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Chair

Mr. Scott Simms

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• (0845)

[English]

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

Before we get to the formal proceedings, I would like to take a moment to turn to our dear colleague, who returns to us in much better health. Welcome, Todd Doherty. It's good to have you back, sir.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Thank you, Chair. It's good to be back.

If I can, Mr. Chair, I just want to say thank you. I've probably said it a hundred times. I'll say it 1,000 more times. The notes, cards, and messages that we got from all sides of the House really, truly were uplifting. Mr. Beech's spouse reached out to my wife as well. Over the last two months, I truly felt like I was part of a team and family, and it came when we needed it the most, so thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, sir. We appreciate it very much. It is good to see you back.

Now, we go to the formal proceedings of the day. As you know, we normally only take this time to study supplementary estimates (C). However, this year, thanks to a law change back in June 2017, we are looking at two things, both the supplementary estimates (C) and the interim estimates. This interim estimates business is a whole new universe for us.

However, from a technical standpoint, yesterday, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons announced that Thursday, March 22, will be the final allotted day of the current period. Technically, that means that the estimates have been deemed to have been reported back to the House. That's already been done, so the votes won't be necessary. However, since he's here, why not hear from the person himself?

Since you're here, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is studying the subject matter of supplementary estimates (C) 2017-18, votes 1c, 5c, and 10c, under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Coast Guard, as well as the subject matter of interim estimates 2018-19, votes 1, 5, and 10 under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans as well.

We will begin with our minister, Dominic LeBlanc. It's good to see you again, sir. Thank you for appearing before us today for this hour. You have up to 10 minutes.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Thank you, Mr. Chair. The pleasure is truly mine. I want to assure you of that.

I also want to join you, Chair, in saying how glad I am, Todd, to see you back in good health. I said to Todd that it's a hell of a way to lose weight. I thought your comments in the House of Commons yesterday, Todd, were very moving. It reminds us that we shouldn't wait for a difficult circumstance like that to befall a colleague and a friend to say and think those things. It's a chance for me to say publicly that I'm glad you're back and that you're healthy.

Mr. Chair, thank you for the invitation to, as you said, in very technical complicated terms, appear here on our departmental estimates.

[Translation]

As you can see, I am accompanied by the following members of DFO's senior management team and the Canadian Coast Guard: the deputy minister, Catherine Blewett, the commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, Jeffery Hutchinson, and the interim chief financial officer, Pablo Sobrino.

[English]

It's a pleasure to be here before your committee.

Allow me to take a quick moment to thank each and every one of you—the staff who work for our colleagues, members of Parliament, and also the committee staff—for what I think was terrific work done collectively on Bill C-55 on marine protection. I would note that a number of amendments in the end were incorporated in the legislation. I think it strengthened the bill, and I thank you for that important work.

I also want to thank you again, Mr. Chair, for the work you did in reviewing the 2012 changes to the Fisheries Act. Obviously, at the department we work closely with members of the committee, with provinces and territories, indigenous groups, and with industry stakeholders across the country to ensure that the concerns and points of view that were expressed were taken into account as we drafted our amendments to the Fisheries Act. Many of our proposed changes or amendments in Bill C-68 are obviously inspired by the study, Mr. Chair, that your committee did and the recommendations that accompanied it. Again—and I've said it publicly in the House—I hope and believe that the bill will be referred to the committee in the near future. I look forward, as do my colleagues in the department, to working with all of you if you have suggestions on how we can strengthen the legislation. We're obviously interested in that conversation, and I look forward to those exchanges as well.

Mr. Chair, today we're here to discuss our departmental spending plans. I will provide you and your colleagues with a brief financial overview of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard's 2017-18 supplementary estimates (C) and 2018-19 interim estimates before speaking to a few recent accomplishments of the department.

The supplementary estimates (C) provide the resources for the department to launch, for example, the fisheries and aquaculture clean technology adoption program. You'll remember that this was part of budget 2017, in which there was an element for aquaculture and for the department to address the last ice area within Canadian Arctic waters.

● (0850)

[*Translation*]

In terms of our 2018-19 interim estimates, our initial ask to start the fiscal year amounts to \$577.4 million, which represents three-twelfths of our approved reference levels.

I am pleased to say that our 2018-19 funding includes the following: \$263.5 million in new funding for the oceans protection plan; new funding over a quarter of a billion dollars for the department to continue carrying out its mandate; \$58 million in new funding for the Atlantic Fisheries Fund for this fiscal year; and \$41.5 million for the renewal and expansion of indigenous fisheries programs and initiatives.

[*English*]

There's no question that the demands on our oceans and marine resources are higher than ever before. Our government's historic investment of \$1.5 billion in the oceans protection plan will make our coasts cleaner, safer, and better protected. In collaboration with other departments and indigenous and coastal communities, we're well on our way to developing a safer marine transportation system that strengthens Canada's economy while preserving and restoring marine ecosystems.

Through the oceans protection plan and in all of our work, our government recognizes the importance of indigenous peoples in protecting our coast, addressing climate change, and the designation of new marine protected areas.

[*Translation*]

I am very pleased to say that, by the end of 2017, Canada had surpassed its domestic goal under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to protect 5% of marine and coastal areas. In fact, we have protected 7.75% of marine and coastal areas.

