnold: You didn't look at whether they're doing the hydrogen peroxide treatments or the freshwater treatments?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: No. That's an industry practice rather than a federal government regulation.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It's still a federal government regulation to make sure they are not contaminating the sea floor, the ocean bed, or causing risk to wild fish.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: They're not monitoring the health of wild fish, right? There's no requirement to minimize the development of resistance to disease and pesticides. There are no limits on the amount of pesticides and drugs that are used, so these are all potential risks to wild fish.

Mr. Mel Arnold: But if they're moving away from that practice, is anyone paying attention to it?

Ms. Sharon Clark: They implemented the aquaculture activity regulations in order to control for drugs and pesticides for diseases and pathogens, so we comment on what's working and what's not working that well in that area. Julie spoke about that earlier.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I keep hearing the same answer. Nobody's checking or following the new developments and the new best practices.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Definitely, they're not dealing with new and emerging diseases, so they have no way to deal with that, which is a concern, because they're in these big pens together, and they have no assessment practices to deal with that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: That leads to the next question I have, and I have many.

The key diseases that you mentioned, it sounds like they're possibly not all of the potential risks that are out there. Am I correct in reading your report that no one seems to be looking at emerging diseases?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's absolutely correct.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Can you explain why that would be?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: You'd have to ask the department why it's not dealing with new and emerging diseases.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Bring the department here.

Mr. Mel Arnold: In your report, it says:

However, we found that the Department and the Agency did not have a formal process to share information about aquatic animal health. Agency officials noted that they shared information with Department officials at headquarters, but that this was not always transmitted to Department staff in the regions. In our view, information sharing was critical to ensure that the Agency and the Department were working together effectively to control the disease risks associated with aquaculture.

Does this mean that the scientific information and conclusions, or animal health decisions from CFIA provided to DFO were not channelled to DFO for the personnel to react?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I'm going to pass that to Sharon.

Ms. Sharon Clark: We found that both departments were supposed to be working together on the aquatic animal health program. DFO's primary concern was looking at the impact on wild fish. CFIA's primary concern can be seen as more trade-related. When they're working together, they're sometimes not sharing information that's critical to one, because the other doesn't consider it as critical.

Mr. Mel Arnold: On page 15 of your report, there are comments from the department's response that DFO recognizes that CFIA is the lead on some of these issues, and emerging diseases in particular. Then the agency's response from CFIA says it will work with DFO to decide who is the lead. Even the two departments can't decide who is the lead. Who should be protecting wild fish?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It's really DFO's job to protect wild fish. It is supposed to be working together on this issue, and you're bringing up the exact issue that we're trying to raise in our audit, which is this disconnect between the two of them.

Do you want to add anything, Sharon?

• (1610)

Ms. Sharon Clark: That's exactly it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Rogers, you have five minutes.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of questions. Before I get to the questions, this could be a roundabout way of doing it, but there are a couple of things I want to say .

I live in Newfoundland and Labrador, on the south coast. I see fish farms in the area in which I lived for 30 years. Before the beginning of fish farming in Newfoundland and Labrador, we had a major decline in northern cod stocks and Atlantic salmon. We saw the closure of the cod fishery in 1992, and we saw the closure of commercial Atlantic salmon fisheries decades ago as well.

The reason we have salmon farming in Newfoundland and Labrador today is that major decline, which threw 30,000 people out of work. When the people of Newfoundland and Labrador tried to explore ways of staying in their coastal and rural communities, one of the things that came to their attention was the potential of salmon farming, after reviewing jurisdictions such as Norway, Chile and others.

We believe we have an ideal environment on the south coast of the province. It's ice-free, with deep bays and fjords, 400 to 600 feet of water and more, and ocean-going currents and tides, which have a great flushing action. If you're ever going to grow farmed salmon, it seems to be the ideal environment in which to do it.

We as a province—I can say “we as a province” because there's a lot of support for salmon farming in the province, even though we do have some opposition. Obviously, not everybody is on board. I certainly respect the work you've done in this report in identifying some of the shortcomings and some of the potential risk, because it's important to us in the province that these risks be mitigated, reduced, or eliminated, where possible, to grow an industry that can create thousands of jobs and sustain hundreds of small communities. The province has a plan to try to double the industry over the next five to 10 years, and we have major investors coming in from places such as Norway.

When you look at aquaculture operations, is there any such thing as an ideal environment that's least disruptive of natural ecosystems, when they're done in places that have large bays and oceans, and waters that are 300 to 500 feet deep? Do you have an opinion on that?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Most of our audit focused on the coast of B.C. because that's where the federal government has a role.

Off the coast of Newfoundland is actually regulated by the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, so our audit doesn't address that many issues that deal with Newfoundland and New Brunswick, except the issue of the nets and the anchoring systems, which don't seem to be at the same code level as in B.C.

Because the feds don't really regulate the aquaculture industry in Newfoundland, that's really not where our audit looked very much.

Sharon, did you want to add anything?

Ms. Sharon Clark: In the second paragraph of the report, we do mention that the Canadian salmon farming industry is considered to have significant potential for growth due to Canada's long coastline, cold water temperatures and proximity to the United States market. I know this is probably the one part of our audit that the B.C. Salmon Farmers Association quoted on their website.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Right. Therefore, because they're not regulated by DFO, the risks in Newfoundland are not as prominent in this audit as is the case in B.C.

The other thing in B.C. is that we're taking Atlantic salmon and raising them in British Columbia where there are Pacific salmon, so the risks there are much greater than when you're farming Atlantic salmon where there are Atlantic salmon.

I'm not an expert on the issue of how well they're regulated off the coast of Newfoundland. That would be another audit that the Auditor General of Newfoundland could do.

•(1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

Now we'll go back to the Conservative Party.

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to carry on along the same lines I was going in the last section of questioning. An earlier question identified a recurring theme of disconnect between departments, in this case, particularly DFO and CFIA, partly because of an unclear definition of roles and responsibilities, and which one is the lead agency.

