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Monday, June 1, 2020

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)): We'll get started. I'll do a virtual gavel to start the meeting. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number six of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to the order of reference of May 26, 2020, the committee is meeting virtually for the first time for committee business.

As we all know, today's meeting is taking place by video conference. The proceedings are public and will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee. To ensure an orderly virtual meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

First, interpretation in this video conference will work very much like it does in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of "Floor", "English" or "French". As you are speaking, if you plan to alternate from one language to the other, you will need to also switch the interpretation channel so that it aligns with the language you are speaking. You may want to allow for a short pause when switching languages. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike.

All comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. Should members have a point of order, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order. If a member wishes to intervene for the usual committee business or on a point of order that has been raised by another member, I encourage him or her to use the "Raise Hand" function. In order to do so, you should click on "Participants" at the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you will see next to your name that you can click "Raise Hand". This will signal to the chair your interest to speak and will keep the names in chronological order.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. The use of headsets is strongly encouraged. Should any technical challenges arise, for example, in relation to interpretation or a problem with your audio, please advise the chair immediately, and the technical team will work to resolve them. Please note that we may need to suspend during these times as we need to ensure all members are able to participate fully.

Before we get started, I would ask everyone to click on their screen in the top right-hand corner to ensure they are on "Gallery View". With this view, you should be able to see all of the participants in a grid row. It will ensure that all video participants can see one another.

For today, of course, we will not be hearing witnesses, but we will plan our future business. For this reason, I will remind members of a few points in relation to the motion adopted by the House on May 26 and make a few suggestions that I believe will make our meeting go easier. Pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on May 26, 2020, the committee may sit virtually until Monday, September 21, 2020, to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters.

As just mentioned, committees are now able to consider "other matters", and in addition to receiving evidence, the committee may also consider motions as we normally do. As stipulated in the latest order of reference from the House, all motions shall be decided by way of a recorded vote. Finally, the House has also authorized our committee to conduct some of our proceedings in camera, specifically for the purpose of considering draft reports or the selection of witnesses.

Today we are in public, and we will discuss future business of the committee. This means that we may have motions, amendments and debate that will have recorded votes. Because we are not in our physical setting, virtual means that if any motion or amendment is moved, we do not have the possibility of sharing paper copies like we often do. I would ask all members to take their time and to be clear and speak slowly if they move a motion or an amendment so that all members, but also all staff, understand it and have time to write it down if needed.

As mentioned earlier, I strongly encourage members to use the "Raise Hand" function to signal to the chair their interest to speak and to keep the names in chronological order.

If there are any questions, the floor is now open. Does anybody have anything to bring up with regard to committee business?

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Chair, at the opening of our first meeting since the COVID-19 crisis hit, I'd just like to recognize the fishermen whose vessel was lost last week. They found three members of the crew but one is still missing. I'd like to recognize the families of the community and the people of Newfoundland. How drastic this must be, especially at this time.

I think the committee would like to recognize that as well.

The Chair: Thank you for that reminder, Mel. It was indeed a very tragic incident that happened off the south coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's actually in the riding of MP Rogers.

It is very devastating. Three of the individuals were basically members of one family. The search continues, I believe, today for the fourth individual.

That fishing community has been hit very hard. With all the restrictions we have with COVID-19, the community doesn't know what it will do with regard to visitation and the funerals themselves. In a lot of these small communities, and probably in large ones as well, usually the whole community becomes part of this, but with this pandemic it makes it hard for them to do that. It's very difficult for family members and for the community as well.

Thank you for that intervention. It was good of you to think of it.

We'll move on now.

Mr. Hardie.

• (1115)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would also like to send my thoughts to the communities in Newfoundland. The fishers on the west coast don't seem to experience the nasty weather that they do in the Atlantic, but when you lose one, everybody feels it.

It was interesting that not that many days ago on one of the movie channels they were playing the movie *The Perfect Storm*. Of course, that is Atlantic weather at its worst.

We're facing a "perfect storm" situation here too with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, the trading issues with China and the loss of access to markets, so fishers on both coasts are certainly weathering some very difficult times.

I know the government has stepped in with some assistance. I'm hopeful that the focus of our committee, at least for the first few meetings, will be to examine the assistance, look for gaps and then start to look to the future as to what we can do after the pandemic is more or less under control, which we hope will be sooner rather than later, to see what is next and provide stimulus, if necessary, and certainly address this perfect storm that we're dealing with right now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, I do agree with my colleague Mr. Hardie that we need to start to listen to different sectors. We've done some work, some support for independent fishers. We need to hear from them on how things are

rolling out in terms of the announcements that have been made and how that's flowing to them and what the sense of urgency is.

We also haven't heard from sectors such as the sport fishing sector. We haven't heard from inland fishers and supports for them yet. It is important that we have those stakeholders appear before the committee so we can explore ways we can support them through this very difficult time.

Also we have an ongoing crisis with the salmon emergency in British Columbia and the Big Bar slide. It would be very important for this committee to get an update on how COVID is impacting the efforts to bring back our wild salmon and certainly to help support the effort at the Big Bar slide.

I think there are some pertinent questions and it is absolutely critical that we have the minister testify before the committee so that we can ask her some questions around those related issues and how COVID is impacting those emergency issues we are facing as a country.

The Chair: Thank you, Gord.

I see Mr. Arnold has his hand up.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I think Mr. Johns brings up an important point. We did have the minister scheduled to appear before the committee on March 26 before everything was shut down.

I would like to move a motion at this point that we request that the minister appear before the committee for two hours for an update on the Big Bar slide on the Fraser River and to begin questioning on the COVID-19 response.

The Chair: We have a motion by Mr. Arnold.

Nancy, do we have that written down?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): Yes. I did take note of the motion, and the floor is open for debate.

• (1120)

The Chair: Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Chair, I agree with Mr. Arnold. I think the minister was due to appear. I believe we had talked about putting her in our schedule before the House was suspended.

