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# Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 007**

Wednesday, June 3, 2020

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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald





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• (1515)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number seven of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the House on May 26, 2020, the committee is continuing its study on the impacts of COVID-19 on fishing industry stakeholders.

Today's meeting is taking place by video conference, for the most part. 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 entire committee.

To ensure an orderly virtual meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

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. I remind everyone that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

If a member wishes to intervene for 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”. That will signal to the chair your interest in speaking and will keep names in chronological order.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. I might be guilty of going a bit too fast myself at times. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute, because we get background noise being fed through. The use of headsets is strongly encouraged.

Should any technical challenge arise—for example, in relation to interpretation—or should a problem with your audio arise, please advise the chair immediately, and the technical team will work to

resolve the issue. 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, can everyone click on their screen in the top right-hand corner to ensure that they are on gallery view? With this view, you should be able to see all participants in grid view. It will ensure that all video participants can see one another.

Finally, I would like to mention that contrary to a regular on-site meeting, we do not need to suspend after we hear the witnesses and go to committee business that is still in public. We can just wait a few seconds for the witnesses to leave the Zoom meeting, and we are good to continue the meeting without a suspension.

I would now like to introduce the witnesses we have before us virtually today.

From the Canadian Coast Guard, we have Mr. Chris Henderson, deputy commissioner of operations. From the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we have Jean-Guy Forgeron, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic policy; Dominic Laporte, assistant deputy minister, human resources and corporate services; Sylvie Lapointe, assistant deputy minister, fisheries and harbour management; and Jen O'Donoghue, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer.

Mr. Forgeron, I believe you're going to speak for the group. You'll have six minutes.

I remind everybody, both speakers and questioners, that I will be very strict on time. I'll cut in if you're going over your allotted time.

When you're ready, sir, please start.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning.

My name is Jean-Guy Forgeron. I'm the senior assistant deputy minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. I am responsible for the department's strategic policy sector, which covers economics, indigenous and sectoral policy, international and intergovernmental affairs and communications functions.

Today I am accompanied by Jen O'Donoghue, our assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer; Sylvie Lapointe, assistant deputy minister, fisheries and harbour management; Chris Henderson, deputy commissioner of operations for the Canadian Coast Guard; and Dominic Laporte, assistant deputy minister, human resources and corporate services.

Thank you for the invitation to be here to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on Canada's fisheries sector.

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Hardie.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** I'm sorry to intervene, but the telephone connection for staff is not working. They've just given us a heads-up that they're unable to hear the proceedings.

**The Chair:** Okay. Technical services, is there anything we can do?

We will suspend for just a moment to see what's going on. Thank you.

• (1515) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1525)

**The Chair:** Mr. Forgeron, when you are ready to go again, please do.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Thank you again, Mr. Chair, for the invitation to be here to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on Canada's fishing sector. Following my opening remarks, we will be happy to answer any of your questions.

During these unprecedented and challenging times, DFO remains very much at the forefront in managing Canada's fisheries and protecting the marine environment, while the Coast Guard continues to deliver search and rescue services, icebreaking operations, maritime security and environmental response.

Health and safety remain our highest priority at DFO. Those who work in Canada's fisheries, on board Coast Guard vessels or in our operational centres are doing an essential service for Canadians during this critical time.

Our fish and seafood sector is essential to Canada's economy and food security. In 2018, our commercial sea fisheries landed almost 800,000 tonnes of fish and seafood valued at \$3.7 billion. However, significant losses are expected across the sector over the coming months as summer fisheries begin. These losses are primarily related to depressed prices at the wharf and are a reflection of the changing demand.

Restrictions to combat the spread of COVID-19 have also resulted in shifts from food service to retail; from fresh to canned, dry or frozen products; and from in-store grocery to online shopping.

While the Government of Canada has delivered economic measures to help individual Canadians and businesses get through the pandemic through the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency business account and a number of other tax credit measures, DFO is working to support the fish and seafood industry adapt to this new reality.

Over the past several months, the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard and DFO officials have been engaging with harvesters, aquaculture producers, processors, indigenous partners and the provinces and territories. What we heard is that while the fish and seafood sector is experiencing virtually the same pressures as other parts of the economy, the impacts are somewhat unique.

For example, there is an accumulation of perishable inventory due to reduced demand for fish and seafood products that are normally marketed to the food service industry. Additionally, products typically sold fresh are being diverted to processing plants, and this is resulting in concerns over processing capacity, especially in light of the physical distancing requirements and other measures that will be required to ensure the safety of workers.

We also heard from the self-employed harvesters that their particular circumstances as small seasonal businesses without waged employees have made it difficult for them to access the wage subsidies and interest-free loans available under the government's broad-based programs.

These discussions have led to a \$500-million targeted investment in the fish and seafood sector to ensure that fish harvesters and processors get the support they need to adapt to the current situation. Our goal is to continue to ensure the integrity of Canada's food security while positioning these sectors for a strong recovery.

This investment includes \$469 million in funding to establish the new fish harvester benefit and fish harvester grant. The fish harvester benefit will provide up to \$267 million in income support for those who cannot access the Canada emergency wage subsidy and who experience losses of 25% or more in 2020. The fish harvester grant has dedicated funding of up to \$201 million in non-repayable support to those who cannot access the Canada emergency business account. These funds can be used to cover the costs of running a fishing business, including increases in costs due to health and safety requirements.

In addition, given that earnings may not be enough to allow independent harvesters to claim employment insurance this year, the government is working to ensure that self-employed fish harvesters and share persons will be able to file an EI claim based on previous years' insurable earnings.

This support also includes the \$62.5-million Canadian seafood stabilization fund, which will allow the fish and seafood processing sector to increase storage capacity, continue to purchase from harvesters, innovate to meet new market demands and comply with new health and safety measures. Businesses in the fish and seafood processing sector and the organizations that support them are encouraged—

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Mr. Chair, a point of order, please.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Staff are informing me that the Floor channel is not working.

[*English*]

**Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I have a—

**The Chair:** Yes, we have a point of order that a floor line is not working. Can we get that checked on, Nancy?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl):** Absolutely. I am on it already now.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** I also have a point of order, Mr. Chair, please.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Cormier.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Maybe we should ask the staff to just hang up and call back in. Maybe someone just dialled the wrong PIN number or something like that. It has happened before, so maybe we can ask everybody to hang up on the staff side and then call again to see if it is working, because it seems the issue is not resolved, as we have tried for the last 30 minutes.

**The Chair:** I'll ask Nancy to check with the technical people. We'll again have to suspend for a moment to get that rectified.

**The Clerk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. We will do that. We're on it at the moment, and I will make sure to mute everybody during that time.

• (1530)

(Pause)

• (1548)

**The Chair:** We'll continue the meeting.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** It seems to be working, Madam Clerk.

