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Tuesday, November 20, 2018

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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.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), we have supplementary estimates (A) 2018-19, votes 1a, 5a and 10a under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which were referred to the committee on Wednesday, October 24, 2018.

Welcome, everybody, to our regularly scheduled committee meeting.

I want to give a special welcome, of course, to the Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard; his parliamentary secretary, Mr. Sean Casey; and departmental officials. We have Catherine Blewett, deputy minister; Sylvie Lapointe, assistant deputy minister, fisheries and harbour management; Philippe Morel, assistant deputy minister, aquatic ecosystems sector; Jen O'Donoughue, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer; Kevin Stringer, associate deputy minister; and Jeffery Hutchinson, Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard.

None of you are strangers to the committee. You've certainly been here before.

I'd also like to welcome a member on the Conservative side, Mr. David Yurdiga from Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, who is filling in today.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you.

The Chair: As well, we have Ms. Elizabeth May, member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, as a guest observer, I guess, and maybe someone who will want to ask a question a little later.

Welcome.

Minister, the floor is yours for seven minutes or less.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Thank you.

I'm happy to be here in my role as Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to discuss the supplementary estimates (A) for 2018-19.

As was noted, I'm accompanied by a number of my officials and the Honourable Sean Casey, my very able parliamentary secretary.

I am honoured to have been entrusted by the Prime Minister to play a leadership role in the protection of our oceans, coasts,

waterways and fisheries to ensure that they are healthy today and for future generations.

[Translation]

Since being appointed as minister, I've developed a better understanding of the work being done by the communities whose livelihoods depend on our fisheries and oceans and on my department. I'm committed to building strong partnerships in order to protect our oceans and freshwater resources, not just in Canada, but as part of a global effort in the face of significant changes to climate and habitat around the world.

[English]

I want to commend the members of this committee for their efforts to help strengthen both the Oceans Act and the Fisheries Act. These pieces of legislation will be integral to restoring lost protections to fish and fish habitat, and to moving us toward our marine conservation targets.

Thank you for inviting me today to discuss supplementary estimates (A). Fisheries and Oceans Canada, including the Canadian Coast Guard, is seeking Parliament's approval of \$980 million through these estimates.

The men and women of the Coast Guard are hard at work every day across this country, and our government is committed to providing them the tools that they need to keep Canadians safe, to protect our marine environment and to keep our economy moving. That is why over 80% of funding for supplementary estimates (A), \$827.3 million, is to be spent on updating the Coast Guard's fleet through the purchase and upgrade of three icebreakers from Chantier Davie in Quebec. The ships will help to ensure that the Coast Guard maintains icebreaking capacity over the next 15 to 20 years as our fleet is being renewed.

Another \$57.8 million under the estimates will go to the Coast Guard's offshore oceanographic science vessel project to allow for the completion of the engineering phase, as well as to purchase material to advance the construction of the ship.

• (1535)

[Translation]

As this committee knows, Canada's freshwater and marine coastal areas are inextricably linked to the economic prosperity of Canadians. Our government has an obligation, therefore, to incorporate modern safeguards and restore lost protections in the Fisheries Act. That's why \$21.5 million is being sought for Bill C-68 to ensure that, should the amendments pass in the other House, we'll have the capacity to implement the act in a timely manner.

[English]

We are also seeking to increase investments beyond Bill C-68 when it comes to indigenous consultations and negotiations. Some funding included in the estimates, \$48.9 million, will support negotiations and reconciliation efforts with indigenous peoples, specifically to implement treaty obligations such as undertaking fisheries studies and enabling access to fisheries, both of which will help indigenous communities improve capacity for self-government and self-determination.

I would like to take a brief moment to outline some of the important work the department has been doing as a result of previous investments.

[Translation]

Two years ago, our government launched the historic \$1.5 billion oceans protection plan to make our oceans cleaner, safer and healthier. Since then, we've worked tirelessly to protect our marine coastal areas and endangered whales and to prevent and respond to oil spills, as needed.

[English]

Marine safety and accident prevention is an area that our government is firmly committed to through investments and new measures, enhancing Coast Guard capacity with new radar and the reopening of the Kitsilano Coast Guard base. We are leasing two offshore towing vessels for use in the waters off the west coast and increasing our towing capacity by installing tow kits on all of the Coast Guard's major vessels. These types of projects will help us to avoid potential marine pollution incidents. We are also strengthening the Coast Guard's capacity to respond to incidents. For example, we purchased 23 portable skimmers and 67,000 feet of curtain booms to help with potential spills. We opened four Coast Guard facilities, including two search and rescue stations.

A few weeks ago I introduced new measures and \$61.5 million to further safeguard the southern resident killer whale population. We are taking decisive action by increasing access to food, reducing threats from vessels and protecting against contaminants.

Beyond implementation of the OPP, we are making significant progress in other areas as well. For instance, we have now protected almost 8% of our marine and coastal areas, up from just 1% when this government came to office in 2015. My officials and I will continue to work to ensure we achieve Canada's 10% commitment by 2020.

[Translation]

I would also like to highlight some of the investments in infrastructure that we're making to ensure that our communities are well supported. In budget 2018, we announced a \$250 million commitment to renewing Canada's network of small craft harbours.

This funding is helping to accelerate repairs and enhance existing installations for planned projects at core commercial fishing harbours and at non-core harbours. Small craft harbours are key economic hubs in coastal communities across Canada, and they support regional fishing industries.

[English]

Finally, as part of Canada's 2018 G7 presidency Minister McKenna, Minister Sohi and I co-hosted the G7 ministerial meeting in September on the theme of working together on climate change, oceans and clean energy. We made progress in a number of areas related to healthy oceans and resilient communities. By combatting illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and addressing marine plastic pollution by signing on to the Global Ghost Gear Initiative, we will support sustainable oceans and fisheries management.

[Translation]

We'll also increase our knowledge by expanding our global observation efforts and sharing scientific data in support of the development of clean energy systems in coastal communities that are vulnerable to challenging weather conditions.

[English]

Colleagues, Canadians can be proud of the progress we have made to date, but I am sure that you will agree there's still much more to do. Our government will continue to lead the way on new and innovative policies and actions that provide meaningful and lasting protection for our oceans and freshwater resources.

Thank you.

I would like to turn to my parliamentary secretary who will share a little bit about the work he is doing.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Thank you, Minister.

I'm pleased to be here with the minister in my role as parliamentary secretary supporting him on various files including North Atlantic right whales and belugas.

As the minister has indicated, our government has made significant investments that are balancing the protection of our marine and coastal areas with the economic needs of our communities. This year, I'm please to report—and I am sure that the committee members well know—that not one right whale has died in Canadian waters as a result of a ship strike or fishing gear entanglement. We're grateful to vessel captains and fishers who are following the protection strategies that we put in place.

● (1540)

[Translation]

The minister recently participated in an industry round table discussion on new measures to protect right whales in the North Atlantic for the upcoming season in 2019.

[English]

We made amendments to the marine mammals regulations to put in place species-specific approach distances for species such as belugas to reduce underwater noise caused by ships. We know that more needs to be done and we're working to reduce other key threats to belugas such as pollution and prey availability.

[Translation]

We've recently allocated research funding in order to better understand the impact of contaminants on priority whale species.

[English]

We will continue to consult with indigenous groups, provinces, territories and industry to best address concerns in our efforts to continue conservation and protection measures.

I will now turn it over to our chief financial officer, Jen O'Donoughue, to present a few more financial details regarding the supplementary estimates. Following that, we'll be happy to take your questions.