Clearly, a lot has happened. For instance, we see news that the cost of the Big Bar remediation has gone up about three times from the original estimate. Very clearly, there have been some challenges there. I agree with Mr. Johns as well that the impact of the Big Bar on our wild salmon stocks and the future of them is critical, so I think it would be timely.

I would propose when we're looking at the schedule, we look at next week as an opportunity for the minister to appear before the committee and spend the two hours going through all of the details.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

Is there anyone else who wishes to speak to that motion?

Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all my colleagues for joining us today. It's nice to be back together as a committee.

I want to echo the concerns raised by the previous three speakers. For us on the west coast, the west coast salmon issue is obviously the most compelling and urgent issue we face. Our west coast salmon are declining at such a rate that it is an existential issue right now. There are so many different challenges that the salmon face, everything from the Big Bar slide, to overfishing, to the types of nets used, fish farms. Many different issues are implicated on this issue. The sooner we can have the minister at the committee and the sooner we can actually flesh out additional opportunities to address the issue, the better.

As you know, the Cohen commission did issue its report a number of years ago. The government responded. I recently went through that report. There were dozens and dozens of recommendations and some of them were responded to in a way that really did not satisfy me. It would be very helpful for us as a committee, as part of that exercise of reviewing the west coast salmon fishery, to walk through those recommendations and determine which ones still require a more comprehensive response from the government. So far we still have a challenge and there's no indication that our west coast salmon are recovering at all. In fact, if anything, the signs are pointing the other way.

There's a little anecdote I want to share with all of you. Last week my wife went in to shop. Yes, she socially distanced, but she came back with a couple of tins of sockeye salmon. Each tin cost seven dollars. Now, I've never seen sockeye salmon quite that expensive, and I think in part it's reflective of the fact that the supply is no longer as abundant as it used to be. It certainly should compel us as a committee to undertake this study, and complete it, and bring the minister and her officials in to speak to us.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ed.

Is there anybody else who wants to speak before we vote on the motion?

Gord.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, can you reread the motion just as it stands?

The Chair: I believe the motion was to have the minister appear before the committee for two hours in the very near future, and somebody mentioned next week or something.

Mel, correct me if I'm wrong. You did ask for the minister to appear before the committee for no less than two hours to answer questions on the Big Bar slide and the salmon and, indeed, the COVID effects that have been happening.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. The Big Bar slide was the one issue. I believe the minister should be able to answer questions on all matters when she appears. I'll be forwarding another motion, but I believe we have others who wish to speak as well.

Thank you.

• (1125)

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I believe Mr. Arnold addressed it. The motion was simply focused on two west coast issues for the minister to appear on. I think it should be open so that we can discuss east coast fishing issues as well.

The Chair: Madam Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Chair, I don't know if you noticed that I raised my hand several times. I just wanted to make sure that things are working.

Thank you for repeating the motion, because I did not have access to the network for a while.

In my view, the time for the minister's appearance is a challenge. We are doubling the committee's business. In addition to the regular business, that is, our work on Big Bar on the West Coast, we also have everything related to COVID-19.

Is there any way to amend or change the motion so that the minister could appear first for routine matters and then appear again for COVID-19?

I would like to talk about the past and the present, and about the recovery.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Gill, is that in the form of an amendment to the original motion?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Yes.

I said "amend". Yes, that is right, it is an amendment. I did not propose anything, but it could be four hours, two hours on routine matters and two hours on COVID-19 issues.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gill.

Mr. Johns, you had your hand up. Was that to talk to the amendment or to the original motion?

Mr. Gord Johns: Initially, Mr. Chair, I was going to table an amendment that the minister appear before the committee by June 12. I just wanted to make sure that we talked about a date in that motion so it's not open-ended.

The Chair: That would be another amendment. We have to deal with the first amendment first, Mr. Johns.

Hearing nothing else, we'll vote on the amendment.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I believe Mr. Arnold has his hand raised.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, before we got to the amendment, I was going to propose that we have the minister appear for this meeting. Additionally, I was going to propose another motion that we have the minister appear once per month until the COVID situation ends, or between now and September 21, when the House resumes. I don't know if that would satisfy the others if we did a second motion to have the minister appear once per month and got this motion done and out of the way to have her appear as soon as possible.

The Chair: We do have to deal with Madam Gill's amendment first.

Hearing nothing else, we'll vote on Madam Gill's—

Mr. Mel Arnold: I saw Madam Gill had her hand raised.

The Chair: Yes, but she shook her head after that, so I thought she meant to cancel it out.

Madam Gill, did you have anything else to add?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I just shook my head for no reason. It has nothing to do with what was happening. I was talking to myself.

I stand by my amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Now we'll vote on Madam Gill's amendment.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, in order to respect the orders of the House, we do have to go with a recorded vote.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Gord Johns: On a point of order, can you reread the amendment for clarification?

The Clerk: Yes.

Would Ms. Gill want to read her amendment again?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I would suggest that we add two hours for the minister's appearance, as the first two hours were for matters already before the committee. I was proposing that two hours be added for the COVID-19 portion, for a total of four hours.

It can happen on different dates. I suppose we will set them later.

• (1130)

[*English*]

The Chair: Everybody has heard the amendment. This has to be done in a recorded vote.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 9; nays 0)

The amendment as presented has passed, so now we will vote on the motion as amended.

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): Can you reread the motion as amended, please?

The Clerk: May I first suggest, Mr. Chair, that you verify whether or not there is debate on the motion as amended or members are ready for the vote.

The Chair: Is there any debate on the amended motion?

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Chair, while I agree that we need to cover more than just the COVID-19 issue and that there are other issues as well—Big Bar, Pacific salmon, east coast issues—I caught from Madam Gill's amendment that she wanted those other issues dealt with first and COVID-19 after that. I would prefer that we deal with Big Bar first, then COVID-19, and get into the rest of it.