**The Clerk:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Yes, it is working.

[*English*]

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, it seems as though everything is working now.

I did stop my timer. There were 49 seconds left.

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll get started again, hopefully without any more so-called hiccups.

Mr. Forgeron, you have 49 seconds left, almost a minute.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Then I'll conclude by saying that DFO will continue to work with its partners and stakeholders to build on the important work accomplished to date to support our vital fish and seafood industries.

I welcome the questions of the committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that and thank you for your patience, and we send a big thank you to the technical staff as well, who have been trying to straighten out these issues for us as we try to get through this meeting today.

We'll start with a first round of questioning of six minutes or less for each. As I said earlier, I'll try to be very tight on the time limits.

Mr. Arnold will begin.

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

I thank the witnesses for being here today, and I recognize the work that DFO and the Coast Guard have gone through to try to manage to get through this COVID situation and help our harvesters and processors get through it.

My first question is for Mr. Henderson with the Coast Guard.

Has the Canadian Coast Guard provided guidance for personnel safety on board their vessels in respect of the COVID-19 situation?

**Mr. Chris Henderson (Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Canadian Coast Guard):** I'm very happy to advise that absolutely we have detailed, extensive guidance for our personnel on all vessels and in shore bases and installations. There are detailed screening procedures. Either a rescue specialist or a delegate from the ship's commanding officer will screen everybody coming on board our ships and will ask folks who are exhibiting symptoms of COVID to not enter the ship or the facility and to go and get tested.

We have extensive standard operating procedures for everything from extensive cleaning of vessels if there is a suspected contamination to how to don and use personal protective equipment appropriately.

We have engaged—

• (1550)

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Would there be protocols for all sizes of vessels within the Coast Guard?

**Mr. Chris Henderson:** Yes, sir, there would be.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Okay, thank you.

When was this guidance provided?

**Mr. Chris Henderson:** We started developing the guidance in February as we saw COVID coming towards us. After mid-March, when the lockdown happened, we started to publish the guidance on our Intranet page, which is internal to the Coast Guard and DFO, but in the context of many of our crew members being off cycle, not having access to the departmental system, we published it on the Internet. We have been developing and maintaining it since the middle of March.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Okay. Thank you.

What federal government entities or departments contributed to producing the guidelines and protocols?

**Mr. Chris Henderson:** We've worked extensively with the Public Health Agency of Canada, Transport Canada and Health Canada. We've worked closely with Public Safety Canada through the government operations centre there, because they are coordinating a lot of the federal response. We sought input from our federal partners.

We also consulted extensively with our bargaining agents within the Coast Guard and DFO to make sure that labour was comfortable with what we were coming up with.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

My next questions will go to Mr. Forgeron.

When did DFO begin developing the Canadian seafood stabilization fund?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** I can't remember the exact date, but when it became very clear that there was a drop in demand for seafood products, as evidenced by prices at the wharf, in the case of the stabilization fund, one of the things we wanted to make sure happened was that processors were in the best position possible to continue to receive seafood from harvesters.

We started engagement early on—in March, I would say—with our regional agency colleagues to assess what would be required to help the processors, both as a subsector of our sector but in particular to be well positioned to continue to take on fish from our harvesting community for their benefit.

I would say it was sometime in late March, but I don't know the exact date.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I was muted by the chair. I hope that I'm back online and that I have time left.

What seafood processing organizations and operators were consulted in developing the seafood stabilization fund?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** We have ongoing consultations with members of the industry—for instance, the Fisheries Council of Canada and the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance—both bilaterally and multilaterally on what the different segments of the industry require to address what's going on during this pandemic.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I have a point of order.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I am sorry, Mr. Chair.

I know that we have already lost a lot of time, but because of the poor sound quality, I missed all of the interpretation from the beginning of Mr. Forgeron's speech. I am sorry to waste any more time, but I would like to hear the interpretation so that I can fully participate in the meeting.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Nancy, could you check with interpretation to see if everything is working?

**The Clerk:** Yes, I will.

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

• (1550) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1600)

• (1605)

**The Chair:** I hear from the clerk that the technical people are suggesting that the reason we couldn't quite understand the translation was that there was no headset being used. It's much easier, of course, with a headset like the one I have on.

Might I suggest in that instance that the witness could provide the committee with written or typed responses to the questions that have been asked so far? The clerk could forward them to us in both official languages, and we can move on to questioning of another witness.

That's my suggestion. I don't know if everybody agrees with that.

Hearing nothing, I'll say we're going to move on.

There are still about 55 seconds left in your questioning if you want to continue, Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to make the best use of the time I can.

I'll come back to Mr. Forgeron. Why were Ontario, Nunavut, Yukon and the Northwest Territories excluded from the seafood stabilization fund?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Whether or not they're going to be excluded from the fund is yet to be determined, Mr. Chair. Basically, the initial thought on the fund was to address pressures in the coastal fisheries that were federally regulated. As we announced the program and rolled it out, we've seen that there is probably a demand for assistance of a similar nature in other jurisdictions besides the four Atlantic provinces, Quebec and British Columbia.

We are working with regional agencies to determine whether that need would be best served through the stabilization fund or through other regional development agency programming that is being rolled out currently, like the regional relief recovery fund, for those organizations to address the freshwater processing industry sector requirements in that area. When we announce the details and roll out the programming for the stabilization fund, it'll be clearer which of these two funds the freshwater processing sector will be addressed through.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Forgeron.

Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

We'll now move on to Mr. Battiste, for six minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Thank you.

I've been speaking to fishermen daily in Cape Breton, and our lobster harvesters are facing substantially reduced demand due to COVID-19. I've seen photos of literally piles of lobster that just won't be sold and will probably be wasted. Prices have dropped to about \$4.25 per pound, the lowest price we've seen in a generation, and the market has been so weak that there have been quotas on the haul.

I'd like to get a sense of DFO's line of sight on this issue. I'd also like to get a sense of whether or not a government intervention is being considered.

We announced a food surplus purchase program. Is that something that we might leverage? This seems like exactly the sort of situation where a food surplus purchase program could play a role, and I'd like to get you to comment on that.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** What we are definitely seeing, Mr. Chair, is really depressed prices at the wharf due to a decrease in demand for the product. In particular, lobster is one of those products. The price for lobster in the first quarter, for which we have the statistics, remained strong. Last year's prices were particularly high. They were record prices, but we're receiving reports similar to what the honourable member has heard about a reduction of up to 40% in the price from the high to where it is right now.

What we're hoping to see is an increase in demand for this product in the short term, and we're seeing the recovery of some of the markets already. The Lobster Council of Canada has told us, for instance, that the Chinese market is now up to 50% of where it normally would be at this time of year, after having been much lower in the previous few months. That will actually help with the particular problem of too much lobster coming in at the wharf. A lot of the relationship is managed between the processors, the buyers and the harvesters. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans does not directly interfere in that as the fisheries regulator.