This achievement was made possible thanks to sound science and to sincere engagement with Canadians, indigenous groups, industry leaders, and environmental organizations that care passionately about Canada's oceans.

[*English*]

Our nation's prosperity depends on making sure that the benefits of a growing economy are felt by more and more people, with good, well-paying jobs for middle-class Canadians.

This is especially important to the more than 76,000 Canadians working in commercial fishing, aquaculture, and processing jobs, many in coastal and indigenous communities. I don't have to tell the people around this table, who in many cases—perhaps with the exception of Mr. Miller—represent communities along Canada's coast and remote communities.

Often the fishery and related industries are in fact the only or the most significant source of economic activity in these communities. That's why our government is focused, for example, on the Atlantic fisheries fund, which I announced in 2017. It's designed to encourage new and innovative ways to harvest, process, and deliver high-quality, sustainably sourced fish and seafood.

Other provinces, notably the Province of Quebec, have reached out to me about the possibility of negotiating a similar fund for their fishing industries. Obviously, it will be a pleasure for me to work with Minister Lessard and our colleagues from Quebec on that initiative. We remain open to looking at every possible opportunity on all of Canada's coasts that would in fact improve economic opportunities for Canadians.

● (0855)

[*Translation*]

I will stop here, Mr. Chair.

In your opening remarks, you said that my colleague, the President of the Treasury Board, will be tabling the Main Estimates in April to ensure better alignment with Budget 2018.

This important change in timing is a key pillar of his estimates reform, which will ensure that we, as parliamentarians, are well-positioned to study documents that will be substantially more meaningful, relevant, and pertinent.

It would be a great pleasure to come back to talk to you about the Main Estimates at that time, if you wish.

[English]

Mr. Chair, with that, I wanted to leave some time for questions. I assume all of your questions will be very specific, technical questions related to supplementary estimates (C), and if that's the case, I said to Pablo that I would be happy to ask him or the deputy minister or the commissioner to answer. I will respond to the compliments that members will have with respect to my work as minister or the government's overall work, and those very technical questions on spending I could perhaps leave to the CFO or others.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Your sincerity knows absolutely no boundaries, and I'm absolutely impressed.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you. I learned from you, Sir.

The Chair: Yes, well, I don't know. You may not want to follow that path much longer.

Nevertheless, I do like to invite guests, as you know, which is apropos for our committee. I want to thank or welcome someone we alluded to earlier through the Minister, Mr. Marc Miller from Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs.

Is that correct?

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Exactly, so I represent a slight slice of the St. Lawrence—

The Chair: You do represent a slice of the St. Lawrence.

Mr. Marc Miller: —and the [Inaudible—Editor].

The Chair: I'm sorry, what's that? Go ahead.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: The seaway itself, Marc, or would it be a piece of the coast along the seaway?

Mr. Marc Miller: I'd have to ask the CFO.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Yes, I'm sure his phone at small craft harbours is ringing off the hook.

Let's now go to our questions. As you said, you're eager for time, so let's go there right away.

Let's go to Mr. Morrissey for seven minutes, please.

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

Minister, I will begin on the complimentary side relating to the budget announcement of a significant increase in spending for small craft harbours, of \$150 million. That's for this fiscal year—I thank my colleague for clarifying.

One of the questions I've heard from some is this: are you confident in small craft harbours' ability to get the \$150 million of new money out in projects and spent within the fiscal period allocated, which I believe would begin April 1 and take us into the spring of 2019? I ask this because the \$150 million new money is on top of the \$140 million that was the normal part of the budget. Could you give this committee some assurances on that ability?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Bobby, for the question.

In fact, the increase in funding for the fiscal year starting in a couple of weeks and next year, I think, was largely a result of the work of parliamentarians on all sides who spoke publicly and consistently about the backlog in deferred maintenance and the long list of projects, important in small communities, that weren't able to be funded. I just want to publicly thank colleagues who have been supportive of trying to get increased investments in this program.

I do share your concern, Bobby, around the importance of not lapsing the funding. If we ask the Minister of Finance for that significant investment, and then at the end of the financial year that starts in a couple of weeks, we have lapsed \$30 million or \$40 million, or whatever the amount, short of what we wanted to spend on the appropriate projects, it will be hard to make the argument in future years that.... Even this amount of money will not clear the entire backlog of work. I think it's a very significant start.

I have worked with the deputy minister and with regional directors general to identify quickly.... That work is done. The deputy minister and I had a long conversation about this when we were in western Canada last week. I am confident that this money will be invested in the best projects across the country, but I'm going to be keeping a very close eye, as will the deputy, on how quickly we're going to tender projects in the coming weeks, and ensuring that those projects are on track to be completed in a timetable where that money can be invested in the financial years that the Department of Finance and Minister of Finance gave the money to us. There won't be any money that lapses, and we will obviously be happy to work with all parliamentarians and receive their suggestions as to the priorities in their area, and work with local communities and harbour authorities to identify those projects.

● (0900)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Minister, one of the areas that's causing a lot of concern on the east coast as well as the west coast is the issue of protection of migrating whales. Members of the fishing community have taken steps to do what they can to remove rope and fishing gear from the waters at sensitive times. I'm concerned because, in this issue, it's how Canada is viewed in the international community. It's extremely important that Canada maintain a strong reputation in the international community so that it does not negatively impact the sale of our seafood across the world.