If I misunderstood the nature of her amendment, that's fine. If it's still open for us to schedule or sequence the issues that we deal with with the minister, that's fine. I just wouldn't want to leave the COVID-19 issue to some later date, because it's so current.

The Chair: To clarify, Mr. Hardie, the amendment has already been voted on and passed.

Now we're debating the amended motion. To determine when the minister will come will all be part of setting up the schedule as we move forward and we know when the minister is available.

Mr. Beech.

• (1135)

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Chair, could you please repeat the motion as now amended?

The Chair: Nancy, do you have this available?

The Clerk: Yes. I can repeat the motion as amended.

The motion would read, "That the minister be invited to appear for four hours", instead of two, "to cover the studies on the Big Bar Pacific salmon and other studies of the committee, and two other hours on the COVID for a total of four hours at the earliest opportunity."

The Chair: Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, I would like to put forward an amendment that this take place by June 12.

The Chair: We have an amendment for "no later than June 12".

Is there any debate on the amendment?

Seeing no hands we'll vote on the amendment.

Nancy, when you're ready.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The amendment suggested by Mr. Johns is that we add "no later than June 12" at the end of the motion.

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

The Chair: If there's no further discussion, we'll vote on the motion as amended.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I have a question, Mr. Chair.

Will this permit questioning on the estimates or can we request another appearance by the minister on the estimates before the date they are to be voted on in the House?

The Chair: I didn't hear that it said "on the estimates" in the motion.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, would you like procedural advice on this?

The Chair: Yes, please.

We'll suspend for a second while I engage with the clerk, please.

• (1135) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1140)

The Chair: We're back.

We'll move to Mr. Arnold's question of being available for the estimates.

I believe the ways of dealing with the estimates had been modified when the House was not sitting, only the hybrid Parliament. It was agreed by all parties that the estimates would be studied by committee of the whole. The minister will not be required to appear before committee to deal with the estimates. I think that goes for all the committees.

We'll get back to the voting on the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

We'll go on to the next topic.

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move another motion that, in addition to the meeting requested in the motion just passed, that we also request the minister to appear once per month through the summer until normal operations of Parliament resume.

The Chair: The motion reads, "That the minister appear before committee once a month until the House starts its regular sittings."

Is that correct, Mr. Arnold?

• (1145)

Mr. Mel Arnold: That's correct.

I'd like to get clarification from the clerk that the motion passed by the House prevents the committee from asking the minister about the estimates.

Does the motion passed by the House prevent the committee from asking the minister about the estimates?

The Clerk: I would have to verify the procedural details on that. Do you need an answer now?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Perhaps you could get back to us at some point in the meeting. We can deal with the motion that I addressed first,

which is probably the proper order of business. We should get clarification on that.

The Clerk: We can certainly look into that during the meeting. The motion that you just mentioned, were you referring to once a month on COVID or at large?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Once a month on matters of the committee.

The Clerk: Thank you very much. We will look into that in just a moment.

The Chair: Madam Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I also wanted to make a motion, but I do not know whether we should deal with this one first.

May I introduce it?

I cannot hear anything.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is it a motion or an amendment to this motion, Madam Gill?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Actually, it was another motion. That is why I raised my hand, but Mr. Arnold had the floor. So it will be a future motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Chair, while I appreciate the intent of the motion, these are unprecedented times, and certainly this committee has a lot of great work to do. We still haven't outlined what the entire summer is going to look like. I'm not sure if there is a precedent for a monthly attendance of the minister.

I'll remind committee members that this committee can call on the minister whenever it likes, so what I would recommend is this. As we've just signed up for a four-hour meeting within the next two weeks, as early as possible for the minister, let's have that meeting. Let's determine what our business is now and going into the future, and as the minister is needed, we can certainly extend an invitation to her so she can come on the business of the time, but I think having an open-ended meeting every single month is unnecessary and unprecedented.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It certainly is unprecedented to have the minister appear once per month, but we are in unprecedented times. Many have said that. The situation continues to evolve. Fishermen, harvesters, processors and retailers have all been impacted and continuously are trying to adapt to the new situation. The minister has not yet appeared before this committee and has not been accountable for any of the decisions.

The summer barbecue circuit won't be happening because of travel restrictions. There won't be any international travel and there won't be any other significant events. Therefore, certainly the minister should be able to schedule at least two hours per month to communicate with this committee, which is convened basically to look after the interests of fish and fishermen right across this country. Two hours per month certainly isn't an extraordinary demand on time. I think it's reasonable.

The Chair: Mr. Cormier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): We just voted to have the minister appear before the committee for at least four hours. I would like the minister to come as often as she can, but I believe we also want to hear about the effects COVID-19 has had on the industry, on the fisheries, on plant workers, and on coastal communities, as much in British Columbia as in the Maritimes and the Far North.

I understand what the committee members want to do by inviting the minister every month, but I also want to hear from members of the industry on the ground, particularly those really affected by COVID-19. I want to know what impact it has had on the fishers, the industry as a whole and our communities. I feel that studies will be done and that people will come to talk about their various concerns, with regard to Big Bar in British Columbia, for example. We also have a lot of concerns on the Atlantic coast.

If the minister appears for four hours, I believe we will have plenty of time to ask her all the questions we want to ask on various subjects. I also feel that we need to hear from the organizations, the fishers and all those who want to give us information about the difficulties the fishing industry is experiencing because of COVID-19 and who also want to talk to us about the future, the aftermath of COVID-19. We need to know what measures we can implement to provide the support needed to this entire industry, which is certainly suffering from this pandemic. I feel we need to give priority to these organizations to come before the committee and talk to us about the impact they have been experiencing since COVID-19 hit.

• (1150)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, I think there are a couple of things that have come up.