I would also like to mention that one of the things the government has done to help address this situation is to use the stabilization fund that we were talking about in the previous question to fund possible increases in the processors to move from the live lobster market to a more processed lobster market, to increase storage and cold storage for lobster, and to help them retool to meet the

new demand shifts created for seafood, away from the live market and towards the more processed market.

As to the question regarding the surplus food purchase program, in fact, fish and seafood are eligible under that program. That program is going to be administered by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, but fish and seafood are going to be part of that program, and there may be an opportunity for what's being harvested, either by the harvesting community or by the aquaculture industry, to avail itself of that program. The details of that program aren't out and are apparently under development by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, which is doing so in consultation with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, to ensure that our sector is appropriately represented and acknowledgeable under that program.

• (1610)

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Thank you for that.

I'm glad you mentioned the storage facilities. I was on the phone this morning with one of the storage facilities and was trying to find remedies. No one wants to see crates of dead lobsters that could be feeding people, especially in some of these communities that have food insecurity.

I'm wondering if there is any plan for us to increase storage capability or capacity in the short term. Is that something we're looking at as well?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** I believe that is going to be one of the key pillars of the Canadian seafood stabilization fund, which will be administered by the regional agencies. One of the primary pillars of that program announced by the government is actually to increase storage. The desire is to increase storage in the short term so as to continue to have a market and buyers for the goods of the harvesters, and have that lobster come off the wharf and go into storage and then to processors and buyers so they can increase inventory and continue to process that fish and seafood. This should also have the long-term benefit of more storage and processing capability for when we have the recovery period.

The hope is to move very quickly through the regional agencies to get that storage capacity up so that there's some ability for the purchasers and the processors to buy that stock as fast as possible.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** I know I won't have a chance to get an answer on this question because I'm running short of time, but I wanted to just speak a bit about the communication and get a sense of having something written.

How can DFO help these fishermen who are looking for help, who don't understand the programs, who have heard that we have put almost a half a billion dollars into the fishing industry, but they don't know how this works out? Is there any way that DFO can figure out how to communicate effectively with these fishermen in these areas that may not have the greatest Internet capabilities?

I hope you have a plan for that, and I know you can't answer because we're out of time, but perhaps you could look at how we're doing for communications going forward.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Battiste.

We'll now go to the Bloc and Madame Gill for six minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I have a question about the \$62.5 million in support given to the industry for storage capacity. Storage affects the price, not only in the short term, but in the long term as well.

So I was wondering whether that was something you evaluated. Storing fish does not bring more money to the fishers, quite the opposite. You get more fish, and the price then goes down.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** The objective, I would say, of the cold storage facilities under the Canadian seafood stabilization fund is to allow the processors to continue to buy the harvesters' product over the long run.

What happens is that if processors and buyers find themselves in situations in which they cannot either store or send the seafood on to the buyers because of lack of demand, they start regulating how much seafood they're willing to purchase from the harvesting community, and we're already seeing that in certain fisheries at the moment. Because they're concerned about their inability to store seafood and fish, they're actually putting limits on how much they'll buy from those individual harvesters, as opposed to what we've seen in the past, when they bought all the product available.

We believe that if we increase the storage capacity of these processors, it will mitigate against the need on the part of the processors and buyers to limit the amount they'll buy from the harvester community.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I feel that is a minimum. It may be fine for those who have the storage, but it does not have a significant impact on the fishers, other than a mitigating impact. We know only too well that many are heading towards a season of losses.

I was wondering about the benefits and subsidies provided by the government. I was wondering why there were differences between the support given to the fisheries sector and that given to other sectors. I talk to a huge number of fishers in eastern Quebec. Generally speaking, they see a big difference in the benefit, as well as in the subsidy. They feel that they have a lower-cost program.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** The objective of the government is to establish a program that has national application, which would be of benefit to all sectors across the economy. Initiatives such as the Canada emergency response benefit and the Canada emergency wage subsidy are examples of such things. As they have rolled out,

we have made changes to them to try to capture differences in sectors.

I'll use the example of the Canada emergency response benefit. We saw very quickly that this was an issue for our sector because of the seasonality of the sector and its impact on seasonal workers, especially those who are coming off of EI. The government made an adjustment to that so that workers coming off of EI—a lot of that was happening in our seafood sector, both with processors and harvesters—would be eligible.

We noticed immediately after this that the change did not catch those individuals who were on fishers' EI, which is not regular EI. Within a number of days, we made a change to make those individuals eligible for the Canada emergency response benefit. Having said that, we realized, through our ongoing consultations with the industry, the union representatives, the harvesters' associations and our provincial counterparts at both the officials and ministerial levels, that a lot of the harvesting community was not finding itself eligible for these benefits. They technically can apply and be eligible, but because of the structure of the industry or their enterprises, some are eligible and some are not.

We—

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I am sorry, my six minutes run out very quickly, Mr. Forgeron, and I have more questions for you.

You mentioned employment insurance, but many who work in the industry and fishing crew members will not have access to it. You also spoke of seasonality, and that is precisely how certain communities make their entire living. In their case, a bad fishing season can destroy them.

Knowing that the current fishing season has already been significantly impacted by the drop in demand, would it be possible to provide income, like employment insurance, to our seasonal workers for a full year to cover them until the 2021 fishing season?

[*English*]

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Mr. Chair, I'm going to answer that question in two parts, and I'll try to be very quick.

Seeing gaps in our sector, especially gaps with regard to the fish harvesters and share persons, who are organized in a very different way from the normal economy, we actually did the grant and benefit program to address those gaps that we found in the Canada emergency response benefit and the Canada emergency wage subsidy directly. Those individuals have choices between either the national program or the sector-specific program.



The Prime Minister also announced that, in the case of employment insurance, those who receive fishers' EI could expect to receive fishers' EI either based on the benefits that they would be entitled to from this year's fishing or, in short order, that they could be secure and understand what they might be entitled to based on previous years' earnings because of the expectation of loss in earnings. That has been done for EI for fishers, who are a small subcategory of the seasonal workers in our sector.

The wage-earning sector, which we—

• (1620)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Forgeron. I'm going to have to cut you off. We've gone way over time.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Would it be possible to have the answer in writing, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, Mrs. Gill.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Johns for six minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Thank you to all the staff at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard for the work that you're doing, in light of the difficult circumstances that you're working under.

My first question is actually... Mr. Battiste was talking about the food procurement plan. My colleague Alistair MacGregor and I wrote a letter on April 24, calling on the government for a Canada food procurement strategy, plan and investment. On May 5, we heard the Prime Minister announce the \$50-million plan. We've been asking for days to see if seafood would be included in that plan. Today's the first day that we got confirmation that's actually happening. Fifty million dollars doesn't go very far when we're looking at agriculture and seafood.