Could you speak briefly on the steps you're taking and the resources you're putting to that to ensure that whales are protected as they migrate through Canadian coastal waters in the Gulf of St. Lawrence primarily and the west coast?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Your question, Bobby, I think is on the minds of many people in the industry. It's certainly on the minds of Canadians who we talked to across the country, not just in coastal areas. The tragic circumstances around the death of north Atlantic right whales on the east coast of Canada and in the United States last season is understandably something that is an enormous priority for our government and for provincial governments.

I'm happy to say for the fishing industry itself as well that from the beginning we have benefited from an enthusiastic and engaged cooperation from the fishing industry. They do not want to be seen as not taking every possible step to protect these highly endangered whales. We've had discussions, for example, with the snow crab industry in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The commissioner and I have spoken about trying to start the season a bit earlier—we're hopeful that this is possible—to allow the gear to be out of the water sooner.

We have looked at a whole series of measures around changing the gear. I hope to make some announcements in the coming days around piloting ropeless traps. If somebody had said to someone in your father or grandfather's generation, Bobby, that they'd be putting a crab pot at the bottom of the St. Lawrence and remotely detonating some buoy that would pop up to the surface with a GPS signal to identify the exact location of the trap, they wouldn't have believed it. That technology is available. It needs to be tested. We're going to be working with the industry, which is enthusiastic to test that as early as this year. We'll be in a position to see if we can apply those kinds of gear changes.

I have a final thing, Mr. Chair. I'm concerned about potential suspension of certification of the snow crab fishery in the Gulf. It's been reported in the media and the deputy tells me it was on CBC this morning. We've worked with the Marine Stewardship Council, and the deputy and others had meetings at a Boston seafood show a couple of weeks ago with the global leaders of the Marine Stewardship Council. I have concerns about the snow crab fishery in the Gulf and the potential suspension of its certification this season. That's why it's so important. This certification is important to Canadians, the industry, and to our exports, so it's important that we prevent and do everything we can to ensure that we don't repeat some of the tragic events that surprised everybody last summer. We'll work with the industry on that important issue as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Minister, we took a bit of time off the top to discuss other things pertaining to the committee. I hope you don't mind. We will probably extend the meeting for about three to four minutes. Is that okay? Do you have the time to spare?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: The cabinet meeting starts at 9:30. I'm not allowed to tell you what's on the agenda, but I need to tell you that I have to be at that meeting.

The Chair: Understood.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I'm already going to arrive 15 or 20 minutes late. I'd be happy to come back at another time, but we were invited for an hour and I do have to leave at 9:45.

The Chair: Okay.

Let's go to Mr. Doherty for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will remind our guests that we appreciate their being here.

We have a lot of questions to get through, so please keep your answers as short and concise as possible.

My first question is for Ms. Blewett. Could you please table with this committee at the earliest possible time the schedule and plan for how you're going to go about...with regard to the small craft harbours?

• (0905)

Ms. Catherine Blewett (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): It would be a pleasure.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Mr. Hutchinson, on January 19 of this year, the Prime Minister announced that your department was commencing negotiations with Davie for four ice breakers that they proposed under their Project Resolute. Last week PSPC announced that you were negotiating for three Viking supply ships, medium-sized icebreakers only.

Can you tell us why you have ignored the Prime Minister's direction by not negotiating for the most needed and available icebreaker, the *MV Aiviq*?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson (Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Chair, our understanding of the publicly stated direction from the Prime Minister is that he announced negotiations for up to four icebreakers. We're not aware of any reference to Project Resolute. We're in ongoing negotiations with Davie for icebreaker capacity.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Can you advise us of any technical deficiencies that the Canadian Coast Guard identified from its inspection of the *MV Aiviq* in July 2017? In addition, can you provide this committee with the Canadian Coast Guard inspection report on the *Aiviq* by the end of this week?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The *MV Aiviq* was built for a very specific purpose, to move oil drilling platforms in the Beaufort. We do see the ship as having limitations in providing service to the Canadian Coast Guard. We would be happy to provide our documentation on that.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Can you also table with this committee by the end of this week any emails, briefing notes, or reports related to concerns raised by the department or experts around operating the 55-year-old *Louis S. St-Laurent* in Arctic regions where polar class 3 icebreakers are allowed to operate without restriction when refuelling or resupplying northern communities?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We would be happy to provide that.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Mr. Hutchinson, do you think it's safe and environmentally responsible to operate a 55-year-old heavy single-hulled icebreaker in Arctic polar class 3 waters? Are you not rolling the dice, given that the polar code requires new commercial vessels that are similarly classed to be double hulled to vastly reduce the risk of an oil spill and environmental disaster?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The icebreakers in our fleet are extremely capable, and in no way do I think it's irresponsible to operate those vessels in the conditions we operate them in.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Hutchinson, in a recent news article, Seaspan stated that the three offshore fisheries science vessels are 90%, 60%, and 40% complete. Since it now appears that these delivery dates are no longer considered secret or under commercial confidence, can you please provide this committee with a report, by the end of this week, with the precise dates as currently stated on each vessel's build schedule?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I can advise the committee this morning that we expect to take delivery of the first OFSV in autumn 2018 and that we expect to take delivery of the other two in 2019. Subject to any commercial confidence that I would have to verify, we would be happy to provide delivery dates.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

That goes to my next question. Could you provide, by the end of this week, the specific dates that the Canadian Coast Guard is planning to have the following vessels in service: OFSV 1, OFSV 2, OFSV 3, OOSV, and the CCG *John G. Diefenbaker*?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: With respect to the OOSV and the *John G. Diefenbaker*, neither one of those ships is subject to a construction contract at this point, so I can't give you a in-service date for either one of them.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Okay.