Mr. Beech said that we don't know about the committee sitting beyond June. I think we need to deal with that. We are in unprecedented times. This is the greatest economic crisis that we've seen since the Great Depression. I think it's absolutely essential that we meet at least monthly to have discussions with our stakeholders to make sure that as things need to be amended, we are able to react quickly.

I would like to move an amendment that we do meet twice a month until the House resumes business at the end of September. The amendment would be that this committee meet two times a month in July, August and September, until the House resumes. Without that, it's hard to have the minister testify before the com-

mittee, but we need to commit that our committee is going to meet. I think it's absolutely essential to establish that.

The Chair: Mr. Johns, can you clarify this for me? Are you making an amendment to the original motion by putting dates in when the committee sits, which would have nothing to do with the minister appearing? I'm just wondering.

Mr. Gord Johns: I think it's hard for the minister to commit to meeting with a committee that hasn't established they're going to meet. The motion right now is that the minister appear before the committee once a month until September, but we need to first establish that the committee is going to meet. I would like to amend the motion to read "and that the committee meet two times per month in the months of July and August". That would be the amendment to the motion that's put forward.

The Chair: I know, Gord, you're introducing it as an amendment, but I'm just thinking that the amendment is not part and parcel with the original motion, so it probably should be dealt with as a separate issue.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm fine with that.

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast: I'm speaking in favour of the motion. I note the last time we met was March 12, at which time I believe we were discussing herring bait. The officials refused to answer any questions on one of the key issues, which was seal predation.

I also note there's a long list of proposed studies we were going to embark upon which we assumed we'd be able to get done this year: sport fishing, seal predation, recreational fishing, illegal and unreported fishing, fishing gear, mislabelling, and Fraser steelhead, which Mr. Arnold brought forward.

How are we ever going to get the work of this committee done if we don't meet and if we don't have the ability to call the minister forward to respond to our legitimate concerns? We have an existential west coast salmon threat here in British Columbia that we're all concerned about as Canadians. I would be just as concerned with some of the threats on the east coast.

This committee was recently recalled. Yes, these are unprecedented times, and unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures. Setting a number of days each month that we meet and setting a schedule when the minister would be able to appear before us is eminently reasonable, in my mind.

Now think about it. The minister has had three months when she's had virtually no engagement with our committee. These are times when she should be fully briefed on the issues we have raised at committee. Surely her appearing before the committee on a regular basis isn't too much of a stretch for her.

In the interest of transparency, I think we need to have access to the minister on a reasonable schedule going forward. On that basis, I'm supporting Mr. Arnold's motion.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fast.

Mr. Battiste.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): I think we are in challenging times. I've been looking at the papers today, and they're saying this is the worst lobster season to hit Cape Breton since the 1970s. I believe the point of this committee is to hear from stakeholders, to hear from people involved in the fisheries. I don't want to be hearing from just the minister and DFO; I want to hear from the people in my riding, my constituents. I want to hear what's going on across Canada on the fisheries. I really feel what we need to do is hear from people, hear from witnesses, and then make recommendations to the minister.

I do support Mr. Johns' idea of twice a month. I wouldn't want to waste half of that by always having the same witness, the minister. I'd like to have that be stakeholders who can tell us what's going on in the fisheries, which allows us to make the recommendations we need to improve the fisheries in Canada. I just don't see that we need to always bring the minister in, and I don't believe I'll be supporting this motion of making sure that we have to hear from the minister every month.

Thanks.

The Chair: Madam Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Actually, Mr. Fast kind of took the words out of my mouth with regard to the first point I wanted to raise. As has been mentioned a number of times, we have never lived through anything like this. A lot of people are in crisis. We mentioned the North, the Maritimes and the West, but the same thing is happening in Quebec.

Unlike Mr. Battiste, I do not feel that one precludes the other. We can certainly ask the minister to appear before the committee over the summer, and hear witnesses as well. At that time, depending on our need to hear from people, as Mr. Johns suggested, we can set the committee's agenda for this summer, but in my opinion, we can call witnesses from the community as well as the minister, because we need them right now.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gill.

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Arnold, you're still on mute.

Mr. Mel Arnold: There are too many different ways of muting and unmuting. This certainly isn't Parliament.

Mr. Chair, it may be prudent at this point to suggest tabling the motion about the minister. Perhaps what we should deal with first is the meeting schedule for the committee, and then we would be better suited to determine how many meetings we may want the minister to appear for.

If others agree, I would agree to table this motion temporarily until we determine a meeting schedule for the committee for the month of June and for the summer months.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mel.

Mr. Calkins, you had your hand up for a few seconds. Do you still wish to speak to the original motion?

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): If Mel is going to withdraw the motion to deal with the committee schedule first, and then present it again, I'll make my interventions at that particular point in time.

Mr. Chair, could you just clarify that Mr. Arnold's motion is no longer before the committee?

The Chair: I believe what Mr. Arnold said was that he would table this until we deal with the actual schedule and then come back to his motion after that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Very well.

The Chair: Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, I would like to move that the committee meet two times a month in July, August and September until the House meets.

The Chair: Mr. Johns, you're moving that the committee meet two times a month until the House reconvenes. Of course, our schedule is set for the month of June, so that would be aside from the June meetings that are already scheduled.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, I would be satisfied with just setting right now that we meet twice in July and twice in August, because we do reconvene in September.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Is there any discussion on that?

Madam Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I have a question about the motion. When we say twice, do we mean twice for four hours or twice for two hours?

Right now, when we are sitting, a full week is four hours.

[*English*]

The Chair: Understood. I believe each committee meeting, unless we extend it, is for two hours. I think by Mr. Johns' motion, that would be four hours in July and four hours in August.

Is that the understanding of your motion, Mr. Johns?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes, that's correct.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any further discussion on that?

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Chair, my concern is the continuity of our discussions and our hearings. Meeting once a month leaves far too long a gap, I think, between sessions.