Will you be increasing it now that we know that seafood's going to be included? When will you be opening up that program so that we can understand the details?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** The program that was originally announced had both the agriculture and agri-food sector and the fish and seafood sector included in it. The \$50 million always envisioned both sides of the food community.

Whether or not there will be a plan after the program rolls out... I do not know when the program will roll out. It's being administered by our colleagues at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm sorry I have to be short, but I have six minutes only.

My concern, sir, is that time's running out. These fishers are out fishing. They don't have a market to ship to. In the United States, in Alaska, for example, they buy their salmon when prices drop. They serve it to the United States military, to U.S. penitentiaries and government operations. I hope that you'll be considering doing just that.

My second thing is that you rolled out these programs around the fish harvester grant and the fish harvester benefit. When will this money actually land in the hands of fishers?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** We hope to be announcing the details of these programs in the not-too-distant future. We are working with our colleagues at ESDC to develop the programming for these initiatives. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans historically doesn't deliver these types of programs. We are working with our colleagues over there. We hope to be rolling them out over the course of the summer months.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** My concern with that, sir, is that fishers need money now. A lot of them can't access the CEBA program or any of the financial supports, the Canada emergency wage subsidy. They are going into the season. They don't have these supports in place.

I'm also asking about their request that licence fees and moorage fees be waived, especially for boats that don't go out and fish. This could help support conservation. I know on the north coast of the Pacific, for example, a lot of first nations own licences. They'd prefer not to go fishing, but they are going to have to, to be able to afford to pay for those licences.

Is the government considering waiving those fees?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** At this point there is no plan to waive fishing licence fees. I believe that in the case of mooring fees at small craft harbours, those are applied by the small craft harbour authorities, not by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Is that correct, Sylvie?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe (Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Harbour Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Yes, it is.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay.

We're asking that the government consider waiving licence fees for these fishers for conservation reasons but also to help these fishers get through for next season.

Also, what are you doing for sport fishers, recreational fishers? A lot of them are making a living relying on tourism. They're not showing up. Many of them can't access the CEBA loans, the various different programs the government is rolling out, or it's not even close to enough.

What is the government doing to look at that sector in particular to help support those fishers? Will they be applying the same EI program based on 2019, for example, into 2021, like they are with the commercial fleet?

• (1625)

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** When it comes to what we're doing for the EI system for the commercial fleet, that is actually limited to those who are participating in the fishers' benefits of the EI system, which are the owner-operators and the share persons.

It actually doesn't apply to the—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Exactly.

Will you be applying something similar to the sport sector because they are in a different category?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** What I believe will be happening is that they'll be considered a part of how the government's approach would be to seasonal workers and their treatment under the regular national EI system, which is the responsibility, policy-wise, of ES-DC and the Department of Finance. Fisheries and Oceans is not involved directly in that discussion.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** In the COVID-19 era, how has foreign ownership of licences, quotas and processing impacted fisheries' operations in the Pacific?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** I'm not aware of any impacts regarding the foreign ownership in the Pacific.

Sylvie, do you have any other knowledge of any possible impacts that might have happened?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** I've certainly not heard from any of the industries on the west coast that this has happened.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** The concern is that we know you don't track foreign ownership on the west coast.

Has the government looked at ensuring that there's a fair split for those who are leasing quota, like a fifty-fifty split? We know people have committed to leasing prices based on last year's market price. Before they even untie their boats and leave the dock they're going bankrupt.

Is this something that you're looking at intervening in while you're responding to the sharing of risks and benefits and to how you're going to, hopefully, implement that plan that was put forward by this committee?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** The department is starting to look at the issue of foreign ownership, as a result of the considerations of this committee.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has no position on foreign ownership, as we can see by the difference in treatment of foreign ownership in the Pacific and the two different ways we treat foreign ownership in the various Atlantic fleets. We have decided to undertake some research on the issue of foreign ownership and beneficial ownership of fishing licences in Canada, as a result of—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** During COVID-19, we're seeing the impact of that. It's serious to those fishers. It's harming those fishers and those communities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Johns. Your time is up.

We'll now go to the second round of questions.

We'll start with Mr. Bragdon, for five minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Forgeron.

Does the DFO's strategic policy see the necessity of government support to increase the availability of Canadian fish and seafood to

Canadians and to build demand in our domestic markets? Is there any strategy under way for that?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Industry stakeholders have raised the need to target the domestic market a little more than has been done in the past. As you would all be aware as members of this committee, we're a very export-oriented industry. Our provincial colleagues have also raised this.

We are discussing the possibility of whether we want to collectively launch, in partnership with our provincial counterparts and the industry, something more in the domestic area of marketing, as opposed to our traditional export marketing efforts.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** I have another question along the same line.

Does DFO's strategic policy see the necessity for governments to reconnect our fish and seafood exports with overseas markets as a result of what's been happening? Have there been efforts and outreach to those areas, along with the domestic market? Also, has the need for expanding those efforts in domestic and foreign markets been communicated to the minister?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** The department hasn't undertaken any new expanded marketing efforts during this period of time. What we have been seeing is an increase in market demand slowly returning as things become normalized. We're now seeing that a bit in the Asian markets, which of course were the first markets hit by COVID. We haven't determined whether we need any long-term plans to target those markets, beyond letting them recover at this point in time.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** In regard to the EI changes that are in the works, which perhaps need to be looked at, when can self-employed fish harvesters and share persons expect to receive the details of the EI changes that the government said it would be proposing? Will the EI changes be proposed in legislation?

● (1630)

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** I do not know the answers to those questions, because that falls under the work of my colleagues at ES-DC. However, these are questions we're receiving from both the industry and our provincial counterparts, even most recently as this morning, from the provinces.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Yes, it's pretty relevant.

Is there something DFO is doing to ensure that whatever proposed changes are coming through EI will actually fit the needs of the fishers? Is there collaboration and communication going on with our front-line harvesters?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** The harvesters' representatives are discussing with us and asking us questions about EI and the other programs. We are currently focused on our current DFO programs, which are going to be delivered by either the regional agencies or ESDC, to ensure that they're understandable enough for our harvester community to apply in an easy, quick way. For instance, in the case of the fish harvester grants and benefits, we have asked ESDC to have call centre capacity to help our harvester community understand the system when applying for this stuff. One of the principles we had in setting up the program was to keep it as simple as possible, for accessibility purposes.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** My next question will be along the same lines as the fish harvester benefits.