I'd like to read a motion to the committee. Whereas the spring 2018 report by the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development examining salmon farming stated that, (a) the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency "did not have a formal process to share information about aquatic animal health", (b) CFIA "officials noted they shared information with [DFO] officials at headquarters, but that this was not always transmitted to [DFO] staff in the regions"; whereas the same report recommends "Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency should clarify their roles and responsibilities for managing emerging disease risks to mitigate potential impacts of salmon farming on wild fish"; and whereas Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency both agreed with this recommendation in the report, I move that the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans undertake up to two meetings before March 1, 2019 and invite officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to provide the committee updates on their progress in achieving their commitments.

We've identified this. Your report has clearly identified this. In fact, in your earlier testimony you suggested that we bring them in and have them answer to that. As such, I'd like to move that motion.

The Chair: She is just giving it to the translator, so they would have to read it out.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'm new to this committee, but isn't there a rule that notice has to be given on motions before they are considered by the committee?

The Chair: There is, but I think when it's related to the topic at hand, it can be moved without notice.

We're going to suspend for a moment and we'll see if we can get a copy in both official languages.

We are ready again.

Is there any discussion on the motion?

•(1620)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, are you going to circulate the motion in both official languages? Will it be circulated?

The Chair: I think it will be circulated.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: We need to have that before we continue.

The Chair: No, you don't, because when it's read in as it is, anyone who wants it translated or to hear it in French will hear it from the translators when it's done. When it's on the topic we're discussing, it's read into the record in that manner, but it will be provided in both official languages for the record. It can go to a vote without having it in paper form in both official languages.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: To clarify, you're saying it can be distributed without being in French.

The Chair: It's not that it can be distributed. It was distributed. It wasn't necessary for it to be distributed. The motion was read into the record and translated as it was being read. It's a courtesy of Mr. Arnold's staff who passed it around. We didn't have to get even a printed copy of it when it's dealing with the topic at hand.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I am just checking. Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on the motion?

Mr. Pat Finnigan: If I read it correctly, this has to be done before March 1. Is that correct, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Mel Arnold: That was the motion presented. I'm open to amendments.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Okay, that was just a question I had.

Can we push that a little bit down the road?

The Chair: You don't necessarily have to do that today. I think you could push it down the road. You can move to extend the time at a later date or you can make an amendment now to make it longer. It's either-or.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: If we'd move it as is, the subcommittee can look at the schedule and make a recommendation to the committee on when it would fit best into the schedule.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Why don't you remove March 1?

Mr. Mel Arnold: I would like to have some timeline on it for the spring if possible; otherwise, it could just be kicked down the road.

•(1625)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What's the end of the parliamentary calendar? Is it June?

The Chair: Yes. It's June 21, I think.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What is the date? It's flexible.

The Chair: Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Could we instead say, "undertake up to two meetings at a time scheduled by the committee's subcommittee"?

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Would you be more comfortable if we changed the date to March 31? I realize we don't have a lot of sitting weeks in February and March.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: March is even worse. Yes, it's even less in March.

The Chair: We don't need an amendment. The mover is agreeing to the change.

Mr. Mel Arnold: If I'm making that—

The Chair: Yes, change it to March 31.

All those in favour?

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

The Chair: You used up all of your five minutes.

Just to be clear, I think if it was something distributed by the clerk or the analyst, it has to be in both official languages when it's passed out.

Going back to the government side, we have Mr. Fraser for five minutes or less.

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll be as brief as I can.

Thank you, both, very much for coming. I appreciated your work on the report and your coming today.

I want to ask, first, just a question with regard to your conclusion in the audit that DFO and CFIA had put in place some measures to mitigate the spread of infectious diseases and parasites from farmed salmon, but key elements were missing.

I'm wondering if you can expand on what elements were missing from that, and also what measures are in place to mitigate the spread of infectious diseases and parasites that actually are in place.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I'm sorry, could you repeat the first part of your question?

Mr. Colin Fraser: You indicate in your report that DFO and CFIA had put in place some measures to mitigate the spread of infectious diseases and parasites from farmed salmon but key elements were missing.

I'm wondering if you can let us know what key elements were missing from that information.

I guess I'll leave it there and then ask you a follow-up.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: As I said earlier, the department is doing quite a bit of research into a variety of issues related to disease and parasite

transmission, the effects of drugs and pesticides, and genetic interactions, etc., so they are doing some work on that.

Some of the things that are missing include not monitoring the health of wild fish. It's very difficult to know whether or not you're having an impact if you're not actually monitoring the health of wild fish.

Another gap would be the fact that they'd only completed one out of the 10 risk assessments. They hadn't assessed whether regulations regarding their drugs and pesticides were adequate to minimize harm to wild fish, so they don't actually know if the regulations are working.

No thresholds were defined for excessive drug or pesticide deposits into the net pens. There was no assessment whether rules were required to control the cumulative effects of drugs and pesticides at multiple sites in a particular area.

There was no requirement, as I mentioned earlier, for companies to monitor the ocean floor to determine whether things like lobster were being harmed.

There was no requirement for companies to minimize the risk of drug and pesticide resistance and no validation of industry self-reporting on the use of drugs and pesticides.

There were a lot of gaps in this area that were concerning in terms of the potential spread of diseases and just controlling the effects of these drugs and pesticides.

Mr. Colin Fraser: You touched briefly on the measures that are in place to mitigate the spread of infectious diseases and parasites. Can you expand on what measures are in place that you've found to be effective?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: They do have this strategic health initiative to look at the causes of diseases. I mentioned all the research that they are doing.

Do you want to add a few things?

•(1630)

Ms. Sharon Clark: Just in terms of what controls they have in place, they do have licence requirements for fish farms, and there are controls around that. One of the elements that is missing is the program for auditing the health of farmed salmon in B.C. It is out of date.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It was 2006 the last time it was updated.

Ms. Sharon Clark: Yes, we found issues there.

The department had limited laboratory capacity to provide timely surveillance test results, and then there was the issue with CFIA that we discussed earlier.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In one case we found that the test results were given almost a year later. That's quite a big gap.