I would propose amending Mr. Johns' motion to say that the committee meet four times per month in July and four times per month in August for two hours each meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I also agree that once per month isn't enough, and two times per month isn't enough. I would tend to agree with Mr. Hardie on four times for July and four times for August—a minimum of four times for July and four times for August. We can add meetings if we choose to as a committee, but I would agree with scheduling a minimum of four times per month.

I'm not sure if we're on the amendment by Mr. Hardie now. If we are, perhaps we could put the word “minimum” in his amendment, changing it to “a minimum of four times per month in July and four times per month in August”.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I can take that as a friendly amendment, if you wish.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

Madam Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: My question is still about the periods not covered, that is, the end of June and the month of September.

Theoretically, Parliament resumes on September 21. Should we give ourselves some leeway to decide in August whether to extend the schedule until the House resumes? Is there a gap between June 19 and June 30, about two weeks, where we will have no committee meetings?

• (1205)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Battiste, is this to the amendment?

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Yes. I just want to be clear. I had said earlier that I would support Mr. Johns' motion for two meetings per month, and I'll stick with that. I think that's an appropriate time for us to get things done.

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, I agree with Mr. Battiste. Mr. Johns' motion gives us that flexibility. The committee can change its direction at any time. At this time it would appear that the timelines are adequate in Mr. Johns' motion.

The Chair: Mr. Cormier, do you have your hand up?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Yes. I am in favour of Mr. Johns' motion too.

It will still give us plenty of time to study various matters. I repeat that I agree the minister should be present at the committee, but we also need to have representatives from the industry and the various organizations come before us so that they can present all the difficulties they are currently experiencing due to COVID-19.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Chair, I'm going to withdraw my motion. Looking at the calendar and looking at the rhythm of what we're up to here, I think that I'm more in support of Mr. Johns' motion.

(Amendment withdrawn)

The Chair: Your amendment is withdrawn.

We're now back to the original motion of Mr. Johns. Is there any further discussion on Mr. Johns' motion?

Mel.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Again, I don't believe once per month is sufficient for what this committee should be dealing with in these unprecedented times.

First of all, I would like to seek clarification. We received a draft calendar which showed meetings twice a week through to the end of June, but I don't know whether that was actually adopted and if it's only the meetings up until June 19, when the House would normally recess.

How many meetings are scheduled between now and the end of June, before we move further on this?

The Chair: Nancy, do you want to clarify that? I thought it was twice a week in June.

The Clerk: Yes, I can certainly clarify that.

A calendar was put out, and there was an agreement by all the whips of all the recognized parties on the committee that the committee will meet twice this week, twice next week and twice the week after, for a total of six meetings in June. This is what has been agreed to by the whips at this time, and we are informed that it could be modified. Specifically, the dates and times could be modified, but as of now, the calendar that you saw is what was agreed to by the whips of all parties.

The Chair: Thank you, Nancy.

Mel, I think you said once a month, and to your point, I believe Mr. Johns' motion is to meet twice a month. It's not once a month; it's twice a month in the original motion.

Madam Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: May I still move an amendment to Mr. Johns' motion? Yes.

It is related to the question I asked earlier. Mr. Johns' motion suggested that we meet once every two weeks. In my opinion, four hours a month is very little. We agree that eight hours is a normal workday for the general public. I think that eight hours a month would not be too much to ask of the committee members.

I therefore propose that the committee meet every two weeks, but for two two-hour periods, as committees ordinarily do. For the entire summer, this would be equivalent to two days for the months of July and August. So I would propose that we meet twice a month, but for periods of four hours rather than two hours.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Gill, if I heard you correctly, you would propose that if we're meeting twice per month, you would amend the motion to add "to meet for four hours for each of those meetings".

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I am not necessarily talking about four hours in a row. We could split it into two meetings. The important thing is to have four hours in the weeks we meet.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, so you are proposing that we do two extra meetings. Either your amendment is adding two hours onto the two meetings per month that Mr. Johns has proposed in his original motion or it's adding two more meetings at two hours each. That is your suggestion.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: That is exactly right.

We have four weeks when we were supposed to meet for two hours each week. That gives us a total of eight hours of meeting time.

Personally, I would add two hours each week, for a total of 16 hours. I did not specify the details in the motion, because it was spontaneous, but we could have four consecutive hours or two meetings of two hours.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mel, when you're ready.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I agree with Madam Gill. We should at least be able to commit, as committee members, to eight hours per month. That would be four two-hour meetings per month.

I would agree with an amendment to Mr. Johns' motion that the committee meet a minimum of four times per month for the months of July and August, as well as meet two times per week until the end of June.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, if you want, we can maybe discuss this to make sure that we are on the same page.

The Chair: Okay. We'll suspend for a moment.

• (1210)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1215)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone.

I just want to make sure everybody understands exactly what has taken place with the amendments.

From Madam Gill, basically the amendment is to increase from four hours a month to 16 hours a month, regardless of how we, as a committee, decide afterwards to do that, whether it's extended hours or extended days or extra days. No?

Madam Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: The motion calls for a total of eight hours of meetings per month. Rather than holding two meetings per month of two hours, I propose that we hold two meetings per month of four hours, for a total of 16 hours for July and August.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, with a total of 16 hours per month.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Johns suggested two two-hour meetings per month, making four hours per month. I suggest two four-hour meetings per month, for a total of eight hours per month. We would therefore meet for a total of 16 hours in July and August. That is one eight-hour workday per month, if you count it in days.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, this could be worked out either in two meetings at four hours or four meetings at two hours. Okay, so now we've understood.

We'll vote on the amendment first. The amendment would be that we do a total of eight hours for the month of July and eight hours for the month of August.

Nancy, would you record the vote, please.

Mr. Terry Beech: Before we vote, I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: I just want to make sure we're all very clear.

If we accept the current amendment, it would be for eight hours of meetings at a meeting schedule to be determined by us after this vote, or how is that going to be determined?