As I'm sure you realize, some people are probably falling through the cracks, and there are some unique situations that pertain to fishers and harvesters. Are measures being taken by DFO to address areas where some people may be falling through the cracks of the Canada emergency wage subsidy program? In certain situations, some of the harvesters and fishers, like others, maybe don't fit into a certain category and there will have to be some tweaking or adjustments. Are you aware of any of that taking place right now?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** We don't have any responsibility directly for the Canada emergency wage subsidy. The fish harvester benefit program was a direct response to the fact that we realized our owner-operators and our share persons, who collectively made up the majority of the fishing fleets' crews, were completely falling between the stools, if you will, of eligibility. That was a direct response to that.

The government has made adjustments over time on the wage subsidy program, including the period of time. What we heard was a large issue here in the fish harvesting community was that it simply did not match their seasons, though it has now been extended. We do pass the advocacy efforts of our stakeholders on to our inter-departmental colleagues, to ensure that those are a part of their policy deliberations and discussions, though we have no responsibility for those programs.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Forgeron and Mr. Bragdon.

We'll now move to Mr. Hardie for five minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you to our witnesses, who've toughed it out with us today.

I wanted to talk a little bit, not about the economic health of our fishers but about their physical health. There's a news report out of Alaska that a fish boat arrived in port with 86 crew members testing positive for COVID-19. What do we know about the safety protocols in place for the people who are out on the boats?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Occupational health and safety issues in our fishing fleet are actually within provincial jurisdiction, not federal jurisdiction. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has not been involved in that. The different provincial jurisdictions have worked with their harvesting community and with their health organizations to establish guidelines in that regard for their fishing fleets. Our current grant program, for instance, the fish harvester benefit, would allow for them to have some liquidity in order to im-

plement elements of that plan if they needed liquidity for that. In terms of direct guidelines, guidance and regulations of occupational health and safety vis-à-vis COVID-19 in the fishing fleet, that falls under provincial jurisdiction, with provincial authorities working with labour and their appropriate associations.

• (1635)

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** You can understand that it's pretty close quarters, obviously, on some of these vessels. With respect to that, what would happen if you got a signal from a vessel out at sea that a crew member had come down with COVID and is really very gravely ill? Is this something the Coast Guard is in a position to respond to with the appropriate safety measures in place?

**Mr. Chris Henderson:** Thank you for that question.

The Coast Guard certainly is involved in responding to reports of mariners who have COVID-like symptoms. It hasn't happened yet, as far as I'm aware, in the fishing context, although it has happened in the commercial shipping context. What happens is that our marine communications and traffic services maintain radio communication with the shipmaster. We go through a screening procedure with them that is based on the Public Health Agency of Canada guidelines. We pass on that information to the Public Health Agency. They consult, and working with Transport Canada, they will hold that ship either at anchor or offshore until we get an answer as to whether or not we need to be concerned about COVID.

As happened in one case on the east coast where a ship was actually in harbour, we liaise with the provincial health authorities to make sure any crew member is looked after appropriately. Our own crew are trained in dealing with mariners who might have COVID. They have the proper personal protective equipment, procedures and training to be able to deal with a mariner displaying COVID, but as I mentioned, nothing that I'm aware of has occurred so far in the fishing fleet.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Have we had any instances where a fishing vessel has shown up in a small community, basically unannounced, with a sick crew member on board and that sick person presents a challenge for that local community to deal with?

**Mr. Chris Henderson:** No, sir, not that I'm aware of.

On the west coast, in the lead-up to the May long weekend, we were particularly concerned about the fine weather encouraging people to take to the water for recreational purposes, and that also included significant concern about seasonal travellers from the United States who tend to take that waterway up toward Alaska for the summer.

As you can imagine, there are some very small communities, mostly indigenous communities, along that route. These are great places that traditionally people stop by, so we were working hard to discourage people from making that trip, working with the Canada Border Services Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard and the RCMP. We put out a lot of communication about that and about the border closure, which was—up until then, by and large—a land border and an airport border. How can I put this...? We basically moved it out onto the water to make sure that we were also making sure that people knew the border on the water was closed as well.

With direct regard to your question, I'm not familiar with that scenario you described.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hardie. Your time is up.

We'll now go to Mr. Fast for five minutes or less, please.

**Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's good to join my colleagues on this committee again.

I want to first of all follow up on a very important question that Mr. Johns asked. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the role that the communist regime in China has played in that crisis. It has also highlighted how vulnerable we are in Canada to the loss of our economic sovereignty over our strategic assets and critical supplies. That concern applies equally to our commercial seafood harvesting and processing industry.

You said that the department hasn't taken a position on the foreign ownership of Canadian commercial fishing licences. I would like to suggest that you do. As you know, the industry committee is undertaking a study on foreign ownership by state-owned enterprises. I'm confident that Canadians have significant concerns about hostile foreign interests' acquiring interests in Canadian companies and strategic industries, including interests in our commercial fishing industry.

By the way, I'm glad you're doing some work on this issue. I kindly ask that you provide this committee with updates on what your research might reveal.

In any event, I'll go to my first question. To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic taken away from the work that DFO would otherwise be doing? As part of your answer, could you tell us how many, if any, DFO staff have been redeployed away from their normal duties in order to address COVID-19-related issues? You can use FTEs if you want.

• (1640)

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Dominic.

**Mr. Dominic Laporte (Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources and Corporate Services, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Yes, thank you very much.

We've been able to deliver on most of our business line. In terms of staff being impacted by COVID-19, for the entire department we have a total of 10 staff members who have been impacted.

Our staff are still working. We also have staff in the field. Staff who are essential to our business line have been doing that. I would have to say that DFO has never been closed for business because of COVID.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** I'm glad to hear that you've never been closed for business.

As you know, DFO.... Basically, our country has a number of pressing issues within its purview relating to our fisheries, not the least of which is the dramatic decline in Canada's wild Pacific salmon populations. Being from the west coast, I'm trying to get a sense of whether this work has been compromised or otherwise delayed by COVID-19. For example, the Big Bar landslide is an existential threat to the Fraser River wild salmon.

To what extent has the pandemic response negatively impacted progress on the Big Bar remediation project?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Jen.

**Ms. Jen O'Donoghue (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** I can answer that, Mr. Chair.

In this case, the fact that the Big Bar location is so remote has actually worked in our favour, unlike other things that we've been trying to do out there. The actual project has been able to continue despite the pandemic. Kiewit has done an excellent job making sure that the health and safety of workers has been maintained throughout the process.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** I just want to follow up on that.

The costs of that project have more than tripled over the original estimates.

Are you aware of whether the work of the contractor on the Big Bar slide has been compromised by the pandemic?

**Ms. Jen O'Donoghue:** In terms of the cost, as you know, we presented to the [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] back in March. We anticipated to spend approximately \$45 million by the May time frame on Big Bar, and we've actually stayed very close to within that range.