Mr. Colin Fraser: My time is limited, so I'll move for a moment to the fish escape provisions that you talk about. I note there's a big difference between the number of fish escaping in British Columbia compared to the two Atlantic Canadian provinces that you looked at. What do you attribute the big difference to be?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: The big difference is that in British Columbia, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans requires companies to follow its own standard for net support structures and for anchoring systems. That is not required in Atlantic Canada. It's pretty clear that the standards for these anchoring systems and for the nets are higher and tougher, I would say, in British Columbia than in the Atlantic provinces.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Okay, and you say they're not required in the Atlantic provinces. It's up to each of the provinces to put in place those regulations—

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct.

Mr. Colin Fraser: —and that hasn't happened in Atlantic Canada yet.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct.

That's why we made the recommendation that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans should initiate discussions with their counterparts in Atlantic Canada to address both the quality and the maintenance of equipment to prevent these fish escapes.

Mr. Colin Fraser: That's my time, so thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

I'll go now to Mr. Donnelly to allow him some time, even though we've gone a little bit past the time frame allotted. I want to try and be as fair as possible.

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, I just want to get to the findings in your audit. In your last point to the committee, you say, "These findings led us to conclude that Fisheries and Oceans Canada had not managed risk from salmon farming in a way that protected wild fish."

If you had to give a letter grade, what would you give this?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In my role, I would say that I don't really give out letter grades.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Do they pass or fail?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I would say that there are many risks that they have not addressed. They're at risk of being seen to prioritize aquaculture over the protection of wild fish, and I've enumerated all those risks. I would say that's a conclusion you may come up with, but my audit stands on the facts.

We've indicated the things that they are doing well. It's not like they're doing nothing at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. They're doing a lot of work. We've identified all the gaps. We've made recommendations on those gaps. They've accepted those recommendations.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I know I keep asking about recommendation 75 under Cohen, which refers to the office of the environment commissioner updating this committee and the public on the extent to which the commission's recommendations have been implemented.

I was recently at an event in British Columbia for the International Year of the Salmon announcement, and the government reported that the Cohen response status is 100%. They claim 100%. We're looking

at the government saying 100%, and we look at Cohen's recommendation 75, which says:

An independent body such as the office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development should report to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans and to the public as follows: By March 31, 2014, and every two years thereafter during implementation of the Wild Salmon Policy, on progress in implementing the policy in relation to Fraser River sockeye salmon.

They also say:

By September 30, 2015, on the extent to which and the manner in which this Commission's recommendations have been implemented.

Do you feel these recommendations have been implemented?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That recommendation has not been implemented. There's been no law that has been passed that mandates me to do that. I'm independent. I work in the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, and we're independent, and we pick our audits independently.

However, there have been pieces of legislation that Parliament has passed that then forced us to do certain audits. I'm thinking in particular of the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act that required us to do an audit every two years on whether or not we were reaching goals.

That has not occurred, and it is within my mandate to select when we do an audit and on what topic. Parliament hasn't directed me to implement that recommendation.

• (1635)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I have one quick question.

If the department is not monitoring the impacts of farming salmon on the health of wild salmon, how would the department determine if there's a problem?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That is exactly my issue.

My biggest concern about this is the fact that they're not monitoring the health of wild fish; therefore, I don't know how they can make that conclusion.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: There may be mass die-offs?

Is it hard to say?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: You'd have to ask them, but that was my biggest concern.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thanks very much for your good work.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move right into the second hour, if our guests are ready.

Just for housekeeping, I'll read out the same statement again.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this is a briefing on the reports of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development for the fall of 2018.

I won't welcome our guests again, because they're already here.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: There's one switch up.

The Chair: Okay, there's one switch up. We welcome Director Elsa Da Costa to the committee. Thank you for attending.

Also, substituting in is Mr. Jowhari, member of Parliament for Richmond Hill.

Welcome, sir.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, sir. It's good to be here.

The Chair: Ms. Gelfand, you have a small statement to make.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Yes, I do.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I am pleased to be here again this afternoon to discuss my report on protecting marine mammals, which was tabled in Parliament on October 2. I am accompanied by Elsa Da Costa, the director responsible for this audit.

Our audit looked at what the government had done to protect marine animals from the threats posed by marine vessels and commercial fishing. In Canada, there are over 40 species of marine mammals—such as whales, dolphins and seals—and 14 populations are on the endangered or threatened species list.

We found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada, in collaboration with Parks Canada, Transport Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada, was very slow to take action to reduce threats to marine animals. Departments have several tools at their disposal to protect these animals. For example, they can establish protected areas, set speed limits for vessels, close or restrict fisheries and set distances for whale-watching boats.

[English]

We found that most of these tools were not used until the situation became severe. Twelve endangered North Atlantic right whales, representing 3% of the world's remaining population, were found dead in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence in 2017.

It was then that the departments took action to protect a few whale species, for example, by closing certain fisheries and introducing speed limits for ships in some areas. More specifically, we found the following:

Only four of the 14 recovery strategies required under the Species at Risk Act were completed within the act's required timelines, and no action plans were completed on time. In 2017, only seven of 14 action plans were finalized, and the rest remained incomplete.

Marine protected areas are not necessarily established to protect marine mammals. Only three of the 11 marine protected areas established by Fisheries and Oceans Canada are intended to do so. In addition, fishing and shipping are allowed in over 80% of our marine protected areas.

Up to and including the 2017 fishing season, only eight of the 74 fish stocks that had interaction with marine mammals had management measures in place as required by the policy on managing bycatch. None of these measures included gear restrictions. In 2018, new restrictions were placed on fishing licences.

Even though prey availability for the southern resident killer whale was identified as a significant threat to the species for many years, Fisheries and Oceans Canada had not taken action to implement quotas on chinook salmon farming. The department

announced such measures in the 2018 fishing season, which was subsequent to our audit period.