Mr. Hutchinson, can you confirm whether the Canadian Coast Guard is considering using an Arctic offshore patrol ship as an icebreaker, given that it is being built to the lowest possible ice class, polar class 5, and would be useless as an icebreaker on the St. Lawrence or in the Arctic? Will you table with the clerk by the end of this week any emails or briefing notes related to this proposal?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Again, there may be matters of commercial confidence that we will have to pay attention to, as well as cabinet confidence. Subject to those provisions, we would be happy to share what we're able to.

The Arctic offshore patrol vessel is a very capable vessel for what it's designed for, and I would have to review our material on that.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Mr. Hutchinson, the CCG has set aside funding to build three high-endurance multi-task vessels and five OPVs. Can you table with this committee all emails, briefing notes, and reports related to when this RFP will be issued, as well as any briefing notes or reports related to the reasons for the delay in getting these vessels built, when the funding has already been allocated?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: With respect, that may be a difficult request to honour, simply from two perspectives.

One is that at this point those ships would follow the ships that are already in the NSS build schedule. I don't expect we'd have anything discussing an RFP for those vessels.

The second part of the question was about causes for delay. Again, we see those ships following the current NSS build schedule. I wouldn't expect that we have internal exchange on that. I'm happy to take a look and happy to provide what we have.

• (0910)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, as we were preparing for this meeting, we went out to our constituents, those in our riding, those in our province, and asked if they had any questions they would like us to pose to you. One of the largest first nations within the province of British Columbia, Lax Kw'alaams, has asked us to pose this question to you. Why is the government continuing to allow American NGOs to dictate policy in relation to our natural resources and impacting the well-being and revenues of our ordinary Canadians? They went as far as to say that for a government that professes to support UNDRIP and reconciliation, you are proposing to go forward with a plan that will seek to limit what first nations who are opposed to a tanker ban can do with their traditional territories.

What do you have to say in response to that?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Obviously I don't share the view that Canadian policy is being dictated by American NGOs.

Canadian policy, from our perspective, is dictated by what we think is in the best interests of Canadians: growing an economy sustainably; protecting the environment; providing jobs, including for indigenous communities like the ones you referred to, Mr. Doherty.

We made a commitment with respect to a tanker ban in northern British Columbia in the election campaign. That was a clear commitment we made in the 2015 campaign.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Was it based on science?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Of course it was, Mr. Doherty. Of course it was.

Mr. Todd Doherty: The commitment was...?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: The commitment we made in the election campaign was to proceed with that tanker ban. I have had a chance to meet the indigenous groups you referred to. I understand their point of view. I've listened carefully to their point of view. But my colleague, the Minister of Transport, has also had an opportunity —

Mr. Todd Doherty: How many tankers go through the southern part of our province?

The Chair: Sorry, but I have to interrupt right there. We're over time right now.

Minister, if you have a last thought on that, I'll let you go ahead with it, but I have to call it there, otherwise. We have to go to the next question.

Go ahead.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Again, we made a firm commitment in the election campaign. People should not be surprised that we proceeded to implement the formal commitments we made in the election platform. That's what my colleague, the Minister of Transport, has done.

The Chair: We'll have Mr. Donnelly for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the Minister and departmental officials for being with us this morning.

The supplementary estimates (C) 2017-18 request \$488,563 in new funding for the fisheries and aquaculture clean technology adoption program, which provides funding to assist Canada's fisheries and aquaculture industries to improve their environmental performance.

As the minister knows, the best way to improve the environmental performance of fish farms is to get them out of the water and onto land. The Namgis First Nation is going to court this week, seeking a judicial review of Fisheries and Oceans Canada policy that doesn't mandate testing for piscine orthoreovirus before the scheduled transfer of Atlantic smolts to Marine Harvest's open net salmon farm in the Namgis territory, and an injunction preventing the minister from issuing a licence permitting the transfer of the smolts.

Chief Don Svanvik states:

We have made every attempt to engage Canada in good faith on their PRV policy and the transfer of Atlantic salmon into our territory, but it refused to consult with us. Namgis has no other option to protect wild salmon, our title and rights and ultimately who we are as people but to ask the Court to intervene to prevent the serious, irreversible harm being visited upon us by Canada and Marine Harvest.

Minister, will any of the allocated money be used to help transition farms out of first nation territories and onto land?

Moreover, when it comes to RAS, the train is leaving the station, and B.C. is not on it, and Canada is not on it. We have no strategy. Land-based closed containment aquaculture represents an opportunity for Canada, and B.C. in particular, to play a leading role in an emerging market. However, the opportunity is highly time sensitive.

Several commercial scale Atlantic salmon land-based closed containment projects are already under way. The U.S. has six facilities in development, which will produce more than 200,000 tonnes. Other countries are following its lead: Norway, Scotland, Denmark, Poland, South Africa, Switzerland, China, and France. Here in Canada we have three facilities: Kuterra, Canaqua, and Sustainable Blue. Between the three facilities, they're producing almost 1,000 tonnes. The U.S. plans to produce 20 times that.