The contractor [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] relate to safety and security at the site and our wanting to use the expertise of Kiewit to continue the work on some of the contingency measures that we've put in place.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Can you provide us with assurances that Peter Kiewit Sons is going to be able to do that work safely? As you know, it's subject to a criminal prosecution right now, and there has been a recent, smaller slide there, which could have injured workers on the site. Are you able to provide us with assurances that this work is going to be done safely?

**Ms. Jen O'Donoughue:** The project is monitored very closely by us and by some of our partners at PSPC. We continue to make sure that all of the safety measures are in place and to monitor it very closely.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You're out of time, sir. You're a little bit over, actually.

Thank you to the people answering.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Before I go to the next questioner, I just want to ask the committee for permission to extend a bit for the time we lost. I'm estimating approximately half an hour because we do have a bit of committee business that we want to do.

If we could extend, we'll continue on with the questions for now.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we'll go to Madam Gill for two and a half minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

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

My question is twofold. At home, on the North Shore, I have noticed several communication issues—as Mr. Bragdon mentioned earlier—that have led to requests to delay the fishing season due to the COVID-19 fears. The requests came from very isolated communities, where a number of fishing vessels will be docked and where fishers will not have access to accommodation, given the physical distancing guidelines. The same is true for Indigenous communities.

Although the health guidelines and the delay in the fishing season are the responsibility of Quebec and the provinces, it was nonetheless extremely difficult, given the fishing areas for which workers come from Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and the North Shore. People move from place to place.

Has Fisheries and Oceans Canada thought about improvements to ensure that the communities in my region, which have already suffered enormous economic and social impacts, do not have to suffer them next time? Of course, I am thinking of the eastern Quebec First Nations and isolated communities, such as the members of the Coasters Association on the Lower North Shore.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Sylvie.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** Thank you for your question.

To date, we have not implemented any new communication measures, but I must say you raise a good point.

We are acutely aware that, in isolated communities, particularly Indigenous communities, the risks and impacts of the pandemic are much higher. We are going to work on that.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Why have no communications or health guidelines been issued to help these communities?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** With respect to small craft harbours, we have worked with harbour authorities to provide signage and communications to ensure that access to these harbours is restricted to those authorized to enter.

With respect to Indigenous communities, we are in regular contact with them, not only to gather information related to their needs, but also to let them know which departments and information posts they can contact to obtain this information.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. We've actually gone over time.

Thank you for that.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** All right.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I have to intervene and apologize to one of my colleagues who I jumped over in the five-minute round. That would be Mr. Morrissey.

I've calculated the extended time to be half an hour, so we will stop at 7 p.m. my time, which would of course change all across the country. We will extend by half an hour.

Mr. Morrissey, I'll go back to you for your five minutes. I do apologize.

Whenever you're ready, you have five minutes or less.

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

Before my question, I'm pleased to hear the Conservatives advocating for the liberalization of the EI program.

In Prince Edward Island, we're unique in that we have a wild oyster fishery. It's unique to Prince Edward Island and I believe it's the only one that's licensed by DFO in their harvest. There's a bit of confusion on how they will be impacted by the relief program that was announced by the minister, so if the department could respond to me, or respond in a written answer, that would be great.

Are you aware of the unique character of the wild oyster fishery on Prince Edward Island, which comes under the licensing control of DFO, and will those fishers have the same ability, whether in partnership with the licence-holder, or the leaseholders, which is unique to this fishery, to participate in the fishery package the same as other fishers?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** I saw reports on that confusion just yesterday.

We believe on the face of it they should be eligible for these programs, but we can double-check to see and make sure there is no specific impediment to them because of the unique nature of this fishery. As a licensed fishery, which would be part of the fishers' EI system, we would expect them to be fully eligible. We'll make sure and we will provide a written response to the committee.

• (1650)

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Just for further clarification, some have a licence but some hold a lease, which is still the wild harvest regulated by DFO. Therefore, could you be clear to me on that? As well, some of them participate in a partnership.

My other question is in two areas. How is DFO being impacted by COVID-19 as it relates to enforcement and protection out within the fishery?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Sylvie, do you want to respond?

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Is it impacting your ability to continue to provide protection and enforcement levels as it was prior to COVID-19?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** During COVID-19, on the conservation and protection side, we've been delivering our services to 100%, or in some areas, maybe 80% or 90% of pre-COVID. All our fisheries officers have been issued standard operating protocols, both from a fisheries officer perspective but also with specifics to whether they're conducting port inspections, at-sea inspections, whether they're boarding foreign vessels for inspections, whether they're doing aerial surveillance—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Just so I understand then, the protection personnel are in the field basically the same as it was prior to COVID-19.

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** That's correct.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** My other question would be in the area of small craft harbours and the ability of technical people to get out on site at various harbour locations.

Have they been impacted by COVID-19 in their ability to get out and continue to ensure that small craft harbours are kept up and these programs are moving forward?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** For the most part, they have. With respect to some construction projects in Ontario and Quebec, we've seen delays due to prevention regulations around construction, but they've now been lifted. We've had a few issues in Newfoundland and Labrador around the availability of construction workers, but by and large, all the harbours have been able to operate as per usual.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** I want to go back to a question that was raised by my colleagues in either the Conservative Party or the

New Democratic Party. I believe one of the answers I heard was that it might be months before it's clear who would be eligible under the fishery incentive programs that were announced.

Could somebody speak to that and narrow that up? I believe I heard in the "not-too-distant future", but for an oyster fisher with no fishery because we've been shut down totally for over a month, quite frankly, that's not a good enough answer.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** When it comes to whom we expect to be eligible for the fish harvester benefit, the groups that will be eligible will be the licence-holders, the owner-operators of the inshore fleet, as well as the share persons who make up another 6,000 members of the crews of—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Yes, I'm aware of that. It's the timeline on which they will begin to take a look at the applications.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** The timeline...

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** It's only when they have access to the applications that the industry will have some comfort that they know what they're looking at and when it'll move forward.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. We've completely gone over time there for a response, Mr. Morrissey and Mr. Forgeron. Perhaps you could supply that response in written form; that would be appreciated.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** My question is pointed at the COVID recovery and response plan, and I'm focusing on the wild salmon emergency. Can you tell me whether there have been any delays in the government's plan to transition from open-net salmon farms to closed containment?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** That's one of the mandate commitments of our minister. We are planning on supporting the minister in meeting all of her mandate commitments over the course of this mandate. It is still our intention to have a responsible plan with regard to the transition of open-net aquaculture in British Columbia as per the schedule in her mandate letter.

• (1655)

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I only have two and a half minutes, so I'll move on to the Big Bar landslide. I'm glad Mr. Fast raised it because we're hearing from indigenous communities that.... Obviously, there were stipulations in the contract to hire indigenous people who are living adjacent to and on the lands where this project's being developed. What enforcement mechanisms has the department had to make sure that indigenous people are hired?