We also found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada lacked the resources and guidance to effectively respond to distressed marine mammals. There are around 900 incidents of distressed marine mammals each year, and very few people are trained to help.

• (1640)

[Translation]

The measures recently put in place have been reactive, limited and late. The clock could well be running out for certain species, such as the west coast's southern resident killer whale, which has been listed as an endangered species for 15 years and whose population is now down to 74 individuals. There needs to be continued action from the departments to manage threats for all marine mammals.

This concludes my opening statement. We would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gelfand.

We'll start off with seven minutes on the government side.

Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

Madam Commissioner, as you are aware, the situation in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence in 2017 alarmed most Canadians. It alarmed fishermen. Your report identifies that the United States gave Canada until January 22 to address the entanglement of marine mammals as new conditions on Canadian fisher exports to the United States.

Could you elaborate a bit more on what that impact is, on what that condition is?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It's definitely a serious issue.

For Canada to maintain access to the U.S. market for a variety of fisheries, Canada has to meet certain requirements that the U.S.—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What are those requirements? Are they outlined? Are they specific?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I don't have them specifically.

Generally, they relate to entanglement and gear restrictions that Canadian fisher people have to implement for us to maintain access to the U.S. market, but Elsa probably has those details.

Ms. Elsa Da Costa (Director, Office of the Auditor General):

Specifically, I don't know all the minor details, but it's to address bycatch and entanglement, bycatch being the capture and retention of species. Entanglement is entanglement in fishing gear.

Those are the two key areas they're looking at under the Marine Mammal Protection Act in the U.S. They have imposed this on their own fisheries, and they are now imposing it on their imports. Canada has quite a large number of exports.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The U.S.-Canadian fishery is 70% of our market.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It's a big issue.

If you want more details, I'm sure we can get back to you on that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: In your audit, how did DFO respond to you? How are they planning to conform to this American standard?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: They're very aware of it.

My understanding is they are planning to meet those requirements. We were very careful in the use of our language in the audit to ensure we weren't putting those markets at risk. My understanding is they want to be ready and they will be ready.

That's a great question to ask the department.

We need to be ready.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Did you uncover anything in the audit that would have shed some light on how we arrived at the situation in 2017?

It was dramatic year over year.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It was.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Fortunately this year it did not repeat itself.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We looked at all the different tools we have at our disposal to protect marine mammals and we found that generally they weren't being used. The other thing we found was the collaboration between all the various departments...one of the problems is that we have so many players in this: the Coast Guard, Transport Canada, Environment Canada and DFO. They're all part of the solution and the collaboration...although we did see it work, once they started acting. Before that, it's almost as if there wasn't any pressure to act.

They have several tools at their disposal, such as, marine protected areas, species at risk, the marine mammal regulations, which had been proposed in 2012 and only got implemented in 2018 while we were doing our audit.

I don't know how to answer why they didn't act before. They had a variety of tools and we found that the action happened after there was a severe incident and then all of a sudden, we started to see a whole bunch of action. Why there wasn't action before is a great question to ask the departments.

• (1645)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You made an observation in your comments, as well as in your report, that DFO is not adequately trained to respond to marine mammals in distress. You said:

There are around 900 incidents of distressed marine mammals each year, and very few people are trained to help.

Again, going back to the east coast, you had the tragic situation that occurred when they were responding. Were they not trained?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We found that on the west coast it's Fisheries and Oceans Canada that responds to the calls directly. On the east coast, it's a network of third party responders, NGOs and individuals that respond.

There are not very many people who are trained within DFO to do this. We found that there was no national guidance for the partners to respond to incidents. Each partner developed its own protocol for how to respond to the incidents. There were inconsistent responses, a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, and frankly, just so few people who can do it.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Who was ordering the responses on the east coast? Whoever responded to a marine mammal in distress, could you identify who actually initiated it?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Do we know that?

Ms. Elsa Da Costa: As Julie stated, on the west coast it's done by the federal government.

On the east coast, they use a network of mostly conservation organizations that do that. They mainly get contracted to set up the hotline. These typically serve fishermen who might find a large mammal, or the Canadian population that finds any type of marine animal in distress. It could be beached. It could be stranded. It could be entangled. It could be dead.

They call the hotline that is usually set up by these networks, and then they go and respond. Sometimes the response could be as simple as dealing with a seal in a Tim Hortons parking lot in Newfoundland—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: There. It just proves that they do live on burgers from McDonald's.

Ms. Elsa Da Costa: —or it could be a large whale entangled in fishing gear and someone needs to come and help untangle it.

The disentanglement of large whales is what few people are able to do. It is high risk and there are few people trained in Canada to do it.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I would say, generally, Canadians respond sometimes. These things wash up on the shore—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Just so I'm clear, on the west coast it's totally DFO's responsibility—

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It's DFO.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

We'll go to Mr. Sopuck from the Conservative Party, for seven minutes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you very much.

On page 6, you talk about the direct threats to marine mammals and the threats posed by commercial fishing, such as bycatch, entanglement in fishing gear, depletion of marine mammals' food resources, threats posed by marine vessels, oil spills, collisions with ships, and chronic noise and disturbance.

I notice that you did not include the whale watching industry. In your view, is the whale watching industry a threat to marine mammal resources?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We identified shipping and—

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I understand that. Time is limited here, so I'm asking very direct questions.

You did not include the whale watching industry. Is the whale watching industry a threat to whale populations?

• (1650)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I can't make a comment on that. What I can tell you is the marine mammal regulations are partly aimed at whale watching operations and they've set distances for those boats with regard to marine mammals.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: It's quite obvious by omission here—

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I audit the federal government.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I understand that.

The whale watching regulations are federal regulations, so I'm going to conclude that, by omission here, your view is that the whale watching industry does not have any effect on marine mammal resources—

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Please don't do that.

I could not audit those regulations, because they were not in place. They were proposed in 2012 and they were implemented in 2018. I have not had time to audit them.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay. Well, I'll state for the record here that the people of Churchill are extremely concerned about these marine mammal regulations. The population of belugas there is 55,000 and increasing, and the federal government is imposing a great hardship on these communities. I will be dealing with this over the next few months.