The Chair: Yes, we would have to determine that after this vote when we determine how many meetings we would have going forward for the schedule.

Mr. Terry Beech: The total hours that we're voting on in this amendment per month for July and August would be...?

The Chair: Eight hours per month, which would be a total of 16 hours combined.

Mr. Terry Beech: Thank you.

The Chair: Nancy, when you're ready.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

I would like to remind members that there's no debate during a vote. It's just a ye or a nay, so let's stick with that, please.

Now we go back to the main motion by Mr. Johns, which I think we all understand as two meetings per month for July and August.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

We will move on to further business, and discuss the dates we would sit. Somebody brought that up earlier.

Does anybody have any suggestions?

Mr. Beech.

• (1220)

Mr. Terry Beech: I'm open to whatever is good for the committee, but I would suggest perhaps the same days as hybrid Parliament, if that works for everybody.

The Chair: Mr. Battiste.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: That works for me, yes.

The Chair: Nancy, you had your hand up.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I would like to clarify that when it comes to the schedule of the committee, the members have to be in touch with their whips. Some work has to be done with the whips of the committees and with the resources of the House to see when there are availabilities and when it is possible to meet.

The Chair: If everybody is in agreement, can we leave this until next week so we can talk to the House leadership to see what dates they propose are better for the committee when we sit in July and August? Mr. Arnold has indicated that he is okay with that. Is everybody else okay with it?

Hearing no dissent, I'll assume that's good to go. We'll get that schedule ironed out, although it doesn't have to be done right away, as it's not until July and August.

Ms. Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I wonder if now is the time to make my motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, whenever you're ready.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you. I will now read my motion, for which I gave notice on May 28:

That, pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, May 26, 2020, the Committee undertake a study of at least four meetings to identify the impacts of COVID-19 on fishing industry stakeholders such as independent fishers, processing plants, First Nations and workers; that the Committee call witnesses including senior departmental officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and interested stakeholder groups to testify; and that the Committee report its conclusions and recommendations to the House.

[*English*]

The Chair: Does everybody have a copy of the motion? Okay.

Is there any discussion on the motion?

Mr. Johns.

• (1225)

Mr. Gord Johns: I have a friendly amendment. I want to change the wording “first nations” to “indigenous” and add sport fishing as well, because we haven't talked about that, in addition to independent sport fishers.

The Chair: Everybody has heard Mr. Johns' amendment to change “first nations” to “indigenous”.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: The translation is not the same for “autochtones”. In French, it is “autochtones”. There is a translation problem. I am quite willing to correct it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Chair, Mr. Johns is on to something, but there's a difference between a sport fisher.... I consider myself a sport fisherman, but there are also guides, outfitters and lodges. I'm assuming that Mr. Johns meant to include everybody, from the person who buys a fishing licence and takes themselves fishing, right up to business owners with seasonal industry who take people as guides or outfitters for recreational fishing. I would prefer to call it recreational fishing, but I'm not fussy either way.

Mr. Gord Johns: That's perfect.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Has everybody heard the amendment? Is there any further discussion?

Mr. Gord Johns: Just to clarify, we'll use the word “recreation” instead of “sport” and “indigenous” instead of “first nations”, because of the English side of that. These are just friendly amendments.

The Chair: Okay. We'll vote on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Now that we have another study added to the list of things we're already studying, and given the fact that we're now in the third phase of motions that govern a COVID committee of the whole, which some people are referring to as modified Parliament—it's not Parliament—and given the fact that this committee and its work is actually given to us or instructed to us from the House of Commons, which is adjourned, when we do a study how exactly are you as chair going to report to a House that doesn't exist?

The Chair: I would ask Nancy to verify, please.

The Clerk: The motion adopted by the House is that the committee can study COVID-19 and also other matters. The motion of the House specified that the committee can meet in camera in order to consider draft reports, so the committee can do that. There is no specific definition as to when the committee can present a report.

At this time, there is no Routine Proceedings in the House plan, so the committee would not be able to present a report. However, it doesn't mean that the committee cannot study, prepare and adopt a report, but the committee, at this time, would not be able to present the report until the House is back and there is Routine Proceedings.

● (1230)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I assume then, Chair, that the committee is still operating under the normal rules that a committee would operate, and that any consideration of a report from this committee would be done in camera and would be embargoed until you, Chair, rise in the House of Commons during Routine Proceedings and present it.

Until there is actually a House of Commons then, would I understand that any work we do would simply be put on the shelf until an actual Parliament resumes?

The Chair: All our meetings are in public, so I guess it would be in public anyway if people are interested in listening to us.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Usually consideration of draft reports is never done in a public meeting. I suppose we can do that if we choose to.

I think these are all worthwhile exercises, Chair. I'm not trying to suggest that they are not. I'm here because I think this is a worthwhile exercise. I'm simply trying to figure out what the point of the exercise would be if we're not able, over the summer months, to actually publish or make public a report as a result of a study that this committee undertakes without a mechanism for you, Chair, to rise in the House of Commons and make that report public.

The Chair: Mr. Cormier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, I would also like to introduce a notice of motion. May I do that now, or do I need to wait until we have finished the discussion that Mr. Calkins raised?

[*English*]

The Chair: We actually haven't dealt with Madam Gill's main motion yet.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Perfect.

The Chair: If there is no further discussion, we will vote on the motion as amended by Madam Gill.

Nancy, when you are ready for the vote, please go ahead.

The Clerk: The vote is on the motion of Madam Gill as amended.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I'm not clear on the motion as amended. Could I have it repeated, please?

The Chair: When you are ready, Nancy.

The Clerk: The motion by Madam Gill reads as follows:

That pursuant to the order of reference of May 26, 2020 the Committee undertake a study of at least four meetings to identify the impacts of COVID-19 on fish-

ing industry stakeholders such as independent fishers, processing plants, First Nations and workers; that the Committee call witnesses including senior department officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and interested stakeholder groups to testify; and that the Committee report its conclusions and recommendations to the House.