Kiewit has gone over budget three times what they initially were awarded for the contract. We're hearing from indigenous people on the ground that they're actually not getting awarded those contracts that were guaranteed to them. Is this because of COVID?

**Ms. Jen O'Donoghue:** There is a very structured benefits plan as part of the Kiewit contract, and every time we have increased the Kiewit contract, we have also looked at that benefits plan, and we're monitoring it very closely. We can certainly follow up if you're hearing those kinds of things. We haven't heard them from a project perspective.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Great. We'd be happy to share that with you.

In terms of restoration projects, obviously, it is critical right now, especially during the salmon emergency, that we don't lose sight of that. We're hearing from people who are getting denied in Clayoquot, Sumas and the Fraser—all of these very important organizations like the Coastal Restoration Society that are working in partnership with first nations and local stakeholders. We have invasive European green crab. We have derelict and abandoned fishing gear. We have plastics. We have stream reparation that needs to be worked on, and we have people ready to work in the middle of a COVID crisis who can physically distance and do this work.

Are you going to accelerate the funding into those communities as part of the recovery plan so that we can get those projects off the ground, instead of waiting until next year or the year after?

**The Chair:** Sorry, Gord. That's all your time.

Again, I would ask the witness to provide that answer in writing to the committee. That would be great.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll go on now to a five-minute round for Mr. Calkins.

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

A few weeks ago, I spoke to several guides and outfitters from across our country, including many who guide in our coastal waters. As seasonal industries that often use a contract method instead of payroll, many of these companies are ineligible for any of the support programs put forward by ESDC or the Department of Finance. What has the department been doing to help ensure the survival of these commercial sport fishing ventures?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** The department's focus has been dealing with those parts of the fish and seafood community that it is directly in the business of regulating, which is our fish harvesting community. I believe that recreational fishing businesses are seasonal businesses that would fall more under the other seasonal busi-

nesses that the department of ISED would be looking into responses for, as a part of the greater tourism industry.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** That's what I thought. However, these very same organizations suffered economically last year due to the restrictions on chinook retention, and that is something that the department directly sets. DFO has extended these restrictions to this year, and now these salmon retention restrictions for two years in a row coupled with COVID-19 will put even greater hardship on the recreational sector, as well as the communities that rely on it for tourism dollars.

Has the department done an assessment of the retention restrictions and the COVID-related issues and what the overall cost will be to the sport fishing sector?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Sylvie, do you have any information in response to that question?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** I know we've done some economic analysis. I'd be pleased to follow up on that in writing.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** I would welcome that.

On April 9, the sport fishing advisory board submitted a proposal that would help to address the legitimate chinook conservation concerns, while still allowing retention of hatchery chinook or wild chinook that fit in a slot size for those stocks that are not of particular concern. This would be an opportunity for the department to give an olive branch to those businesses that rely on these salmon stocks. I think it would create opportunities for the department to go down a different path, all the while ensuring that the salmon stocks, the natural wild salmon stocks, remain viable and that the commercial sport fishing entities remain viable.

Have you had a chance to look at the sport fishing advisory board's recommendations? Do you have any thoughts on them?

• (1700)

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** Yes, we have looked at the recommendations. We've been engaging on a fairly regular basis with the SFAB, both at headquarters and at the Pacific regional level.

We're currently pulling together all of the results of our consultations on what the chinook measures will look like for 2020. We'll certainly be taking that proposal into account.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** The government is currently spending money much faster than any government in history. I'm not saying this as a criticism; these are just the times we're in.

Has the department seized this opportunity to purchase equipment or do other projects, like upgrading hatcheries? Has it purchased marking equipment so that all hatchery-raised fish could be marked so we can pursue marked selective fisheries in the future?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** We did receive some funding in 2018 to raise our hatchery capacity. We are currently looking at how we could put in place increased marked selective fisheries. Again, that's all going to be coming forward in the plan for the 2020 chinook measures.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** COVID-19 has compounded many existing socio-economic problems that the recreational angling community is experiencing. I would guess there's also some work coming out of universities and from people who are studying the effect that pinnipeds are having on the predation of juvenile salmon stocks, particularly coho, chinook and others that might not necessarily be a target of pinnipeds. Seemingly, there is an increase in pinniped populations, sometimes a tenfold increase, compared with populations from a few years ago.

Is the department prepared now, based on the findings that universities are making and on reports that this committee has endorsed unanimously, to deal with an increasing pinniped problem and the predation they have on salmon stocks?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** Last year we—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Calkins. You've gone over time.

I would ask the witnesses to provide an answer to that question in writing to the committee, at the earliest convenience.

We will now go to Mr. Cormier for five minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Good afternoon.

I thank the witnesses for being with us.

I would like to acknowledge all members of the industry who are listening to us, whether they are fishers, plant employees, deckhands, those who land lobsters and crabs on the wharves, fishers' associations or plant owners.

I know this is not an easy season for them, but we have been here before in the fishing industry. My father was a fisher all his life, so I have seen the ups and downs of the industry. I think the programs we have implemented and announced so far have been very well received by the industry, but they lack clarity in some cases. I know all the details are not out yet, so I have a couple of questions for you.

I want to start by talking about newcomers to the fishing industry. For example, a young person may decide to buy a lobster fishing licence from their father or from someone else. Have you thought about the fact that some of them do not have income from previous years to compare with their current income, which may make them automatically ineligible for the 75% wage subsidy program that has been announced?

These licenses are very valuable. They are worth millions of dollars. So have you thought about making sure that these newcomers have access to the 75% wage subsidy or the \$10,000 subsidy?

[*English*]

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** We don't have a specific answer to that question, other than to say that the representatives of the harvester communities as well as our provincial counterparts have

raised that as an issue of concern for new entrants into the fisheries, in that they don't have that history to make them eligible for these programs, although they have the same expenses as those who are long-time participants. We'll be looking at that issue.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you.

Along the same lines, as I told you earlier, my father was a fisher all his life with his brother. Family ties are very common in this industry, with a lot passing from "father to son". Now even mothers have their fishing licences, as well as cousins.

Have you thought about these relationships as well? Unfortunately, as you know, various programs make people ineligible if they are related. It is the case with employment insurance, for example. Have you thought of disregarding family relationships to keep from disqualifying certain fishing companies?

• (1705)

[*English*]

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** They are the two new programs that we're launching at DFO, the benefit program and the grant program. There are no family-relation issues that we see as being issues for those two programs.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Mr. Forgeron.

Something else worries me a lot. In front of our house, every morning, I see the lobster fishers and crab fishers heading out to sea. However, one fleet I have not seen going out to sea since the beginning of January is the shrimp fleet.