Ms. Jen O'Donoughue (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members.

[Translation]

My name is Jen O'Donoughue. I'm the chief financial officer of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

We're pleased to be here this afternoon to give you a quick overview of the supplementary estimates (A) 2018-19.

[English]

The supplementary estimates (A) is the first of two supplementary exercises planned for this fiscal year. They present the department's revised spending plans, which were either not sufficiently developed in time for inclusion in the main estimates, or have subsequently been refined.

The items presented today include all Treasury Board approvals since the main estimates and exclude budget 2018 items. As with all supply bills, they are referred to committee where the contents are studied before voting actually takes place.

[Translation]

As the minister said, we're seeking Parliament's approval of \$980 million, most of which will be allocated to our capital vote 5a.

[English]

More specifically, we are seeking \$827.3 million for three icebreakers, \$57.8 million for our offshore oceanographic science vessel, \$33.8 million to advance reconciliation and indigenous issues, and \$21.5 million to implement the amended Fisheries Act.

The remaining 14 items are other initiatives, some technical reinvestments and transfers to and from other departments. These items can be found on pages 2-37 and 2-38 in the explanation of requirements section.

[Translation]

It's on pages 2-82 and 2-83 of the French version.

[English]

Budget 2018 initially identified \$217 million for five DFO-led measures in fiscal year 2018-19. To date, approximately \$120 million in authorities has been granted to the department, including \$87.2 million for renewing Canada's network of small craft harbours this fiscal year.

Thank you for allowing me the time to present today.

[Translation]

We would be pleased to answer all your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to questioning now and I'll remind members that I'm going to try to be very strict on the time. I know everybody wants to get in some questions so we'll try to stick to it as much as possible.

Moving now to the government side we have, Mr. Morrissey, for seven minutes or less, please.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, to the new minister, to this committee.

Is this your first opportunity—

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: It is.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: —and the parliamentary secretary?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Minister, obviously you are well aware that the fisheries and the related health of the oceans are the lifeblood of hundreds of coastal communities and the people who depend on those across this country.

I have two questions.

My first question concerns the area directly under you, where we've seen an erosion of resources directed towards the protection side of the department over the years. At the same time, we were asking fishers to engage in more conservation measures to protect the resource. The point they always make to me is that while the industry is taking significant measures to conserve the resource, they do not see the same amount of effort coming from the department to ensure adequate protection.

Can you comment on that?

• (1545)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Obviously, in the context of a sustainable fishery, it's extremely important that we're basing quota decisions on science. The department certainly is working hard to ensure it has the appropriate resources and the appropriate capacity to do that. It relies on fishers to be doing the good work and ensuring that they're participating in fisheries, but it also requires that we have appropriate enforcement with respect to ensuring that the rules are being followed and that quotas on the catches can be relied on in the context of the work we're doing.

I'm happy to say that we have been doing a lot of work to reinvest in the enforcement side of DFO. In 2018 alone we had three troops of newly qualified fisheries officers who graduated in March, June and November. In total, 72 new fisheries officers have joined the department and are serving Canadians at detachments across the country. A further 16 fishery officer cadets are currently in training and are expected to graduate in March 2019, which will bring the total number of new fisheries officers to 88, which may well be a record of new officers graduating in a single year.

It is definitely something that we are focused on.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Minister, that information will be well received by the industry.

My second question goes to the growing awareness within the industry that the oceans can no longer be used as a dumping ground. There are consequences to the industry, to the very stocks that the fishermen depend on.

One is the issue of plastics within the oceans. The other is the area of illegal fishing and ghost fishing. Given your leadership role, as Canada is the G7 leader in this area, how do you look to bring more awareness on these two critical issues and how can we begin to address them? For some time, it was an issue that was swept under the rug, but it is one that we're seeing every day. In fact, there's new awareness today of the death of a lot of seaborne mammals because of plastics, and this is an issue that has to be dealt with.

How do you view your position, your ministry, in reacting to those two significant global issues that will have a very real impact on coastal communities in Canada?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: On the issue of plastics in the oceans, there are plastics that come from terrestrial sources but in the context of fisheries and oceans, it's particularly ghost gear. The ghost gear that's floating in the oceans is by weight almost half of the plastics that are entering the oceans these days.

That and the issue of unregulated fishing are both really important and go to the heart of the sustainability of the fishery. In order to manage a fishery in a thoughtful way on an international basis, you need to know how many fish are being taken. With illegal fishing, it becomes very difficult to do that.

Similarly, if there are large numbers of marine mammals and fish that are being killed by ghost gear and/or other plastics, it again becomes very difficult to manage the sustainability of the fishery.

We have made that a major push in our G7 presidency at the level of leaders. Minister McKenna and I led the conversations with G7 ministers in Halifax.

It is also a key focus of the The Sustainable Blue Economy Conference, which Kenya and Canada are co-hosting next week. I'm leaving on Friday for that conference.

It's definitely something that we're working on with our international partners. We are also working to ensure that from a domestic perspective we are walking the walk.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Minister, can you point to any concrete examples of technology that may be available, or methodology, to rid the oceans of plastics?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I think part of this domestically is developing a coherent strategy that aligns some of the regulatory issues that we have around things like ghost gear and trying to ensure that we're creating incentives for people to do the right thing and return gear. It is also a technology issue, in making it easier to extract ghost gear and bring it back.

Also, can we think about ghost gear in the context of a circular economy, where we're trying to figure out how to create products out of what has been thought of as waste, in the same way that we create methane out of manure?

I was with a group of young people at the G7 who were having a round table on this subject. One of the young people from the United Kingdom had started a company that makes carpets out of used ghost gear. Of course, there are lots of questions about the economics and all of those kinds of things, but I think those are the kinds of things that we need to be incenting people to actually do.

• (1550)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I questioned you briefly on the protection side, but you cannot manage the fishery without adequate data from the science side, and biology. Could you comment briefly on how the department has been moving in that area?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Science is fundamental to making good decisions with respect to fisheries management. We have been reinvesting in the science capacity of the department. That is a process that certainly takes time, it's not just a matter of numbers, it's also a matter of experience.

It is something that we are fundamentally committed to do. We have allocated additional resources to do that. I would suggest that we will be looking to continue to do that, in terms of enhancing the scientific capacity of the department.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we move on to the Conservative side.

Mr. Arnold for seven minutes or less, please.

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

And thank you, Minister, for being here, and all of your staff.

I'm glad you mentioned a couple of things in your opening comments, because I'm going to refer to your address on September 20 to the G7 ministerial meeting.

In those comments, you said that:

When it comes to man-made pollution in the world's oceans, Canada is also taking action. As a federal government, we are moving towards making our operations low-carbon, resilient and green. As a country, we are moving toward zero plastic waste by keeping plastic out of oceans and landfills.

One thing you don't mention in this, regarding keeping our oceans clean, is sewage dumps and outflows. Those have been identified as significant issues on the west coast and the east coast as well. I can quote some numbers out of the St. Lawrence River over the last few years, but I think you're probably well aware of those. Why is that not mentioned in any statement or plan?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: It's a very good question.

Let me start by saying that the regulations with respect to waste water treatment in Canada are the purview of the Minister of the Environment, rather than the Minister of Fisheries. I would say that it is an important issue, it is one that in Canada we do need to address.

As you will be aware, there is a schedule for all of the major waste-water treatment facilities that are not currently in compliance with doing secondary treatment, to be in compliance by either 2020 or 2030.