B.C. is uniquely positioned to take advantage of the trend toward safe closed containment. The growth path for this industry could be greatly accelerated if appropriate incentives were put in place and regulations.

I'll leave it at that, and ask for your comments, Minister.

●(0915)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Fin, you've covered a number of significant areas. I'll offer some quick comments, and the deputy may have some specific answers to the more precise questions around funding opportunities.

With respect to the Namgis, we have obviously taken note of the court action. You'll understand that we cannot and should not comment on the specific elements of a court case. I have had an opportunity in previous visits to British Columbia to meet with the Namgis leadership, so I understand this personally, and senior officials from the department are in regular contact with them. Obviously, I understand their sense of frustration. However, the assertion that we do not and have not consulted with the Namgis, I don't think is necessarily representative, but—

Mr. Fin Donnelly: When did you meet with them, Minister?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I met with them on a visit to British Columbia last year. I can get you the exact date. We've had ongoing discussions with the Namgis.

With respect to the broader issue around aquaculture, Fin, you and I have talked about this. Our parliamentary secretary and other colleagues from British Columbia have spoken to me about it a number of times as well. I know that Terry has visited the Kuterra facility, and has worked with our department in his capacity as a parliamentary secretary to identify potential opportunities for some of that funding around innovation and testing, and whether that technology for closed containment land-based aquaculture can in fact be used much more broadly, from an economic and environmental sustainability perspective.

As to your specific question about whether the fisheries and aquaculture clean technology adoption program might be a source of funding, I would certainly be open to an application to that fund that would advance that discussion. I don't disagree at all, Fin, with your analysis of the potential of land-based aquaculture and the importance of British Columbia not ending up behind the parade of other jurisdictions that in fact have gone further.

That's a modest amount of money. That fund is not a huge amount of money. My colleague, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, may have potentially other funding sources. I've had a conversation with him about that, and I know that our parliamentary secretary has as well.

Perhaps the deputy has a specific thing she wants to add.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Can I just jump in? I have one minute left, so I'd appreciate your response, and I have one other quick question I wanted to get in on a different topic. It's with regard to the CEDP and the PIP, the salmonid enhancement program. These are the community economic development and the public involvement programs.

I've been led to believe that under the CEDP there have been no program increases since the early nineties, and no wage increases, no capital allocation, no upgrading for aging hatcheries, no equipment replacement, no training plans. Twelve first nations' hatcheries have closed due to program reductions. Annual contracting meetings in Vancouver have been eliminated. There have been no funds to address inflation at 14% since the early nineties. The contracts used to negotiate each year now are allocations. Twelve CEDP programs have been closed due to budget reductions. On the public involvement program side, there have been no program increases since the nineties. For every DFO dollar contributed, communities provide 10 times more through volunteer labour, operational materials, vehicle use, and business donations, and the PIP groups involved are all in salmon recovery activities, fish production, habitat restoration, education, and classroom incubation. These groups are dealing with inflation, like CEDP, and it's difficult for them to recruit new people due to budget concerns. In addition to the costs of inflation and other concerns, infrastructure hatchery—

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly, your time is up. I'm going to have to end it right there.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I can't even get through this list. It's so long.

The Chair: You get a brief response, please.

● (0920)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I'd like to get a brief response on those issues.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Sure. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Fin, I'd be happy to look into what certainly looks like a dire picture that you've painted of that program. I know the importance of the salmonid enhancement program and the community economic development program. I have heard every time I've been to British Columbia, but also from my colleagues from that province, about the enormously successful work the program has done.

If the funding has eroded—and I certainly don't disagree with the numbers or circumstance you described—I'd be happy to look into it. We can confirm your specific questions. We will be happy to get back to you with the exact details of those programs. I'd also be happy to look with the department at ways we could in fact improve the funding, because if we're leveraging \$10 for every dollar that we put in, imagine the benefits that we could potentially get if we put in \$1.25. I'd be happy to look at how we could perhaps, over time, improve that, and I can get you the exact figures with respect to the financing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Jordan, seven minutes, please.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here today.

I have three quick questions.

The first is about the \$250 million for small craft harbours. How will it be determined where that money is allocated?

That's one. I'm going to go through all three. It might be easier that way.

Secondly, with regard to abandoned vessels—and Mr. Hutchinson maybe can answer this for me—I know that we've had the program

on the west coast for the smaller boats. I'm interested particularly in larger vessels and their removal. As you are aware, we have a few on the east coast. Of course, it's great that we're doing some work with the *Manolis L* and the *Kathryn Spirit*, but there are others. I'd like to know what the process is for removal of those vessels.

Thirdly, one of the things I hear a lot about now is enforcement, and the cuts that have been made to DFO previously with regard to enforcement and how these are affecting the local fishery. I'm just wondering if there's any movement to increase the number of enforcement officers on the ground.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: On the water.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Exactly.

When you have a long coastline that needs to be protected by fishery officers, and you have one boat that takes in from Shelburne to Yarmouth, it's pretty hard to get to a problem.

If someone could address those three concerns, I would appreciate it. Thank you.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Bernadette. I'll take a crack at the first and third questions, and ask the commissioner to respond on the removal of larger vessels.