An amendment was adopted to modify "First Nations" to "indigenous" and we would add what Mr. Calkins called "recreational fishers".

The Chair: Is that understood, Mr. Arnold?

Mr. Mel Arnold: We've called for the minister to appear already. Is this going to be part of—

The Chair: Mel, we're in the middle of a vote on this one.

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

● (1235)

The Clerk: We will go back to the vote on the motion.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays, 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you, Nancy.

Thank you, everyone. That might be our first unanimous vote today.

Mr. Cormier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: I would like to present a notice of motion. May I do it now?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, by all means.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: All right, I have it in English and French.

That the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans undertake a study to examine the fishery management measures put in place to protect North Atlantic right whales, in order to evaluate the impact these measures have had on the reduction of right whale deaths in Atlantic Canada and Quebec as well as the impact on the economy of coastal communities in these regions and to provide the government with options and recommendations to improve these measures; that the Committee call witnesses including senior officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and interested stakeholder groups to testify before the Committee; that the Chair be empowered to coordinate the necessary witnesses, resources and scheduling to complete this task; and that the Committee report its conclusions and recommendations to the House of Commons.

So that the committee is not rushed, I propose that we do this study only when we return to Parliament, in the fall or winter.

I think you are all aware of this, but for those who are not, let me remind you that since 2017, in my region, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, as well as elsewhere in Quebec, particularly in the Magdalen Islands, right whales have been observed, and the government has had to introduce exceptional measures to protect them.

This has had an impact on our fishers, our coastal communities, our plants and their workers. Every year since 2017, we have been finding dead right whales, which has led us to implement measures that have become stricter every year. We were also able to improve them in 2018 and 2019 to improve the coexistence between whales and fishers.

As you know, if we do not protect this endangered species, it will certainly have a detrimental effect on the markets to which we export our crab, lobster and other fish species around the world.

I therefore propose that we do a study, but only when we come back to the House, either in the fall or this winter. This will allow us to hear from people who have experienced the effects of the presence of right whales in our area, including fishing organizations and fishers. I feel that this study should be done in cooperation with all these different groups, because once again this year, the whales are in the Gulf well ahead of schedule.

This year, we did our best to ensure that the fishing season starts well ahead of the date that was usual in previous years. Unfortunately, although our efforts were successful, COVID-19 hit and we were unable to start the fishing season before the right whales arrived, as we would have liked.

So I feel that a study of this kind should be done so that we can hear from people and give them the opportunity to propose new measures that could be more beneficial to fishers, plants, plant workers and communities as a whole. That is why I am proposing that we do this study, but only when we come back to the House.

• (1240)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Cormier, because at the beginning you said you were giving a notice of motion, and I just had to find out whether you were actually moving it, because you were speaking to it, and you can move a motion during committee business.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Chair, I find it very entertaining to listen to a motion proposing a new study coming from a party that just voted down increased hours to do studies. However, I do believe that the motion is a worthwhile one to discuss and to have brought in front of the committee. I would amend the motion by adding, in front of the words “department officials”, invite “the minister and” department officials. Let's see if the minister has some solutions for us.

The Chair: The amendment is to add the words “the minister and” in front of “department officials”. Is there any discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast: No. I was going to speak to the main motion. If this is an amendment, I'll speak to the main motion after this.

The Chair: Not hearing any interventions on the amendment, Nancy, we'll go to the vote.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

Now we turn to the main motion as presented.

Mr. Fast.

The Chair: Now we turn to the main motion as presented.

Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast: I want to echo the comments of my colleague, Mr. Calkins.

Is the committee not puzzled by the irony of this motion? The issue of right whale protection and predation is certainly worthy of study. We've gone through the list of motions I mentioned earlier. I would ask the clerk to tell us how many studies we now have on the docket to consider.

• (1245)

The Clerk: I do not have the total number of studies right now. I believe that at the second meeting the committee adopted about 10 or 12 motions and we just adopted one for COVID. I can make the final calculation to give you the correct number if you give me a few minutes, but it would definitely be over 10.

Hon. Ed Fast: Again I go back to it. Isn't it ironic? Here we have 10, 11, maybe 12 studies that we're looking to undertake and for weeks now we Conservatives have been asking the Prime Minister to have Parliament return to a normal routine and normal schedule and the Prime Minister has repeatedly said no to returning to normal sittings of the House.

Our committee, which has not sat for three months, is being asked to undertake at least anywhere from 10 to 12 studies, and yet just a few minutes ago the Liberal and NDP members of this committee said a big no to meeting more regularly during the summer, a proposal that would have allowed us at least to start to work on these studies. I just don't understand how this committee can expect to do all of its work when it's not prepared to make up for lost time from the last three months and sit a little more often during the summer. I'm just gobsmacked, quite frankly, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fast.

Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: First, Mr. Chair, I have to respond to that comment by my colleague.

It was the NDP, actually, that worked with the government—pressured the government—so this committee would start sitting as the next committee to sit. Here we are; we've committed to sitting over the summer. The Conservatives initially wanted the House to rise on June 17 and reconvene in September.

Right now we're sitting over the summer and we have a chance while we're sitting over the summer to increase meetings should we decide to do that. We have to be cognizant of our whips and the staff of the House of Commons, and whether it's even feasible to have further meetings. We're starting with two, and I think this is an opportunity right now for us to get started.

I agree that we have a lot of work to do and a lot of catching up to do, which is why we're sitting over the summer, why we're going to have questions at the COVID committee over the summer, and why we're having 90-minute question periods instead of 45-minute question periods.