We have allocated significant green infrastructure funding to accelerating that process. There is a new waste-water treatment plant being built in my riding, in North Vancouver. There is a new waste-water treatment plant being built in Victoria, which presently has no waste-water treatment, which is appalling. There are a number of similar facilities being constructed across this country.

It's a very important issue and it's one that we definitely need to address.

Mr. Mel Arnold: On a different topic now, \$1.5 billion was originally announced for the oceans protection plan. Could you tell us how much of that has already been spent?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The oceans protection plan is a project that actually crosses a number of different departments. It involves Fisheries and Oceans. It involves Transport. It involves Environment and Climate Change. I would say that approximately \$800 million of that has been spent, but that's not simply by Fisheries and Oceans. Maybe I can ask my CFO to supplement that.

Ms. Jen O'Donoghue: The actual spending last fiscal year was \$152 million, and \$800 million has been announced in terms of spending for 2017 and 2018.

Mr. Mel Arnold: So out of \$1.5 billion, approximately 10% has actually been spent?

Ms. Jen O'Donoghue: The amount of money for the oceans protection plan was over five years for all of those departments, so there is specifically planned spending in each year. That was approximately what the planned spending was for last year.

Mr. Mel Arnold: In terms of the icebreaker plan for the Canadian Coast Guard, a Canadian Press report states that the three Norwegian-made icebreakers will cost up to 30% more than projected due to import tariffs, brokerage fees and other costs.

Why were these tariffs and additional costs not included in DFO's original estimate?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Let me start the answer, and then maybe I'll ask the Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard to supplement it. The original number was actually the contract with Chantier Davie Canada for the acquisition of the three icebreakers. The additional costs that were budgeted within the government are to cover things that are separate from the contract. The vast majority of those are tariffs. Essentially, we pay them and get them back, so they are a net-net no-cost. There are some modest conversion costs that are associated with that.

That's generally the explanation, but maybe I'll ask the commissioner to supplement that

• (1555)

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson (Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): That's exactly right, Minister. By separating out the \$610,000, it actually gives a line of sight on how much the contract is for the delivery of the vessels, including bringing the first of the three vessels to a regulatory standard that will allow us to use it this year. Much of that other money, as the minister has already noted, flows back to Canada. Those import tariffs, for example, leave one pocket and come back to the other pocket, so they're not reflective of a true cost. If we included them in the total cost of the contract, it would actually make ship-purchase and shipbuilding contracts more difficult to compare, rather than less difficult.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Minister, over the past year there have been some significant restrictions placed on fishers on both coasts in regard to the protection of whales, both the right whales on the east coast and the southern resident killer whales on the west coast. These significant restrictions were put in place after lengthy consultation with the locals, with the fishing groups and with advisory boards, yet the restrictions that were put in place on the west coast were not in line with what was recommended by the groups that had consulted heavily with Fisheries.

They have impacted those local economies significantly in a negative way. Have you had any discussions with those communities on those negative impacts, and have you had any indication of positive results from those significant restrictions that were put in place?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Let me talk a little about the southern resident killer whale, and then I'll ask the parliamentary secretary to talk about the right whale.

As you know, in Canada we have the Species at Risk Act, and both of these species are endangered. There is an imminent threat. There was a finding of an imminent threat to the southern resident killer whale, and that means that there is a requirement for the government to act to address the biological needs.

Of course, in looking at how to best do that, we think through various pathways to get there and certainly look at options that will have the least economic impact. The consultations that go on with fishing communities, both recreational and commercial, and with the transportation industry, in terms of shipping, are all very important.

I've had many conversations with both, including a chamber of commerce roundtable with many of the west coast of Vancouver Island communities that are actually involved in this fishery. We are certainly looking to incorporate their thoughts and concerns into how we go forward, but the bottom line is that we need to act to address the critical issues facing these whales. We will do so and have been doing so in a manner as sensitive as possible from an economic perspective.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Casey, you'll have to try to get that in on a later question, perhaps. Time is up.

Now we go to the NDP and Mr. Donnelly for seven minutes or less, please.

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

Welcome to the minister and his team of officials.

Minister, on the topic of owner-operator and fleet separation on the west coast, the federal government has a duty to conserve, manage and develop the fishery in the public interest and for the benefit of Canadians. The best way to do that is to keep fishing licences in the hands of the people who fish and live in the fishing communities.

This week we celebrate World Fisheries Day, and I'll be meeting with fishers from British Columbia who want to know whether you, as a minister from British Columbia, support owner-operator and fleet separation for B.C. fishers.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As you know, in Bill C-68, there are a number of provisions that relate to the owner-operator policies, although those policies apply primarily in the Atlantic provinces and Quebec.

We certainly are aware that there are some in the Pacific region who are interested in seeing measures similar to those in Atlantic Canada. There are others who have a different perspective on that, and that is something that we are thinking of and discussing. We're very interested in the work the committee is going to be doing with respect to this issue. I think it will help us in the context of trying to figure out what the right pathway is here.

Sylvie, do you want to make any further comment?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I think you've covered it, Minister, and I have a few other questions and short time.

On the Cohen Commission recommendations, you recently announced that the department had acted on all of Justice Cohen's recommendations. However, recommendation 75—and I'll just remind you—reads:

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:

And there's a schedule:

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.

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

So, we've heard from the department about the status of the implementation of Cohen's recommendations, but we haven't heard from an independent body as per recommendation 75. Do you plan on acting on recommendation 75 by asking the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to report to the committee and the public on the extent to which and the manner in which the Cohen Commission's recommendations have been implemented to date?

• (1600)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I think my precise wording was that we had responded to and described the actions we had taken in response to the various recommendations of the Cohen report. I didn't say that we had acted on exactly what the commissioner had said on every one of those recommendations.

We certainly are interested in moving forward. We are working very actively with the Province of British Columbia on trying to align what we are doing, not just for sockeye salmon but for salmon more generally in British Columbia, and ensuring that we have a holistic approach to ensuring that we are doing everything we possibly can to sustain those runs that are healthy and to turn around some of those runs that are clearly not.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: But, reporting to the public, an independent body—is there a commitment for that one?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As I mentioned, we've been very transparent. Everything we are doing is now published online, and so we're transparent. The Commissioner has the full ability to review whatever it is that she wants to review, as she has done in areas like aquaculture.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay.

I'll turn to another subject—sport fishing in British Columbia. Sport fishers are seeking a regulation change and getting nowhere with department officials on what I think appears to be a fairly straightforward change. They're seeking to have the current description, that catch records must be recorded on a tidal angling licence in “ink”, changed to being recorded “permanently”. So it's a one-word change—ink to permanent.

That would eliminate the necessity of printing a licence on paper and allow for electronic record keeping, which then becomes transferable.

Can you help resolve this matter?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Yes. Gerry Kristianson has raised this with me a few times. Certainly directionally I think we're supportive, but maybe I can turn it over to Kevin and he can talk a little bit about where we are with that.

Mr. Kevin Stringer (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We've all had the same visitation on that issue. It is a small change in terms of a regulation that would make it much easier to move forward on some of the things that the recreational fishery wants to do and we want to do on monitoring, on being more modern and on being able to use the fisher app that they've developed.

We are seeking to have this done. We're working on a number of small regulatory changes—this being one of them—so we are on it.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Great, and I think they would appreciate that commitment. Thanks, Minister.