This is going to be a year of great uncertainty for that fleet and the shrimp fishery. There is virtually no market. It has been going on for a long time, but this year will be worse than any other. The fishers do not know when they will be able to go to sea.

The programs announced are good for the fishery sector. However, what is being done about the shrimp industry, which sadly will certainly be in big trouble if there is no fishery this year? How are we going to help? Granted, the programs are there, but what are we going to do if there is no fishing season? Are you in discussions right now with the shrimpers to tailor our programs to that industry?

The provinces will also need to be involved in the discussion and be at the table to provide funding over and above the federal funding. Unfortunately, New Brunswick's Conservative government has thus far not spent a dime to help the various businesses in the province, in the fishery or any other sector.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** Sylvie, do you have any comments on the information that the shrimp industry has provided to us?



I know they have reached out to us and talked to us about the issues they're facing.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Anyone...?

**Mr. Jean-Guy Forgeron:** One thing I can say right right off the top is that we know that as this industry comes off of the employment insurance, it is eligible for CERB. We expect it will be eligible for fisheries EI as a sector, and as I mentioned earlier, the details of that will be done by ESDC. The sector, I know, has also recently reached out to the department raising a number of its concerns. At this point in time, we'd have to take a look at what they would be asking for beyond these programs.

These programs have been established—be it coming off EI, CERB or being still eligible for the possibility of the harvester programs—so that whether or not you fished the season, eligibility probably will be the same, and it's similar for EI.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Forgeron.

Unfortunately, that uses up what I suspect will be all of our time for questions and answers with our witnesses.

I would like to personally, and on behalf of the committee, thank the witnesses for their contribution here today. I know it's under different circumstances, and with everybody all in one room, it makes it a bit harder and sometimes confusing, but I think it went okay once we got on track. Again, thank you for your participation. I know most of you have been before committee before.

We'll give just a moment now for our guests to sign off before we continue on with committee business.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Mr. Chair, if I may, are we able to submit questions to these witnesses afterwards? We have a full list of questions we haven't gotten through yet because of the delays. Are we able to submit some questions to be answered by the officials as part of this?

**The Chair:** Yes, I would suggest any member who has any questions that we didn't get to would submit those questions to the clerk who will forward them to the witnesses. I'm sure they'll be only too glad to respond in writing.

Thanks for that, Mr. Arnold.

• (1710)

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Mr. Chair, I'm assuming that our committee business is going to be done in camera. Is that right?

**The Chair:** It's all in public.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Good. I just wanted to make sure that my notice of motion is dealt with.

**The Chair:** It will be.

I think all the witnesses have signed off. There are just a couple of things I want to report.

We've heard back from the minister on her availability to appear before committee. The minister has told us that she would be available for two hours on June 9 to come and talk about Big Bar and she would be available again for two hours on June 10 to come in and discuss COVID-19. I just wanted to let the committee know

that. Our two meetings next week will be attended by the minister on those two topics.

As well, for witnesses for the study we just started—more witnesses than just the officials, I guess—the deadline to submit those names is 5 p.m. tomorrow. Some people may say that's a little bit quick, but the reason we had troubles today was due to the short time we had to get witnesses lined up and get them equipped properly to do this, from where they are to where we are. It caused some problems. We want to make sure that the staff, the clerk and everybody has enough time to get those witnesses lined up and prepared with the equipment they need to make sure the back and forth goes okay, and we don't lose time in the future, hopefully.

That's it from me.

Mr. Fast.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and in the spirit of the eagerness that our committee members have demonstrated in bringing forward issues for study at committee, I want to join the bandwagon by highlighting the shrimp-by-trawl industry on the west coast of Canada.

This industry is pulling its hair out trying to get the attention of DFO, to no avail. My notice of motion reads as follows:

That the committee undertake a study of at least two two-hour meetings to investigate DFO's management of the shrimp-by-trawl industry on the west coast of Canada; that the committee hear from industry stakeholders at the first two-hour televised meeting; and that the committee invite [DFO] officials to appear at a second two-hour televised meeting of the committee to provide up-to-date information and respond to concerns raised by industry stakeholders over the government's management of the shrimp-by-trawl fishery and answer questions from members.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fast.

Are you putting that on notice of motion or are you actually making the motion?

**Hon. Ed Fast:** No, I'm putting in a notice of motion, for the time being.

**The Chair:** All right. I misunderstood earlier.

Thank you for that. It will be up for discussion at a later date, since it's only a notice of motion. It won't be voted on today.

Is there any further committee business?

Go ahead, Nancy.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, as we have confirmation of the minister for next week, I would appreciate it if I could have direction on what the committee plans to do at the meetings after that.

**The Chair:** What would be the dates?

**The Clerk:** They would be on June 16 and June 17.

**The Chair:** Okay. I think that's why we want the witnesses by 5 p.m. tomorrow. Isn't it to continue on with COVID-19?

• (1715)

**The Clerk:** If it is the will of the committee to continue with witnesses on this particular study, that would be great, but I would like to have specific directions from the committee or the chair.

**The Chair:** Does anybody want to make a comment on this?

Go ahead, Mel.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My comment was actually on another issue. I'll let this carry on for now, but I have something else before you adjourn.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Just to clarify, we are going to have the minister here Tuesday, June 9, and Wednesday, June 10, and then we're going to continue studying the COVID response on June 16 and June 17. As well, again for clarity, we're to give you a list of witnesses for tomorrow by 5 p.m. Is that eastern time?

**The Chair:** Yes, it's 5 p.m., eastern time.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** You're saying we're good to go to 5 p.m. Pacific time, I think.

**The Chair:** I don't think so.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay.

**The Chair:** I'll be asleep by then.

We have that resolved then. We'll continue on with the COVID study on June 16 and June 17.

Mr. Arnold, you had something you wanted to raise?

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

I would like to suggest that once we've had these meetings on COVID with the minister on June 16 and June 17, we start looking at bringing in witnesses for the previous studies that we had already started and continue with some of those other studies, or at least the one we started on the west coast salmon. It's very relevant, I think, that we carry on with that study. I would like to promote that idea with the rest of the committee, the idea that we start to alternate in our meetings between COVID and the west coast salmon study.

**The Chair:** Okay, no problem. We'll make a note of this, and I'm sure we'll manage to get through it along the way.

Before I adjourn, I would like to remind members to please try to get online early, before the start time. It gives the clerk and the interpretation and technical people the opportunity to test the sound. When anybody is joining very close to the start time, it makes it difficult to do this and to do it with any sort of satisfaction or confidence, because we're anxious to get the meeting started. We lose time doing the committee business, whereas if people signed on a few minutes early, it would make it that much easier to start on time and get through what we want to get through in any given meeting. I'd just ask for everybody's indulgence and co-operation on that.

If there's nothing else, I'll adjourn the meeting.

Thank you, everyone. The meeting is adjourned.

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