This is something we could talk about all day, and we can spend our committee time on this, but right now adding this study gives us a chance to prioritize how we're going to work going forward. Yes, we have a lot of studies. I'm up for increased meetings. The New Democrats are not opposed to that. In fact, we are the ones who have been pushing for this committee to sit and for us to meet over the summer months. There's no hesitation for us to want to work harder and more, but we have to make sure we do it with our party whips and make sure we're cognizant of the staff of the House of Commons so that this is feasible. We're starting with those two meetings.

I support the motion. I think it's a good motion for us to have on our docket. As we look at our priorities, certainly it can't be ahead of what we've identified we need to study that we had agreed to in March. Those studies are going to take us into the fall. Certainly, salmon is going to take us through the summer and into the fall, because it's a study that needs priority attention.

I support this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Gord.

Madam Gill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to make one small correction to what Mr. Johns said about the House sitting. This is not the usual Parliament. We are not sitting this summer. On the contrary, the motion as presented means that we are still in a committee, the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic. Therefore, we do not have all the powers we usually have.

I wanted to correct that information, which seemed inaccurate to me.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gill.

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I just wanted to make it clear that this study would not be put ahead of any other motions that we already have on the books as a committee. I didn't hear anything in the motion itself that it was immediate. We have 11 studies on the books already. We've already identified that those studies are vitally important to the sectors they represent.

Is this motion, as it is, going to preclude any of the other studies that are already passed?

• (1250)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I think I was very clear after I read my motion that I put this forward to be studied when we come back in the fall or even during the winter.

The fishing is going on right now, but I wanted to put that out there. This is not only important to me, but, as all members of the committee know, it's a situation with the right whale that we've lived with since 2017. I was very clear reading that motion that it is going to be when we come back in the fall or the first couple of weeks of winter.

The Chair: I believe it's the will of the committee which one they do first. Unless it's expressed in the motion that it be done immediately, the committee will sit down and decide which one they'll do next and next and so on. I think that's the way we've always done it.

Go ahead when you're ready, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I am certainly not opposed to the intent of the motion. I just want to recognize that we believed the other motions that have been put forward were of timely importance, and this should not be taking precedence over any of the other meetings. I'll put that on the record now.

I will support the motion because of its intent, but not putting a timeline on it.

The Chair: That's duly noted.

If there is no further discussion, we'll go to the vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

In a matter of a few minutes, we will close up for the day, but on Wednesday, we have committee again. What would we like to see on the agenda for the meeting this coming Wednesday?

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, before we move on any further, I'd like more clarification on the estimates and whether the committee can study or discuss the estimates at this point in time.

I don't see anything in the government motion that was passed prohibiting the committee from considering the estimates or asking questions. I would just like clarification on whether we are prohibited from discussing the estimates, and if so, where that is noted.

The Chair: Nancy, could you clarify, please?

The Clerk: Yes, I have the answer. Mr. Arnold, thank you for the question.

The answer I have here is that the motion adopted on May 26 states that if the supplementary estimates for the period ending March 31, 2021, are tabled during the period the House stands adjourned, they will be dealt with in a committee of the whole on Wednesday, June 17, 2020. However, committees have until Friday, November 27, 2020, to report the main estimates for the period ending March 31, 2021, to the House.

Hence, the questions to the ministers on the main estimates would be in order.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Nancy.

The Clerk: Mr. Arnold, does that answer your question?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Nancy. That certainly clarifies things. It sounds as though we will have the opportunity to ask questions on the estimates.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, if the committee does go ahead and it reviews the estimates, how will you be reporting that to the House?

The Chair: Actually, Mr. Calkins, the committee can report to the House electronically on Wednesdays. That is my understanding.

The Clerk: Yes. In the special order adopted by the House on May 26, there is a specification that if the committee has an order, such as an order of reference, then the committee can present back to the House electronically.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion before we try to figure out what we're going to do on Wednesday?

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, would it not be appropriate for us to have senior staff from the department report to the committee and update us on the COVID response at the earliest convenience?

The Chair: Is it your suggestion that we try to have them on Wednesday?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes. That's right.

The Chair: Is everybody in favour of trying to do that?

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I would support having the officials appear before the committee as soon as possible. This is meeting number six, and so far this committee has only done three and a half hours of actual study work since we formed as a committee. I'd like to get down to some groundwork and get some work done by the committee.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Have we decided on which days we will be meeting over the summer? Also, have we decided the order of the studies we're going to do? Have we prioritized them? If not, we should clear up those questions for sure on Wednesday.

The Chair: I'm sure we could find some time to do some prioritization of what we are going to do going forward. Right now we're trying to figure it out for Wednesday. So far we have to invite the officials in to talk about the COVID response, as well as do some committee business for meetings going forward and prioritize some of the studies or what we have on our docket, as Mr. Fast and others have indicated. We have quite a list, so we should probably look at trying to whittle that down a little bit before we consider doing any more studies.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, would it be appropriate for us to have the senior bureaucrats and officials for the first hour, and in the second hour get a briefing on Big Bar? Would my colleagues agree that this approach would be appropriate, given the sense of urgency around Big Bar?

The Chair: Mr. Johns, I suggest that we allocate probably an hour and a half for officials and whoever is here to talk about COVID and Big Bar. It would probably be the same officials, I would think. We would use half an hour to try to schedule what we're going to do going forward instead of leaving it half-botched with no set agenda. I'd rather see us take a bit of time to at least discuss the first couple of things we're going to do going forward without the officials being part of that.

• (1300)

Mr. Gord Johns: To clarify, Mr. Chair, maybe we could just focus on COVID and do Big Bar with the senior officials separately, because I think that needs some time.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Johns.

If everybody is okay with that, we'll try to get the officials in on Wednesday to talk about the COVID response from the department. Then we'll try to use the last half hour to schedule the next two or three meetings after that, probably up to the end of June, June 17 or 19 in whatever week it is, so we can get some clarity on what the committee will be doing over the next month or so. If everybody is okay with that, we'll move in that direction.

As there's no further discussion, thank you, everyone. Have a good evening.

The meeting is adjourned.

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