On the oceans protection plan, supplementary estimates include \$5.3 million to improve marine safety under the OPP. I think we can all agree that's a tiny amount. The question that I was going to ask has been asked: How much has been spent to date? The answer was \$152 million. I think, Minister, you said \$800 million has been announced. Can you provide the committee with a complete list of initiatives including information such as geographic location, amount of funding and description of the projects funded by the OPP? That's something that we tried to track down on the websites of different departments, and we find it depends whether it's Fisheries or Transport Canada, etc., so having that sent to the committee would be helpful.

In the remaining seconds, could you tell me if the department knows whether the technology to clean up dilbit exists? We've talked about this in the past.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: With respect to your request, we can certainly pull together a list of everything that's been announced across departments. That's not a problem.

In terms of diluted bitumen—and you and I have had many conversations about this—there is a lot of information out there both about the behaviour of diluted bitumen relative to conventional crudes and also about the effectiveness of various cleanup methods. That's all very public, and there's more science and more information that's being published all the time.

• (1605)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Is the technology in place to clean it up?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Some of the investments that we're making with respect to the Coast Guard are exactly about that, absolutely.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

Now we'll go to the government side again, to Mr. Rogers for seven minutes or less.

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

Mr. Minister and guests, thank you for being here. I have a couple of questions around Coast Guard issues, so perhaps Mr. Hutchinson can also chime in on some of this. Could you provide an update on the lifeboat stations in Newfoundland and Labrador, which are to be constructed in Old Perlican, Twillingate and St. Anthony? What is the timeline for completion, and when will they become operational?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As you noted, we announced the new lifeboat stations, three in Newfoundland and Labrador and four on the Pacific coast. The station at Old Perlican, I believe, will be open in the summer of 2019, with construction already weighing in on schedule. Maybe I can ask the commissioner to talk about the other two.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The station at St. Anthony has already been refurbished, and there has been a bay-class boat delivered to that station. It's operational today, as we speak. As the Minister said, the station at Old Perlican is on schedule to be opened and functioning next year, and Twillingate will follow after that. I think we would have it operational for summer 2020.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Minister, in the last election we made a commitment to reopen the maritime rescue sub-centre in St. John's, Newfoundland, which was closed by the Harper government. In May it reopened—a promise made, a promise kept. Could you comment on the importance of these maritime rescue stations and how government is investing to keep our oceans safe through significant investments in the Canadian Coast Guard?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The reopening of the sub-centre in St. John's was very important. It was a commitment that we made. It was very similar to the reopening of the Kitsilano Coast Guard base on the west coast, which had been closed previously. Since becoming operational, the rescue sub-centre in St. John's has worked on 452 incidents, and some were fairly high-profile cases. Less than a week after opening, the Coast Guard provided humanitarian support to the local Royal Newfoundland Constabulary to assist with rescuing an individual who had fallen off the Signal Hill trail, and there are a whole range of others that I could go through where having that sub-station in place has been incredibly important from a safety perspective.

Did you want to add anything there?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I would simply add that the sub-station has received in excess of 22,000 calls, and I think that indicates that there's a volume to be managed through that office. Very important to us is the 24-7 capacity that it offers, and while it supplements the work of the JRCC in Halifax, having that 24-7 backup is.... Any world-class system has to have backups in place.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Living on the island, and of course seeing the impact the ocean can have on major storms as we saw this past week, I truly appreciate the commitment you made to the work we're doing here.

Minister, as you know, snow crab is a valuable resource for many fishers on the east coast, particularly Newfoundland and Labrador. Today many have major concerns about the 2019 total allowable catch and the references to the precautionary approach to management principles and so on. I've heard from some of them following some meetings with some DFO officials.

Could you comment on your department's plans to address the concerns of fishers who are calling us and asking about the 2019 quota for snow crab?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As you know, the snow crab stocks have been declining for some time. Obviously that is a significant concern. We need to be relying on science-based decision-making for ensuring sustainable harvest of our oceans. The current research suggests that the snow crab stock may be challenged to maintain the current level of fishing, given the declines we are seeing. I think a precautionary approach is essential to prevent long-term damage to the stock.

We're developing a framework for snow crab. It was published initially in October, and we're now holding consultations with fishers to ensure we are incorporating their thoughts on the path forward.

• (1610)

Mr. Churence Rogers: I would ask the minister that your officials and you, certainly, pay close attention to the fishers in the industry and the local knowledge they bring to the management of this resource and this stock. They obviously rely heavily on it for their livelihood.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

Now we move to the Conservative side, Mr. Calkins, for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I'm going to throw some questions straight at you without much preamble.

In determining your strategy to increase the populations of the southern resident killer whale, what are the desired population targets that your department and you have agreed upon for the short, medium and long term?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The southern resident killer whales face three different sources of threats: the contaminants in the water; the lack of availability of prey, which is largely chinook salmon; and physical and acoustic disturbance from ships.

The measures we have taken are intent on addressing the declines in numbers we've seen. The focus for all species at risk is initially stopping the decline and then starting to turn that around over time. That's exactly what we are intent on doing through the measures we've put in place.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: So you don't have any numbers per se because the population is in its normal range between 70 and 90 right now, even though it has been in decline for several years.

You don't have a hard and fast number other than just stopping the decline and waiting and seeing what happens?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I'm not sure the population is in its normal range. Only 15 to 20 years ago there were 95. They are now 74.

If you look at the distribution of males and females and those of calf-bearing age, there are significant concerns about the viability of the species going forward.

If we are going to act to save this species, we need to act now.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I would argue that out of the three pillars you're talking about, the most important one is the availability of prey. Ships have been present while the population of the killer whales has been increasing and decreasing. I'm not going to get into whether the contaminants, the long-term bioaccumulations, are a direct or imminent threat, but I think food and starvation are considered an imminent threat.

Certain salmon hatcheries have been utilizing various methods to rear chinook salmon that are demonstrably more resilient. This would be like an S-1 chinook salmon, for example, that doesn't get into the ocean until it's at least two years of age. It's much larger. It's much more resilient. It's much more able to evade predation, and so on.

Some of these hatcheries I know of on Vancouver Island specifically are not being used by the salmonid enhancement program. You have allocated some more money recently for this, some \$60 million. Will these hatcheries be enveloped into the Department of Fisheries and Oceans? A couple of hundred thousand chinook salmon are sitting in a hatchery right now that should be released, and they are not getting anywhere with the department.

Can you explain why?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Part of the whales initiative we announced a couple of weeks ago was more money for hatcheries. We're in the process of assessing exactly which hatcheries would have the greatest impact. Certainly the primary source of food is the Fraser runs, and we're looking primarily at those, but we have not yet firmly decided.

I would not agree with your characterization that prey is the single largest issue. Prey and transportation are inextricably linked because the whales do not forage when they are disturbed. It's simply not true to say that the same number of ships that were there 20 years ago are there today. There has been a significant increase in volume every year out of the Port of Vancouver and the Port of Seattle.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Can you provide the committee with a breakdown of the costs associated with the decision to cancel the expropriation of the quota from Clearwater and can you assure this committee that any new process to award contracts will be above board and transparent?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I can assure you that we are continuing with a plan to encourage indigenous participation in the fishery. As I announced a few months ago, we will be moving forward with a process that will be transparent and informed by third parties, to ensure we get it right.