On the \$250 million, I want to thank you publicly for your help in securing that funding, Bernadette, with respect to small craft harbours. As you know, the department has a normal, existing program. It's a series of points allocated, and the normal A-base program of small craft harbours puts out about \$100 million a year. That's woefully inadequate compared to the need.

That program will continue to operate with the priorities that are established—often in multi-year capital plans, and so on. Some of this funding will go to some divestiture projects. I think the budget mentioned four specific projects; they are not all divestiture projects, but were used in the budget as examples in different parts of the country of specific projects that would receive funding.

There's no doubt that some provinces and communities have asked us about divestiture, such that we invest what we need to, to get their wharves or their particular harbours up to a standard where a province or a municipality could take them over. To be honest, I don't think we have an exact proportion yet of what money will be used for divestiture. Obviously, we will use a significant portion of this money to complement the urgent requirement that had fallen off the table from the existing program. In your constituency it's some of the most lucrative and economically important fishing grounds in the whole country.

With you, I visited a number of harbours in your riding that are perfect examples of deferred maintenance. If you think of the economic impact of these harbours and the jobs they facilitate and the importance to the economy of these coastal communities, my hope is that over the next two years we can catch up on a great number of these projects that had been deferred.

We'd be happy to work with your office and others to get your priorities, and I say this as well to other colleagues who have small craft harbours in their ridings. We are wide open to receiving your views on priorities and we'll work with you to ensure that this new funding can meet some of those objectives.

On enforcement, you're absolutely right. One of the challenges I heard from Newfoundland to Bella Bella, British Columbia, was the importance of having more fishery officers, conservation and protection officers, habitat protection officers, but particularly fishery officers, C and P officers, on the wharves, on the water. I visited small detachments where there used to be five or six people and now they're down to three, but it takes two to patrol safely. You can imagine that with three in a particular detachment, you've massively reduced their ability to enforce the Fisheries Act. Their presence is a deterrent to those who perhaps might not be inclined to follow the law. It's also a safety aspect in many communities. These people are first responders.

In Bella Bella last week I met two fishery officers who are in an isolated detachment there. They are, in many cases, the only federal presence along that part of the coast. I chatted with them about some of the challenges in recruiting and maintaining their staffing levels. We will be increasing by at least 70, or I hope more, permanent positions of fishery officers across the country. Help is on the way for those working in detachments now. The money that we got—almost \$300 million—with the new fisheries act that we're proposing, will be a good first start, but I'll continue to try to rebuild that capacity.

Before we run out of time, I'll let the commissioner respond as well. We know the importance of the *Farley Mowat*. That left. You and I saw that together, Bernadette.

• (0925)

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: But I have the *Cormorant*, too.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That's right, and there are other examples across the country. Your riding is a good one, but perhaps, Jeff, you could provide details or some insight into our plan for some of the larger vessels.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I'd be very happy to, Minister.

As people around this table know, Bill C-64 has now reached third reading stage. That bill forms part of a larger plan that fundamentally changes the situation around vessels of concern, primarily by creating liability for abandonment of vessels, which has never existed in the past, but also by squarely positioning that legislation in a risk-based approach. That's the segue to the answer to your question, Ms. Jordan.

Our approach to those larger vessels is risk-based. You've already noted that we're taking action on some of the larger vessels that pose a more immediate risk, like the *Kathryn Spirit* and the *Manolis L*. We expect, as announced in January, a long-term plan for the *Manolis L*

will be out this year. *Kathryn Spirit* is already being dismantled, or “broken” as we say.

As for the other large vessels, we have ongoing technical assessments scheduled for many of them. For *Corfu Island*, for example, the technical assessment is ongoing. The order in which those will happen are risk-based. For example, we'll be undertaking technical assessments of the *Matterhorn* and the *Petrel* this year. We have *Cormorant* down for next year.

As we're able to get to vessels, we get to them, and that generally then leads to a funding decision. Where we are dealing with the situation with a smaller amount, say, in the hundreds of thousands, we'll generally take that out of our environmental response program. Where you're into the territory of, say, a *Kathryn Spirit*, which is over \$10 million, almost in the tens of millions of dollars, then a larger funding decision is required because we don't have the program dollars.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Arnold, you have five minutes, please.

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

There are two key questions I want to get to, and if there's time remaining, if we can keep our responses reasonable, I'd like to pass the remaining time to Mr. Miller.

Minister, thank you for being here. I have a question regarding the glaring absence of any funding plans in the estimates for preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species, or AIS, particularly in my home province of British Columbia. The Okanagan Basin Water Board in Kelowna found that the introduction of invasive mussels into the Okanagan region alone would cost an estimated \$43 million annually in mitigation and infrastructure maintenance. DFO's own evaluation of its fisheries protection program states that “the economic and environmental damage that some AIS have caused and can cause far outweighs the cost of prevention”.

Last year, MP Albas and I wrote you regarding the need for federal support for AIS prevention in B.C., and your response in October highlighted the \$43.8 million proposed in the 2017 budget for preventing and eradicating AIS. DFO's own evaluation of the fisheries protection program states that aquatic invasive species component is currently restricted from “achieving an impact beyond the Great Lakes”. I am concerned if western Canada and the territories will see any of the funding you mentioned.