I'm also disappointed in your report that you conflate marine mammals. You just talk of them in general. Obviously, you're talking mostly about cetaceans, but marine mammals include cetaceans and seals. I think it's misleading when you use the words "marine mammals" and you do not divide them into the marine mammals that they actually are—cetaceans and seals—because the situations for cetaceans and seals are completely different. Your audit does not make that.... You use the words "marine mammals" interchangeably.

Also, you talk about the depletion of marine mammal food resources. This committee, on numerous occasions, has talked about overabundant seal populations. In terms of your report here you completely.... I actually wish—and again this is not your fault—that this report had been an audit of protecting and managing marine mammal resources, not just protecting, because we have incredibly overabundant seals in many areas.

You talk about the depletion of marine mammal food resources. I'm looking at a study here by Dr. Olesiuk of a creek near the Puntledge River on Vancouver Island. He concluded that three dozen seals killed 10,000 adult chum salmon. That's 36 seals killing 10,000 fish in the fall spawning run. The number of harbour seals on the west coast has gone from 10,000 in the 1970s to 105,000 now. It

shocks me that nobody talks about the overabundance of seals as actually the main threat to the food resources of cetaceans.

Would you provide a comment on that? Why did you omit the effect of an overabundance of seals on the food resources of cetaceans?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Paragraph 2.8 of our audit clearly indicates what we focused on. We focused on whether the federal government had adequately protected marine mammals in waters under the jurisdiction of Canada from threats posed by marine vessels and commercial fishing. We did not include the harvesting of marine mammals.

The audit focused on the direct threats to marine mammals. This is what we audited, threats posed by commercial fishing and by marine vessels.

These audits can be huge and we only have a certain number of people, so we always pick a certain area that we're going to audit. We did not look at acidification of the oceans. We didn't look at all the issues. We looked specifically at whether they had adequately protected marine mammals from the threats posed by marine vessels and commercial fishing. That was the purpose of our audit.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I would argue very strongly, then, that your terms of reference were clearly inadequate, because the elephant in the room in terms of Atlantic salmon, cod, snow crab, the salmon resources off the west coast are super-abundant and exploding seal populations that probably have a greater effect than, of course, any recreational fishing. The recreational fishery takes a minimal amount of salmon, and the commercial fishery obviously takes more. We are talking about 36 seals taking 10,000 adult fish. The super-abundance of seals are the elephant in the room that nobody wants to discuss in terms of the effect that exploding seal populations have on other species.

You talked about marine protected areas not doing anything for marine mammals, and I can certainly see that, because the marine protected area is a three-dimensional structure as opposed to a terrestrial area, which is two dimensional and infinitely more difficult.

Perhaps one of the reasons that marine protected areas are not doing the job of protecting marine mammals is that they're established for other reasons. I'm thinking of, for example, the benthic area, the glass sponge reefs and so on where shipping is allowed and obviously with no effect on the glass sponges.

Can you elaborate on why, in your view, marine protected areas are not doing their job? I would assume you're talking about not protecting cetaceans.

•(1655)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Marine protected areas, we clearly indicate in our audit, did not significantly contribute to the protection of marine mammals. We clearly indicate that not all marine protected areas are established for the protection of marine mammals. There are all kinds of reasons. In some cases, it's seabirds that are the reason we have marine protected areas. It has nothing to do with the marine mammals.

What we did find was that there were three marine protected areas that DFO did establish specifically for the purpose of protecting marine mammals, and in those we found that there was still quite a bit of commercial fishing and navigation permitted in these three areas.

But you're absolutely correct that they're not all developed for that reason. Some are. The Saguenay park is the one that is best known.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we go to Mr. Donnelly for seven minutes.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll just go to one of your final comments in your opening remarks in which you say, "The measures recently put in place have been reactive, limited, and late." Then you go on to say, "The clock could well be running out for certain species such as the west coast southern resident killer whale which has been listed as an endangered species for 15 years, and whose population is now down to 74 individuals."

I'm wondering whether your audit looked at the impact of tanker traffic on the southern resident killer whale.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: The audit did not look specifically at that issue. We were looking at species at risk and we were looking at marine protected areas. We were looking at shipping. In the case of the scarcity of Chinook salmon, the southern resident killer whale is one of the biggest issues identified in the recovery plan and in the action plan, but we did not look specifically at any one species and one issue. Marine traffic is clearly indicated to pose risks to whales and other marine mammals.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Vessel traffic would include, obviously, oil tanker traffic.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It would include any kind of—

Mr. Fin Donnelly: If the government is looking at tripling the amount of traffic in an area frequented by the southern resident killer whales, that obviously would have an impact on the whales the government is trying to protect. That's just a general comment.

You say, "no action plans were completed on time" and that in 2017 half "remain incomplete".

How is that? I know you're probably going to tell me you're not able to answer, but did anything in your audit uncover rationales as to why there's so much inaction on this?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: This is why we indicated that many of the measures were reactive and late. In the section on our audit concerning the species at risk, you'll see many cases in which recovery plans were late, action plans were late.

Really, why they're all late is something you need to ask the department rather than me. We indicate that they are late; for the reasons, you'd ask the department.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Was it a surprise to them, or were they obviously aware of this and considered it just a course of business for them?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: You'd have to ask them.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: All right.

This is a similar question. It was brought up that of 14 endangered or threatened species there are no specific measures in place to save 11 of them.

It seems that the government waits for a disaster, and I think you point this out. It's either when there is some kind of huge outcry from the public or something that's so obvious that they take action. I think that's what you pointed out. They did act after the right whales were in the news a lot.

•(1700)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct. We looked at all the different tools they had—the Species at Risk Act, marine protected areas—and at issues around commercial fisheries. We looked at the policy on bycatch. We looked at issues around the marine mammal regulations and the shipping and supporting of distressed marine mammals.