•(1615)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Have you considered increasing the availability of the preferred prey, the chinook salmon, for the southern resident killer whale through any science-based targeted predator control program? I am talking about a program to reduce the pinniped predation around the estuaries and river environments where young salmon are present.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: We're looking at all ways to increase the number of chinook, whether by reducing the take from recreational commercial fisheries or through hatcheries and investments in habitat. We're also looking at pinnipeds and whether they represent a significant issue. The science to date would suggest they're not as big an issue as many think, but there is more science being done. We are doing it ourselves. I know the Pacific Salmon Foundation is doing its own study on this issue. We're certainly looking at that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: My last question is on the illegal, unreported and unregulated catch. What are you going to do to resolve the issue of unreported catch, specifically unreported catch on the Fraser River?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I think it gets back to one of the questions we had earlier around enforcement. It's important that we have rules, and it's important that we have rules that are respected. We are enhancing our enforcement capacity across the country—from coast to coast to coast—to ensure that we can address any issues that might arise with respect to unreported catch.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

Now we will go back to the government side. Mr. Finnigan, you have five minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

As you know, the Atlantic salmon is in trouble. It has been declining, up and down, for the last number of years. This is certainly attributable to many factors, some that we can take action on and some that we're not even sure about, for instance, why the returns are very low. There are other factors such as predators, whether it be the striped bass, the grey seal or others. There are other actions we can take, such as repairing the river banks and creating cold pools so that it has habitat, especially during these last few summers, some of the hottest in history. In the short term, we can certainly take some of those actions.

With 2019 being the International Year of the Salmon, I'm wondering if there is a new initiative—or any initiative—that we could put in place to protect this salmon. It's a very economic industry, especially with the recreational for my area, the Miramichi, but also other rivers are starting to see lower numbers. Being the International Year of the Salmon, is there anything that the department has planned to ensure we are doing all we can to help the salmon survive and expand?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The Atlantic salmon is an iconic species. It's very important. Clearly, some of the things we have been seeing are cause for significant concern. The department has been doing quite a lot to try to address some of the issues that have arisen.

Maybe I can ask the parliamentary secretary to talk a little bit about the International Year of the Salmon and some of the things you've been working on.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Finnigan, I had occasion last week to attend an event put on by the Maliseet Nation Conservation Council to kick off the International Year of the Salmon and to talk about some of the things the government is doing. They specifically relate to investments in science. There is an Atlantic salmon research joint venture partnership with indigenous communities, academia and conservation organizations. There is also the catch-and-release regulation that was put in place in the Restigouche, Miramichi and Margaree rivers, as well as in some Newfoundland rivers.

Finally, significant work is being done around habitat as part of the oceans protection plan and the coastal restoration fund. Those things were highlighted in that presentation and will form a significant part of the government's initiatives going forward.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you, Parliamentary Secretary.

Shifting to small craft harbours, do we know how long it will take our community to get its money back once it divests itself of our small harbour? A lot of communities reluctantly get rid of their harbours, which they've had for a long time. Do we know how long it takes, once we've removed it and done all the environmental cleanup and everything, to get our money back? Could you give me that figure so I could answer my constituents' questions on that matter?

•(1620)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Small craft harbours are obviously critical for many coastal communities. That is precisely why in budget 2018 we announced another \$250 million to be focused on small craft harbour projects. Part of it, as you know, relates to divestitures with respect to non-core harbours.

Maybe I can turn to Sylvie here. She can talk about some of the economics. It is often project-specific, but maybe she can give a general answer.

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe (Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Harbour Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): It is project-specific, but it depends as well on the state of the harbour we are trying to divest, such as whether or not there are repairs needed to put it in better condition before the divestiture takes place. Sometimes the negotiations with whomever is wanting to take on the harbour can be quite lengthy, so it really does vary.

Through the budget 2018 money we've received for divestiture, we already have some project-ready pieces that we will be able to deliver in the next two years.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we'll go to the Conservative side.

Mr. Arnold, you have five minutes or less, please.

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

Minister, I'm going to touch on a subject that's been key to me and to my riding constituents. I've brought it to the attention of previous ministers.

Last October, the former fisheries minister committed to increasing federal resources for aquatic invasive species programs and prevention activities in British Columbia. However, the actual increase in resources delivered was approximately only \$50,000 annually, shared between B.C. and the Yukon. Of the \$10.1 million of ongoing funding DFO has for AIS activities nationally, about 86% is provided to fighting two species, invasive Asian carp and sea lamprey in Ontario.

Why does DFO continue to ignore the acute ecological and economic threats posed for western Canada by aquatic invasive species? Will the minister personally ensure that British Columbia receives an equitable level of funding to fight AIS?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Aquatic invasive species are obviously important for most, if not all, provinces in Canada. It's certainly important in British Columbia. It's important in Alberta and Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It's important all across eastern Canada and central Canada. In 2017-18 we announced \$43.8 million for work on invasive species, plus a little more than \$10 million for AIS management. A lot of that is coordinating with the provinces and territories, which obviously have a role here.

With respect to spending in British Columbia, about \$850,000 was announced just this past year with respect to aquatic invasive species. A lot of that was focused in the Okanagan.

It's certainly an issue that we are live to. It's an important issue to be on top of to ensure that we don't end up with a bigger problem that we would not have had if we had taken action in the short term.

Mr. Mel Arnold: That problem has been identified as being a \$50-million-per-year maintenance problem for communities in one watershed alone. Again, I would pressure you for more impact on that.

Minister, I want to challenge you a little bit on the statement you made that pinnipeds don't seem to be an issue in the competition with southern resident killer whales. I was just provided a document last night quoting some numbers. Comparing harbour seals in 1972 versus what they are now, they've gone from 210,000 to approximately 355,000. The California sea lions grew from a number of fewer than 6,000 to 47,000. Steller's sea lions increased from 74,000 to 78,000. In the Salish Sea, the harbour seal population grew from approximately 8,600 in 1975 to over 77,800.

How can you believe, or have you been misled with the information you've been provided, that pinnipeds are not serious competition for prey for the southern resident killer whale?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Let me just correct one thing. I didn't say that the populations of pinnipeds haven't been increasing. They have been increasing. That's a statistical fact—

Mr. Mel Arnold: You stated that they weren't competition for prey.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: That's a statistical fact, if you would let me finish. If you actually look at the science that's been done on pinnipeds, particularly on the west coast, it will tell you that less than 10% of their diet is salmon. That being said—

Mr. Mel Arnold: No. Pardon me—

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: That being said—

Mr. Mel Arnold: —but your official tried to say that last week. We have evidence that during the key migration time of smolt coming down the rivers and reaching the ocean environment, it's up to 90% of a pinniped's diet.

• (1625)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Certainly, if you want to bring forward science, that would be considered. We're always open to new science. We have made a commitment, as part of the review we are doing with various stakeholders, including fishers, that the review of the pinnipeds and the impact they have, with respect to science, is definitely part of that process.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Are you moving forward on activities around that?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Absolutely.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I see one other line in the supplementary estimates in schedule 1. It refers to the authority to purchase and dispose of commercial fishing vessels. Could you elaborate a little further on what that is? Are you simply buying fishermen out, taking them out of the business?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'm going to take a shot at it. We'll look to see if this is actually correct. If it's not, we'll get you the correct information.

Some of the funding in the supps speaks to providing access to indigenous groups as part of treaty negotiations. Part of that is retiring access from commercial fishers, and providing the access to indigenous groups. It may well be that. If it's not, we'll get you the answer to the question.

The Chair: Going back to the government side, Mr. Hardie, for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): I'm going to split my time with my fellow westcoaster Ms. May, so she has a chance to ask a question.