In your response to our letter, you wrote that “In British Columbia, there will be new DFO resources to develop, coordinate, and implement regional aquatic invasive species activities.”

Minister, as the 2018 boating and fishing season approaches, what new DFO resources will be provided to British Columbia to help prevent the introduction of zebra and quagga mussels?

• (0930)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: In fact, I have talked with our colleagues from British Columbia on that specific issue as recently as yesterday. As you know, there was a small increase in the aquatic invasive species capacity of the department. It was only \$7.2 million nationally. We obviously would have, and the need is.... I agree with your assessment that the potential economic impact of these zebra mussels on infrastructure, power systems, and hydro systems is devastating.

I totally acknowledge what you said about the cost consequences of not doing everything we can. The Government of British Columbia, I noted, has and is making some investments. My hope is to work with them to complement their investments to use the small amount of money—

Mr. Mel Arnold: What funding is coming forward this year?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: As I said, we have \$7.2 million nationally that we haven't yet allocated.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Eighty per cent of that goes to the Great Lakes, to two species, and the remaining 20% is for the rest of the country. What's coming to B.C.?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mel, we haven't allocated the funding for this year. That percentage may have been true in previous years. I'm telling you that I think the concern in the Okanagan is really severe, so I'm going to work with the department to see if there's a way to increase that funding. Maybe that 80% you referred to doesn't have to be the ongoing circumstance and certainly not this year.

I'd be happy to work with you, Mel, or give you specific details as we develop them, but I share the concern, I recognize the concern. Our colleague Steve Fuhr talked to me about this yesterday. We'd be happy to try to do more, and I think we can.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay, thank you.

Minister, your government promised to fully implement the Cohen commission recommendations, and two and a half years later, this promise is yet to be realized. In August 2016, you were in Vancouver and promised concrete action to restore Pacific salmon stocks, yet your department's preliminary salmon outlook for 2018 shows another grim decline in Pacific salmon stocks.

Fishers, first nations, and the recreational and commercial sectors all echo the same concerns voiced by your department officials in the Pacific region. I see nothing in the estimates aimed at restoring Pacific salmon stocks, and I know this is actually an improvement from your departmental cuts to the salmon enhancement program that you proposed a year ago.

However, I'm still disappointed because Pacific salmon stocks continue to decline, yet these estimates ignore this reality.

Minister, why have your efforts in spending failed to stop the decline of Pacific salmon stocks?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I share the concern of all Canadians about the rather alarming decline of wild Pacific salmon stocks. I'm not a scientist. However, I've met a number of scientists who have views regarding a whole series of factors that likely contribute to this, from climate change to habitat degradation and, in some cases, overfishing, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in international waters. There are a whole series of factors. I'm not pretending that we can and should not do more. What I'm saying is that it's not only in a spending plan of the Government of Canada that some of these more global factors can be attacked.

I don't necessarily share your view that we have not allocated increased spending to try to deal with some of the recommendations of the Cohen commission, for example. I've said publicly that we have implemented 64 of the 75 recommendations, with our colleagues from Environment and Climate Change. We're going to continue to ensure that we work on the remaining ones. We have \$75 million of new investment in coastal restoration, for example. That came as part of the oceans protection plan, which was \$1.5 billion in new funding. I hope that a number of these measures will have direct impacts on wild Pacific salmon.

Last week in British Columbia, with a number of indigenous groups and officials in our department, we discussed ongoing plans around management measures for the chinook, for example, which I'll be announcing in the coming weeks.

We're going to continue to do everything we can, and I'll continue to look for increased investments that can make a difference.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Finnigan, you have five minutes.

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

Mr. Leblanc, thank you for being here.

As you know, the striped bass spawning ground for the entire gulf is in my region of Miramichi. Last year, the committee travelled to the Atlantic coast, where fishers from all the coastal areas told us that they had never seen so many striped bass, which is a positive sign.

The new regulations will soon be announced, however. I have been talking to people in my riding and I have some concerns. Last year, for the first time, the section of the river where the bass spawn was closed for three weeks. Five years ago, the striped bass population was under 30,000, but it is now estimated at over one million.

Under normal circumstances, people take heed of scientific advice, but since the striped bass population is increasing, they do not really understand why that section of the river was closed for three weeks last year. It is expected that it will be closed again this year. I think people will be very unhappy about that. In my opinion, an awareness campaign would be much more helpful than imposing restrictions on the river.

Moreover, how will we move forward with the first nations on the Collaboration for Atlantic Salmon Tomorrow Inc. initiative?

• (0935)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you for your question, Mr. Finnigan. I really appreciate your advice regarding the striped bass fishery. We are very eager to work with you with regard to the fishery this year. I fully share your observation, and that of other stakeholders, that this species has made an incredible recovery.

In response to a question from our colleague Mr. Arnold, we talked about Pacific salmon. If it could come back as strongly as the striped bass has on the Atlantic coast, from a population of less than 30,000 to over a million, according to estimates that I have also heard, that would be a success. Unfortunately, such an extraordinary success involves other challenges. That is also true for the Atlantic salmon.

Mr. Finnigan, I have not yet seen the final details for this year's fishery plan. I hope we can avoid the three-week closure that we saw last year. I have neither seen nor approved any scientific advice in this regard, but I hope that, through discussions, we will find a way to prevent that from happening again.