What we found when we went in to audit them was that they told us they were starting all these new things. We were auditing, however—we always audit backwards—and our reaction was that all this time passed and there was nothing. Then all of a sudden—poof—all these things are happening. We indicate all the actions they've taken, but we clearly indicate that we have not audited them, because they're so new that we can't audit them.

It was our conclusion that they hadn't been doing a lot to protect marine mammals until there was a severe situation, and then they kicked into gear.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

My colleague brought up the point you made that very few people are trained to help. I think you gave a response to that, but I'm wondering how you determined that.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We went in and asked, and they told us. My understanding is it's less than two handfuls of people who are trained to do this work.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: You were able to ask questions like that, and then they would tell you things, but some others you can't ask—or you didn't ask—like on tanker traffic, for instance. Those sorts of questions are different, but they'll tell you certain things that you ask.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: They usually tell us everything we ask. If you look in the "About the Audit" section, you'll see the criteria we use. We ask questions based on those criteria, and we audit backwards, not going forward.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: They'll tell you, but do they tell you a rationale for certain things?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In many cases, and this is in general for almost all audits, they'll tell you they don't have enough resources. We usually don't go down that path, because everybody says that: "Yes, we could do more if we had more money." Generally in our audits we don't go there.

In the case of the distressed mammals, however, they had a very small budget. When you think about how long our coastline is and how many incidents we have, they were down at around \$300,000 a year for 900 incidents. It went up to \$1 million, and they were happy about that, but that still seems quite small in terms of trying to respond to up to 900 different incidents across the country.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Just on the training, does that mean we have to look to other countries or jurisdictions? You alluded to the fact that they have to turn to the United States. Is that the case?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: As we said, in B.C. it's dealt with by DFO, but on the east coast each NGO operates differently. There was a very tragic case where somebody actually died after disentangling a large cetacean. This is serious. It's difficult work. People need to be trained, and they need to have national standards.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

We'll move to the government side, and Mr. Finnigan for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here.

How long have we been collecting data on whales or other marine life collisions, deaths or injuries? Did we have much data in the past?

Ms. Elsa Da Costa: The program began in 2006. Just to clarify your question, you're asking about data on distressed or collision—

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Incidents.

Ms. Elsa Da Costa: They've had data since 2006 or 2008, but the data is collected regionally. We found that the data wasn't really consistent. Every year the nomenclature isn't clear. The type of incident reporting isn't clear. The data is available, but it's not very consistent, so it's hard to really poll it to make an assessment. The DFO website allows national reporting online for the public on some of these incidents.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: It seems over the past few years.... A prime example is 2017, when the number actually peaked and around 17 right whales were killed on the east coast in the gulf area, specifically in the Bay of Fundy.

Can you explain why? Is it that we have bigger boats and more gear, or is it to do with climate change, the warming waters and the whales maybe feeding in different areas than they used to? Do we know why this is happening?

● (1705)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We know for sure that we found these 12 whales passed away in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The department would be able to explain more clearly all the different interactions that are occurring to bring those animals there. We were looking at whether or not the department was doing its job to protect marine mammals. Overall, what we found was that really they hadn't done much until that incident.

Then, all of a sudden, things kicked into gear. That's when they passed the marine mammal regulations. That's when they finished a whole bunch of action plans. It was after the severe incident that the departments started working better together and actually acting on that.

There is the whole issue of marine mammal regulations. In the U.S. they have an act to protect marine mammals, and in Canada we don't have a similar act. Those are some of the things your colleague was talking about earlier. We have to be able to show the U.S. that we're implementing many of the same policies in order to protect marine mammals in our waters as well.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: On that subject, this summer we had a few minke whales, but as far as right whales are concerned, the only dead whale that I know of was one found three weeks ago off the coast of Maine. Have we imposed the same conditions on the Americans regarding cleaning up their act?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Their conditions are more severe than ours, or at least prior to 2017 their conditions were better explained; they were regulated and in Canada it wasn't.

Since 2017 we understand from the department there have not been any killings of North Atlantic right whales, but what we indicate in our audit is that we found an increase in collaboration between all the departments. So at least it shows it can work, right? You have the Coast Guard speaking to the vessels. You have Transport Canada going out and ticketing them if they're going too fast. You have the science coming from DFO, etc. They can work together to do it, or at least that's what we found for this past summer. But, again, we have not audited all those new measures. Those were announced either during or right after our audit.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: As far as talking about MPAs goes—I know we referred to it a little earlier—in the gulf there's only one area of interest, I think, at this stage. That wouldn't have much impact on reducing whale collisions at this stage. What we did was impose new regulations as the incidents happened.

Do you think there should be a permanent regulation or is reacting to a problem and then kind of easing away the way to move forward in your opinion?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Again, it's up to Parliament to decide, or the department to decide, whether or not they need to have permanent regulations. The Gully MPA is somewhere in that region anyhow. It's off the coast of Nova Scotia. There's still limited fishing allowed in 75% of that MPA and no limits on marine traffic.

What essentially happened in the gulf was that they closed some fisheries and this created hardship for some of the fisher people. We have to recognize that it's quite severe. They closed fisheries. They made regulations. They slowed down the ships. That's what they did in order to protect the marine mammals. We have to be in line with the U.S. regulations by 2022.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: What about cleaning up the bottom? A lot of the entanglements are left traps, ropes and nets and stuff from past fishing. As you said, it is a very dangerous job to try to free a mammal when it's entangled. We lost a life in New Brunswick last year because of that.

Do you think it would be a good idea to have some kind of program to try to clean up the bottom? There's a lot of trash out there.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In a previous audit that we did on the integrated fisheries management, or that one of our staff did recently, they did find that fishing gear is an issue. It's not just on the bottom; it's floating around. Getting rid of that stuff that gets released...it's almost fishing garbage that's all over the place. It's kind of related to the plastic issue in the ocean. Trying to capture those is important.

● (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Finnigan.

We go now to Mr. Arnold from the Conservative Party for five minutes, please.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, thanks to both of you for being here.