Commissioner Hutchinson, it was good to hear that our Coast Guard vessels are going to be outfitted with a towing rig. How many capable vessels will we have on the west coast, and will they be able to do the same as the ones we're leasing?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: All of the large vessels on the west coast will be outfitted with tow kits. I believe there are seven, off the top of my head. If that's wrong, I'll correct it.

Will they be as capable as the two we're leasing? Not in every case. The two that we're leasing have very high bollard pulls. That's the technical expression. They're very capable toll vessels, while many of the ships we operate are designed for other primary purposes, for example, science.

Mr. Ken Hardie: There are probably nine capable, two really, really capable, and others that could handle smaller vessels. Is that a fair statement?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: That's a fair statement.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We are looking at an equitable share of wealth coming out of the ocean, and there does seem to be a tremendous imbalance between the risk undertaken by the various players in the harvest, and the returns that they get.

Minister Wilkinson, is the government open to a good, clear review, and perhaps some changes to the regime on the west coast?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Yes. We have certainly heard the different perspectives from various groups on the west coast. We look forward to understanding the views of various stakeholders through the work of this committee. The department will support the committee by providing research and summarizing factual information about socio-economic aspects of licensing and fisheries management.

It's going to be very important for us to hear what folks say to you, and what you say to us, and then we will need to make a determination about how best to move forward.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have one last short question. With respect to the hatcheries providing more chinook salmon into the system, will that strategy include hatcheries and activities further up the Fraser watershed?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: It's certainly possible. We have not fully made the decision about which hatcheries. Certainly, the main criteria will be which ones will have the greatest impact on providing available prey for the southern resident killer whales.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much, Ken.

The best dilbit studies done by the Government of Canada, in terms of honesty and replicating of natural conditions, are done by Fisheries and Oceans in the Bedford Institute of Oceanography in Halifax. The ones least likely to be accurate, because they were done in tanks of water in Alberta, were done by Natural Resources Canada. There's a preponderance of effort to focus only on the ones that say dilbit floats, and can be cleaned up, based on studies in tanks of water in Alberta.

As the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, I want to draw to your attention to the really good studies, which have been published and peer-reviewed, led by chief investigator Thomas King. They suggest that you are very unlikely to be able to clean up dilbit; that the oil balls will sink, and you'll have to heat them somehow, underwater, to get them up and out of the ecosystem. At this point, can you honestly tell us we have a clue about how to clean up dilbit, based on studies in your department?

•(1630)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: With due respect, Ms. May, we released last year a couple of different studies that had 57 peer-reviewed reports, I think it was, that said exactly the opposite of what you're saying. One of the folks who you quote on an ongoing basis is in the Royal Society of Canada report. The fellow who chaired that is a DFO scientist—

Ms. Elizabeth May: I know that.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: —who will tell you that diluted bitumen behaves no differently in water than any other conventional crude.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I've spoken with Dr. Lee, and he hasn't said that when he has briefed parliamentarians here, so there's a difference of opinion and even a difference of reporting on the published documents that exist, but bitumen does separate from diluent.

The question of how quickly it weathers, how quickly it sinks and how we would possibly manage a cleanup is put in a particularly harsh light by the recent efforts off the coast of Newfoundland to deal with the Husky oil spill, which isn't bitumen and is conventional crude. We're really quite limited in the ability to respond in the open ocean in harsh conditions. It's difficult to see how anything in the oceans protection plan would give anyone on the west coast any comfort about the threat of a dilbit spill.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Well, again, I would rely on the science with respect to dilbit. With respect to ensuring that we actually are in a position to clean up spills, we have made enormous investments through the oceans protection plan to ensure that's the case.

Obviously, the most sensitive area with respect to the west coast is within the Burrard Inlet itself, and certainly there are enormous resources that are going into ensuring that we can respond to any kind of spill, whether it's diluted bitumen or the bunker C that is in the 3,200 container ships and cruise ships that come into the harbour every year.

It's important that we ensure that those resources exist, but I would tell you that even more important is ensuring that we are preventing those spills, and we are making investments in things like the radar stations that I announced last week in British Columbia to ensure that's the case.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Another quick question?

The Chair: You're done. You're way over time.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly, please, for three minutes or less.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Chair.

I think I just have time for two quick questions on one of my favourite topics, salmon aquaculture, and specifically on closed containment technology. West coast wild salmon are under threat from disease and pollutants, as you know, and from sea lice originating from open-net cage salmon farms.

Many say that the future of salmon aquaculture is closed containment. The technology exists. It is economically feasible and the prospect of jobs and economic opportunities is immense.

Canada is well positioned to become a world leader in closed containment, but we need to act now. Globally, money is being invested in land-based salmon farming. Florida, for instance, as you know, is building a 90,000-tonne facility, which is the size of our west coast tonnage annually. There's no time for delay. Canada must invest in a safe, sustainable industry that protects wild salmon and employment and develops new technologies, jobs and export opportunities.

I want to give you an opportunity to tell the committee what your position is on removing these farms from the wild salmon migration route and transitioning this industry to safe, land-based technology.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I made a few statements on this subject a few weeks ago on the B.C. coast. We will be moving toward a more fulsome implementation of the precautionary principle. We will be looking at moving towards area-based management on a go-forward basis, and we are working with the provinces actively to ensure that our efforts are aligned.

We believe it's important that we understand the current status and the potential barriers to cost-effective closed containment. We will be moving forward with a study on that, an expedited study, likely in concert with the province, ideally with terms of reference that are agreed to by both the environmental community and the industry, in order to ensure that we understand exactly where we are situated with respect to technology and costs, and to enable us, if in fact we are not quite there, to figure out what the pathway is to enable us to get there.

In the very same way that we did with solar and wind technology 20 years ago, we need to do the same thing. That would be closed containment on land and it would be closed containment in oceans.

•(1635)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you. I encourage you to talk with LandAqua. They have a 50,000-tonne proposal.

My last question in the remaining seconds is on whales. The supplementary estimates include \$1 million for the whale innovation challenge, which is to fund a contest for “new detection and tracking technologies to reduce the risk of collisions [and] entanglements”, but it won't be decided until 2020. My question is, if the protection of whales is so important to the government, shouldn't we be investing significantly more money into public research into these technologies today?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I think the immediate term is that we are investing significant resources and putting into place measures that we know are going to be effective today. That's both with respect to the right whale and the southern resident killer whale.

We are also investing resources internally in terms of science, but this is a challenge to Canadians. It's a challenge for innovative entrepreneurs to come forward with ideas that can help us with our internal efforts and the efforts of others who are invested in this space.

Maybe the deputy wants to speak for a second.

Ms. Catherine Blewett (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): The minister is quite correct. What is interesting about the Nesta prize is that we were challenged with an opportunity for international expertise, so Canadians and citizens around the planet will have a chance to bid, so it's different. It's not the only research, but it really is looking for cutting-edge ideas, and it is being administered in an entirely independent way. That was just another opportunity to bring resources and focus on a really important issue for us.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll continue with questioning to the government side now. We have some time remaining.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I think my time is up, unfortunately. I have another engagement, but I think my deputy is going to stay.

The Chair: Okay, we'll continue with the questioning.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Thank you, all, very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, for appearing. We look forward to your coming back again really soon.

Now to the government side for three minutes, Mr. Fraser, please.

I would like to welcome Robert Lamirande, director general, indigenous affairs and reconciliation.

Mr. Robert Lamirande (Director General, Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser, you have three minutes.

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the officials for being here.

I want to ask my first question regarding small craft harbours. I am from southwestern Nova Scotia and represent an area where the fishery, especially the lobster fishery, is absolutely critical to our local economy.