This is a recreational fishery that is open to anyone. That is what I like. All kinds of people can enjoy it in a very positive way, as a family, for instance. I hope the catch limits will increase. I will have those details in the coming days.

Moreover, I think it is possible to establish a limited, commercial fishery for aboriginal communities in your riding. Those people might have ideas about the operation of a recreational fishery. That could take the form of a pilot project and have a positive impact on the salmon. I am open to all kinds of ideas like that.

I would ask the deputy minister to provide specific details about the CAST program and the first nations.

[English]

Ms. Catherine Blewett: Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the question on CAST. It is a very important research entity on the east coast. We work well with them. Most recently, we've been working with indigenous communities with CAST. We are working quite well together. We're delighted with the progress we've made so far.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Miller, five minutes, please—the other Mr. Miller.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks for coming, Minister.

I want to start, Mr. Minister, with recreational fisheries. It's common knowledge that, while the commercial fishery in Canada is worth approximately \$2.8 billion—which is significant, of course—the last time I checked, the recreational fishery was \$8.3 billion, more than three times as much. Nevertheless, your government has cut out an annual amount of \$10 million put in by the previous government. I forget which year it started. I believe it might have been in 2011. I think, Mr. Minister, you'd agree with me that some departments can almost waste \$10 million in any given week. That money is out of there. It's not there.

Voice: [Inaudible—Editor]

Mr. Larry Miller: Well, if you can, point out where it is, I can't find it.

One point on that is there was due to be a seventh round. That has been cancelled because the office has said that the money is all gone, so they're not replacing it.

The second thing I want to refer to is small craft harbours. I have to point out that Mr. Morrissey said there is \$150 million in new funding. I'd like you to point out where that is. In the 2014-15 budget by the previous government, \$288 million was allocated. Now there's \$250 million, I believe. I stand to be corrected if it's slightly different. I don't know if that's a new kind of math, but it doesn't add up in my mind.

The last thing I'd like you to comment on is the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. I think it's easy for governments of all stripes to forget that outside of the east and west coasts, which are very important, there are huge commercial and recreational fisheries in both the Great Lakes and Manitoba. Do you think the Great Lakes Fishery Commission is funded enough by this government?

• (0940)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thanks, Larry. Those are three very specific and compelling questions.

I recognize the huge importance of the recreational fishery. You're absolutely right. It is literally in every province in the country. I was on the west coast last week. I was reminded of the huge Campbell River, B.C. We stayed at the Dolphins Resort. It's a great facility. I stayed there as a kid with my father when I was eight or nine years old 40 years ago, and I wanted to see how it was 40 years later. It's a perfect example of an economic impact. It's very important. You see it all over that community, but you see it in inland provinces as well. I was in Saskatchewan last week and was reminded of the importance of the recreational fishery in the province of Saskatchewan.

As you know, Larry, for a number of inland provinces, we have delegated management of these fisheries to provincial authorities. Ontario's recreational fishery, the Great Lakes fishery, and other inland lakes are huge economic drivers.

Mr. Larry Miller: What about the \$10 million, though, that does not appear to be in there? It appears to have been cut.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Absolutely, and you're right. That program, from our perspective, made significant investments with small community groups, with local outfitters, anglers, and wildlife groups. The funding will continue for the financial year 2018-19, but we have yet to renew the program. My hope is that over the coming months, I can work with all of you and the Department of Finance to ensure that some of the significant progress this small amount of money has made is not lost and that we can find the right way to continue those investments. I don't have the precise answer in this budget. I hope that by the next budget I will have a precise answer, Larry, because—

Mr. Larry Miller: I'll take your word that you're going to renew it, then. Thank you.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: No, I was very precise. I wish. If I were the Minister of Finance, I'd give you that word, but I'm not the Minister of Finance; I'm the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. I will work with my colleague the Minister of Finance and others, because I think this program has had, over a short period of time, a positive impact. I want to make sure we don't lose that.

Larry, you also asked about small craft harbours. You're right. The previous government in previous years, going back to the economic crisis of 2008-09, made significant investments in small craft harbours. Every government, and the previous government was no

exception, has recognized the huge need and has done what we did in this budget, allocated what we call—bureaucrats at the table will like this—B-based funding, which is a one-time investment over a number of years. In the case of the budget a few weeks ago, it was \$250 million over two years.

Mr. Larry Miller: It's a reduced number, Mr. Minister, and most of it is going towards divestiture.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: No, I don't agree with that characterization at all.

The Chair: Folks, I have to cut it right there. I know the Minister

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: We didn't get to talk about the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

The Chair: We have a certain parameter and standing order that I have to adhere to, so I apologize for that.

Nevertheless, it is 9:44, and we have to call it to an end.

Mr. Donnelly, very quickly.

• (0945)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Chair, can we have 60 seconds to ask just a very quick question?

The Chair: Is unanimous consent required? No.

Actually, it's now 9:45.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: I understand that. It is now 9:45.

I'm sorry, Mr. Donnelly, I have to call it at that.

Thank you for being patient, sir.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to come back on a schedule that suits your committee.

The Chair: Commissioner Hutchinson, Minister LeBlanc, Madam Blewett, and Mr. Sobrino, thank you so very much for your time.

We'll break for a few minutes and go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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