The study is looking at marine vessels and commercial fishing and yet it's titled "Protecting Marine Mammals". Why was the scope so narrow if you were looking at protecting marine mammals?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It's really a question of our resources as to how many issues we can deal with at one particular time in that audit period. It's really dependent on the size of the team. We pick the biggest risks that we can see. That's how we select.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Who determines the scope?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It's determined by the audit team and we have conversations with the department.

Ms. Elsa Da Costa: And external advisers.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: And external advisers. We have specialists we speak to, to help us figure it out. Normally with the scope, what often happens is we're presented with a menu of different issues that we could select, but they say we can only do two or three of them. So it's which two or three. We ask experts to help us with that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Who provides that list, the menu?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Our staff does it as part of the research in the planning phase of an audit.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Is it independent of the government?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Yes, all our staff are independent from government.

Mr. Mel Arnold: And the experts that you use...?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: They're independent from government as well. They're academics often, or from NGOs. Some are industry people. I believe on this one we had the aquaculture industry as one of our experts. No, that's on the other one. We had somebody from the shipping federation helping us with this audit.

Mr. Mel Arnold: No fault to you, but I believe the title of the report is very misleading, "Protecting Marine Mammals". The report didn't look at the minimal impact of recreational fishing. It didn't look at the significant impact of competitive predator species. It

didn't look at the potential impact of armed forces naval operations on the west coast. We've seen in the past that those were of considerable concern. Are those things that could be looked at in the future?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Absolutely.

Mr. Mel Arnold: What would it take for those to become a priority?

We just heard from Mr. Sopuck about the incredible increase in seal and sea lion populations on the west coast competing for the same food sources as the southern resident killer whales.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: As commissioner I report to Parliament, and if Parliament, particularly if a committee from all three parties, indicates that an issue is of importance to them, it definitely rises in our level of priorities. We do a lot of scanning. We do something called strategic audit planning. We identify the biggest risks, but ultimately the decision about what to audit and when lies right here on my shoulders. We report to Parliament.

If parliamentarians say, "Madam Commissioner, an audit on this particular issue would be really useful," and if it comes from a committee, that brings the issue much higher. If an individual MP asks for it, then it's not the same.

For example, the Cohen commission is in our list to look at, to see whether or not the government is telling us that its recommendations are 100% implemented. That's the kind of thing we would look at, potentially.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

During this audit, were you able to determine what level of consultation with stakeholders was undertaken before regulations were changed or enforcement was stepped up?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We did not look at that in this audit.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It would seem to me that would be a significant part of it, that there be consultations with the stakeholders before regulations are changed, and yet you didn't look at that.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We didn't look at that issue because we were looking to see whether or not what was in place was being utilized. We saw marine mammal regulations that had been proposed since 2012 and had been sitting there. They only were implemented in 2018, as a result of our audit.

Often, our audits spark action on the part of a department. Nobody likes getting a bad report card. When they know we're coming in to do an audit, they try to fix things. During our audit they try to fix things. You see that a lot in this audit, when they say, "We're doing it. We're doing it," and we keep saying, "That's great, but you're just doing it now. We are looking at what you've done in the last five years. You hadn't done much, and now you're doing things."

It's good that they're doing things and that they're acting, and that's their job to do.

• (1715)

Mr. Mel Arnold: In both of these reports we've discussed today, I would imagine there was an initial draft report from your office. Does that draft report go back and forth for revisions before you get to the final time?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Absolutely.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Where do the revisions come from?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: The deputy minister signs off that everything in our audit is factually accurate. That's the ultimate accountability. In the meantime, we must go back and forth for months before we actually land on something that everybody can agree with.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

We go back to the government side now, to Mr. Hardie for five minutes.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Have you done this analysis before?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Have we looked at the protection of marine animals before?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I do not believe we have. I believe this is our first audit on this issue.

Is that correct?

Ms. Elsa Da Costa: I think so.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Yes, I'm pretty sure. Our office has been around for 20 years, so I don't know all of them off of the top of my head, but I don't believe we have actually looked at this issue in the past.

Mr. Ken Hardie: What prompted you to make this issue something that you wanted to study?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's a great question. We were looking at another topic, I remember, that somebody had brought forward.

Do you remember how we got there?

Ms. Elsa Da Costa: I do, actually.

We were initially mandated to do a follow-up of the oil spills audit. When we started looking into it, we found that the departments were in transition at this point and it wasn't a good time. We were also following up on the tanker safety panel report that had highlighted this risk in terms of marine mammals not being included in the national oil spill response regime, which sparked something to dig a bit deeper.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay, I can see....

I would take it that the oceans protection plan was a bit too new to be factored in.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We notice a pattern of reports from this committee or other committees going to Parliament and we get a reaction from the ministry saying, "We accept all of the findings." Here, they agree with everything you say. That and two bucks gets you a big coffee at Starbucks.

Do you go back and look and say, "You agreed, so what did you do about it?" Do you do that?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Technically it's actually your job to do that, to hold the departments accountable. Parliament develops the rules and sends them down to the government. The auditor comes in and checks whether the government is doing their job and reports back to Parliament. Technically, Parliament holds the stick, if you will. I definitely don't hold it.

However, we do follow-ups. As Elsa was saying, we were actually looking at doing two follow-ups. We go in and we assess whether or not there is an issue, or whether or not there is a risk. Then if we don't find any big risks, we go to where we do find a risk, and in this case marine mammals was the risk. All the other issues were not so well.

In the past the Auditor General has done that. The public accounts committee, for example, requests an action plan from the departments and often follows up with the departments directly.

Mr. Ken Hardie: You have done very interesting work here in discovering what's not happening, or what is happening.

On the what's not happening, we're looking at four of 14 recovery strategies required were completed; seven of 14 action plans were finalized, and the rest remain incomplete. You found that out, but did you find out why?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: They're going to say, most likely, that it was a resource constraint issue, because everybody says that every time we go in and audit them. That's not necessarily an issue that we bring forward.