We know that the fishery has done extremely well over the last number of years and, as a result of that, there has been a huge issue regarding capacity at our wharves and small craft harbours in southwestern Nova Scotia, like many other places across Atlantic Canada, because the boats are getting bigger, and they're running out of room.

There are also issues at small craft harbours regarding the repair of some of the small craft harbours that haven't had investment for many years. There is also an issue with dredging, and they all come out of the same budget for small craft harbours. A lot of the harbour authorities I represent and I've heard from across Atlantic Canada are saying that the dredging work that happens is just good enough to get you through the year and that there is not enough long-term planning with regard to dredging work so that you don't have to come back over and over and keep doing that same work.

I know you're well aware of this, and I was pleased that in the last budget there was \$250 million in B-base funding for increasing some of those capital projects for small craft harbours, but I don't think it's enough to get us there for the long-term planning, and there are a lot of wharves in my area that critically need work. In many ways it's supporting the local economy to ensure that they have what they need, not only to be safe, but to have what they need to keep the economies going in our smaller communities.

I wonder if you can comment on that as far as the importance of these investments in small craft harbours for the long term.

• (1640)

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I would say your concerns are quite valid and, unfortunately, not incredibly unique.

The issue of dredging is interesting. As the climate changes and as tides change, we see those kinds of imperatives and we see the demand. As you noted, government has made a significant investment of \$250 million. We could always use more. It truly is an important program for safety and for economic access on all coasts of the country.

I may turn to Sylvie if she wants to highlight a bit of our plan.

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: Just to pick up on the issue of dredging, it is something that we are spending more and more money on every year. As the deputy minister noted, climate change is complicating things, as well as the larger vessels to which you referred, meaning that we have to dredge at a greater depth.

We have more and more cases of emergency dredging that are more frequent and unpredictable, so we are trying to better predict what kinds of emergencies we might be facing, and we have been working with harbour authorities to do a better job of that.

We've also identified contractors to provide services under much shorter service, so it is something we are working on very seriously.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

We'll now go to the Conservative side, Mr. Arnold, for three minutes or less.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the officials for being here.

I want to ask a bit more about the funding directed towards dealing with illegal offshore fishing. There seems to have been significant commitment that way.

Is there any enforcement once this illegal fishing has been discovered through the patrols? We hear lots about it being discovered and reported back to the host country. Does anything ever happen after that?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Certainly IUU fishing is incredibly challenging at the international level. The current global governance through the NAO really moves the governance back to the home countries, so it is an ongoing challenge.

The minister noted that we are going to the sustainable oceans conference in Kenya next week, and that's an area that Canada's going to focus on. We want to bring some more global attention to IUU and the real challenges it presents to some of our global stocks.

Mr. Mel Arnold: In other words, you don't know of any concrete enforcement that has been done afterwards.

My next question is whether you have ever witnessed any of this illegal offshore fishing yourself.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I had the opportunity to travel to Japan. Through our CMP programming, we have operation driftnet. I have not actually seen it myself, but I had the opportunity to see photographs from previous missions that had been flown out of Hakodate, Japan, and it's quite something. It's pretty compelling when you see great big driftnets that really have captured a lot of resource.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Was there any action taken, and were there any results? Did it achieve anything, or did we just observe it and report?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Canada's actions were to observe it and report it in the international forum.

Mr. Mel Arnold: That's where our responsibility ends.

How does your department manage unreported fishing within Canada? How do they determine other openings and so on, when there's significant unreported catch taking place?

• (1645)

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I just would like to clarify. When you say domestic, do you have an example that you're thinking of?

Mr. Mel Arnold: It's a very touchy question. I can understand why you're so careful with your answer.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I actually want to give you a proper one.

Mr. Mel Arnold: We know that there's significant unreported fishing. I have been on sport fishing advisory boards for years. Year after year after year, the staff were trying to manage a fishery when they had no idea what was being taken in the unreported catch.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Mr. Donnelly for three minutes or less, please.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and again, thank you to our officials for being here for round two.

The minister spoke about marine protected areas in his opening remarks. Supplementary estimates include only \$870,000 to protect Canada's nature parks and wild spaces. Budget 2018 talked about \$21 million in funding, so I'm wondering where the rest of the money is and what is the plan for that money. Also, what specifically is the plan for the \$870,000?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I will turn it over to the CFO to help unpack the numbers, but I'm happy to talk to you about our plans going forward, as we move to reach our 10% by 2020.

At present, Canada is at 7.9%. We are finishing some of the areas we have said we're going to do, and we're moving forward to close the gap quite quickly.

Jen can probably give us the details on these specific supp numbers.

Ms. Jen O'Donoghue: Yes. The \$870,000 is for the first year of funding. It's related to a horizontal item for the nature legacy for Canada initiative and cost-effective plan, which meets international land and wildlife conservation targets, transitions a species at risk program from recovery planning to protection and recovery action, and contributes to reconciliation with indigenous peoples while delivering conservation outcomes.

I don't know if Philippe wanted to add anything to this. It's related to a partnership we have with the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Philippe Morel (Assistant Deputy Minister, Aquatic Ecosystems Sector, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): This is related to the species at risk programs that will transfer to the department. It's not related to marine protected areas. The programs were previously managed by Environment and Climate Change Canada. We were providing advice to ECCC and it was doing the agreement. Now this money has been transferred to our department, so we manage all of the aquatic species at risk programs.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay. I think I have a few seconds left for one last question.

I didn't hear much of a difference between the \$870,000 and the \$20 million, but if there is follow-up perhaps you could send that to committee. We'd appreciate getting that information.

With respect to the indigenous programs, the supplementary estimates (A) allocate \$15 million to "advance reconciliation on Indigenous and treaty rights issues". Could you talk about what the \$15 million fund will be used for and what, if any, connection DFO's reconciliation programs have to the Government of Canada's proposed recognition and implementation of rights framework?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I'm going to turn that over to Kevin and to Rob Lamirande to give us some detail.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'll start.

There are two significant items for indigenous reconciliation in these supplementary estimates. One is \$33 million, which is related to negotiations with first nations on the east coast. That has been ongoing for a while. The \$15 million is for the west coast negotiations.

There is a large set of negotiations currently under way. With respect to these funds, the \$15 million has actually been moved forward from last year, because negotiations are ongoing. It absolutely links to the rights reconciliation framework and to DFO's effort to contribute to the government's overall efforts around reconciliation and addressing rights.

• (1650)

Mr. Robert Lamirande: That's good. He pretty much covered it.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll return now to the government side, to Mr. Hardie, for three minutes or less.

Mr. Ken Hardie: There will be a short comment from me, and then I'll pass it over to Mr. Finnigan who will then pass it over to Mr. Fraser. We're being very efficient here.

This is a comment. We've heard in many of our studies, and most recently in our study that's under way on small craft harbours, that the local knowledge of the people on the ground is quite often not given due weight in DFO decisions. In the case of small craft harbours, we heard that local people had very clear ideas of improvements that were needed and that DFO came in with engineers and others who basically did something different. We didn't get value for money or the result that everybody was looking for.

This is something that you will hear again and again from us, and I would hope that in future studies, when we have a chance to talk to you, we'll hear a little bit more about the closer collaboration with people on the ground who actually know what's going on locally. I think that's going to be important for good results.

Mr. Finnigan.

[Translation]

Mr. Pat Finnigan: I'll be brief.

You received a letter from the Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, or the FRAPP. In the letter, Jean Lanteigne listed various concerns regarding the area closures resulting from the presence of whales. Apparently, some regions want the next fishing season to start earlier. There's a great deal of concern about safety and the economic aspect. Some regions would be able to start fishing earlier, and other regions wouldn't be able to do so.

I want you to be aware of these concerns and to ensure that no region will lose out as a result of this. However, I don't know whether the solution would be to open the fishing areas earlier.

[English]

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Okay.

Mr. Colin Fraser: The oceans protection plan and the Atlantic fisheries fund have done significant good in ensuring that we're relying on the best science and data available and in ensuring that conservation of our fisheries resources is a primary concern for the government to ensure sustainability of the resources for the long term. I think there's a lot of good happening with the oceans protection plan, supported by the Atlantic fisheries fund in Atlantic Canada, where I know a lot of smaller, industry-led organizations have stepped up to say that we need more science to know what's going on in our oceans for the long term.

One issue with regard to marine protected areas, however, is that there's some misinformation or a misunderstanding about how marine protected areas work. I hope there will be more consultation with the people on the ground to ensure they understand that if a marine protected area, for example, is put in place, it doesn't necessarily close a fishery. I'm thinking particularly of the lobster fishery. There can be other ways to ensure conservation for the long term.

I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on consultation with industry regarding the marine protected areas in particular.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: We really appreciate it because there is a little bit of a challenge in terms of the nomenclature. People do confuse what marine protected areas are. We actually have various levels of protection. When you hear "marine protected area", that typically refers to an Oceans Act MPA, which is actually fairly closed to human activity.

We have so many levels of protection. I'll pick a Nova Scotian example, because I'm very lucky to be from there. We're looking at an area on the eastern shore. It's an inshore area for protection, but the biodiversity we're trying to protect in that particular area is not impacted by the lobster fishery. We've communicated that. We expect that to go forward. As well, there's some harvesting of seaweed.

We can do a better job, as we go forward, to make sure we're clear and we communicate what we're trying to achieve. I do make the joke occasionally that it's not very often that people say to DFO, "Please slow down." In the case of marine protected areas, when I started my job, Canada was at about 1% of marine protection. The mandate was 5% protection by the end of 2017. We did go quite quickly. In the very good work that went out—lots of maps—there are stakeholders who have said, "Hold on, what do you mean?" We are working with provinces and other stakeholders to make sure we explain it and have an opportunity for folks to make sure that they have their say and that they have a clear line of sight on the protections that we're trying to get to—what's in, what's out and how it actually will roll out.

• (1655)

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you.

The Chair: Now to the Conservative side, with Mr. Calkins for three minutes or less, please.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Yurdiga has a question, then I'll take over from there.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the department officials for being here today.

Data is everything—data and science. Mel Arnold asked a question about municipal waste. The minister responded by saying that's an environmental concern. That goes to that committee.

About a month ago, I was substituting in the environment committee and I asked the same question. They said they don't have any data on that. Which department collects data on municipal waste and the toxins in that municipal waste if it's not your department?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: It actually is Environment and Climate Change Canada. When substances move into the water course, ECCCC has that.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Why isn't that data available to us? I asked that question in the environment committee and they had no data.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I'm happy to follow up with my departmental colleagues. If that's useful, I'm happy to do it.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: To the department officials here, following what I think was some fairly intense political pressure, the government relented and exempted fishing fuel from the proposed—or the now-implemented—carbon tax for the approximately 46,000 fishers in Canada. However, there are all kinds of incidental costs that fishers will bear as a result of the carbon tax. One only has to look at the cost of shipping lobster. I'm looking at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans website right now. It says, "About two-thirds of Canada's 50 million lb lobster catch is shipped alive to distant markets. This involves coastal storage in crates, cars, tanks and tidal pounds for a few days or up to several months, shipment for 1-5 days".

All of these things are going to be costs that will be borne by the fishing industry. Any equipment that's brought to the wharf and anything that's taken away from the wharf is going to have increased costs because all of it consumes energy.

Has the department done a study—notwithstanding the carbon tax exemption on the fuel for the boat alone—on what the cost of the carbon tax will actually be to the fishing industry?

Ms. Catherine Blewett: I'll turn to Sylvie to ask if we've actually done that work. My sense is that we've not done an in-depth study. That would be my initial take.

Sylvie, you may have some initial data.

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: That's correct. We haven't done a study, but we'd be happy to look into it and get back to you with some preliminary analysis on that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I look forward to that.

The other question I have is with regard to—

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: It's going to have to wait.

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly, make it a quick question, please, before we run out of time.

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

I'm going to turn to icebreakers and the Canadian Coast Guard. The supplementary estimates (A) propose \$827.3 million in funding to procure three icebreakers for the Canadian Coast Guard. The Parliamentary Budget Officer notes that this funding relates to purchasing and retrofitting three used Norwegian icebreakers as an interim measure. A Canadian Press report states that the three Norwegian-made icebreakers will cost up to 30% more than projected due to import tariffs, brokerage fees and other costs.

When will these three icebreakers be in service to provide interim capacity? Where will they be located? Why were the tariffs and other additional costs not included in DFO's original cost estimates?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The first icebreaker will come into service several weeks from now, before Christmas. The other two icebreakers will be undergoing a more extensive refit, and they will come into service later. I'm just going to check the dates to make sure that I don't give you wrong dates.

In terms of where they will serve, they're not being assigned to a specific zone. They'll be assigned where they need them as we take other ships to do refit work and vessel life extension work. These ships are meant to maintain a capability that allows us the flexibility to work on other ships.

For example, when the first ship goes into service, it will be serving the northwest corner of Newfoundland, initially. These ships are very capable. They can work throughout the St. Lawrence region, the gulf. They can work the Arctic. They've all been to the North Pole before. They're very capable vessels.

I just want to double-check those dates, which I have here.

• (1700)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: What is the cost?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The cost of acquiring the vessels—

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Sorry, I hoped you were going to come back with the tariffs and the brokerage fees.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: When we buy a vessel domestically, we don't pay an import duty on it, so we would show the purchase price contract. By separating these figures out, we can actually make a contract-to-contract comparison on a purchase of a vessel. If we had put those all together, then we'd have a project cost as opposed to a purchase cost, if you will. The other point, which I mentioned earlier, is that out of the \$217 million above the contract price, the majority of that money is actually returned to government coffers.

So, is it fairly reflected as a cost of acquiring the ship or not? We'd like to give the cost of acquiring the ship and separate those dollars out. That's what we did.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: What are the other two dates?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Pardon me? The other two dates?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Are they this year or next year?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: They won't be this year. The first ship will come into service this year, and the other two, I believe, will follow in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

I want to say a special thank you to our guests who have appeared this afternoon. We greatly appreciate your attendance.

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Thank you.

The Chair: I know you've been more than co-operative on many occasions here before committee, so again, thank you.

Before we go into committee business, I will call for the votes under supplementary estimates (A).

DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Vote 1a—Operating expenditures.....\$36,799,816

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

Vote 5a—Capital expenditures.....\$883,499,828

(Vote 5a agreed to on division)

Vote 10a—Grants and contributions.....\$57,947,049

(Vote 10a agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report supplementary estimates (A) 2018-19 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now suspend for a moment while we go into committee business.

Mr. Mel Arnold: If I could, Mr. Chair, in recognition of our Coast Guard employees who are here today and of Coast Guard employees right across the country from coast to coast, it is Navy and Coast Guard Day today, so I thank you all for your service, and I'm sure all the committee joins me in this.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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