Mr. Ken Hardie: You could audit many different ministries, and certainly many different parts of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. We've done a lot of studies since this Parliament began and it just seems that there are so many gaps, so many missing pieces. Are the things that we're asking the DFO to do far and away greater than they could possibly ever really do?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's a great question.

I can only audit what you've asked them to do, and whether or not that's something that they can do or not is really something the department has to answer.

We do ask a lot of our civil servants. I would also say that in our audits, we tend to very quickly tell you that they are doing research. All the good things that we do tell you they're doing don't get a lot of space, but all the things where they need to fix things, that's what gets reported in our audits in a much bigger way.

When we find out that they're doing good things, we do indicate that and we try to be really fair. I don't think people in DFO get up in the morning and say, "What are we going to do today to kill some whales?" I don't think that happens. I think the civil service is a very dedicated group of people working in the public interest, trying to protect, and doing the best they can with the resources they have.

I am always finding the places and always telling you about the places where they're not doing well, but please recognize that they are doing some good work and they are doing their best. They're trying.

We identify the gaps and we recommend that they fix those gaps.

• (1720)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

Now we go again to the government side, to Mr. Morrissey, for five minutes.

A voice: It feels like a marathon.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What's that?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I said it feels like a marathon.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robert Morrissey: There are significant implications for an east coast fishery with a department that may not have the resources to put in place a marine mammal protection plan that will meet the U.S. requirements.

I'm not sure if you addressed it earlier on, but were you able to get some indication from DFO on how they were planning to conform to the American standard?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We had some very senior-level, high-level discussions with the deputy on this issue. They were very aware of the issues. We were very careful in the use of our language in our audit to not add fuel to the fire. We indicated to the deputy that we very much understood the issue that they had to deal with. They understood it very clearly. I told her we could not change the facts—the facts were the facts—but we could be very careful in how we talked about this.

My understanding is the department is very aware of this and is working to ensure...because this has to be a high-risk, highly critical issue for the department. They are taking it very seriously, and we wanted to make sure that our audit was done in the most constructive way possible. That was our goal.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It may not be partly in your report but I want to see if you can comment on marine mammals. One of my colleagues may have raised it as well.

One species that does not appear to be endangered is the east coast seal. In your audit, did you get any information from the department on how it's monitoring or planning to deal with the risk that the growth in this population will have on other mammals?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's a great question. I don't know if Elsa has anything specific. We were looking at tools that they have to protect marine mammals. Those included the Species at Risk Act—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Is there a concern level within DFO?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Is there a concern level within DFO? I'm going to have to ask Elsa—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: —about the growth of the east coast seal population?

Ms. Elsa Da Costa: We didn't speak of specific species during our discussions with DFO during the course of the audit. We spoke mostly of the tools—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Did they have a concern then of the population growth of any marine mammal on the east coast?

Ms. Elsa Da Costa: Again, we didn't—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Your audit would look at both sides. I mean, your audit should look at decreasing numbers, which would put at risk...as well as a significant growing population, and what may attribute to both.

Have you done any analysis on that?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We have not done anything specific on it. In our audit we identified what criteria we used to deal with the protection of marine mammals, so we looked at the tools that the federal government has, the policy on managing bycatch. They have the Species at Risk Act. They have marine protected areas. Those are all the tools they use. Other than the species at risk that are enumerated in our audit, we didn't look at any other specific species.

• (1725)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: When the department puts in place measures to protect a mammal and then that particular species is growing at significant numbers, is there any mechanism there to trigger any reaction?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: You would have to ask the department that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

I do want to apologize. I was looking at the list we wrote down here and I inadvertently went back to the government side twice in a row instead of going to the Conservative side as I should have, so I'll do that now.

I will ask if everyone agrees to extend it for maybe five minutes or so.

Do you have to go? All right.

We have Mr. Calkins for five minutes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I apologize for being late to the meeting. I have a keen interest in this. I believe my colleague Mr. Sopuck probably touched on most of the items that are important to me.

As I'm reading through your recommendations, Madam Commissioner, it seems to me the issue that you cite on page 1 of your report, which is the depletion of food sources by fisheries, seems to indicate that the only depletion of the food source is through fisheries, commercial and/or sport fishing, and not through other natural causes. There seems to be no reference to any of these recommendations made to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans or others, including Parks Canada, on wildlife management controls.

There is some loose language—I don't mean it in a negative way—that I would like some clarification on. Regarding paragraph 2.42, at the end of the very first paragraph in Fisheries and Oceans Canada's response, it says, "These networks will include marine protected areas established under the Oceans Act and marine refuges established under the Fisheries Act, as well as other departments' conservation tools."

That whole paragraph talks about what the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is doing. None of the recommendations that I see actually address the fact that there's not enough salmon in the ocean. They talk about shutting everything down that might be causing a reduction in salmon in the ocean, but I don't see a single recommendation or a single notion anywhere here about enhancing the number of salmon that might be in the ocean.

Did you have any conversations with anybody at the department or from any of the departments that talked about anything that pertained to salmon enhancement?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In this audit, the salmon issue came up because of the southern resident killer whale situation off the coast of British Columbia.

We've done another audit on integrated fisheries management plans, which we could come and talk to you about, where we looked at the federal government. We looked at how well the government is doing in managing its fisheries, the whole 172 different fish stocks that DFO is supposed to manage. We also spoke earlier about the salmon aquaculture audit where we did talk quite a bit about the fact that they weren't monitoring the health of wild fish while they were at the same time dealing with salmon aquaculture. We have talked about salmon in other audits. Other than dealing with it for the chinook salmon that was affecting that one species at risk, we did not deal with that in this audit.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That's all I have, Mr. Chair.

I'll turn it back over to my colleagues here.

The Chair: Thank you very much, everyone.

A special thank you, of course, to Ms. Gelfand and Ms. Da Costa for attending this session. We much appreciate it, and I'm sure we'll be inviting you back again in the not-too-distant future.

I'll ask the clerk to email the schedule for next week because there are a couple of additional meetings coming up.

The meeting is adjourned.

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