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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1555)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 29 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motions adopted on October 19, 2020, and April 21, 2021, the committee is meeting on its study of the state of the Pacific salmon.

I would like to advise members that I will be carving out about 10 minutes towards the end of the meeting to do a little scheduling information.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021, and therefore members can attend in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

For the benefit of our witnesses, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of "Floor", "English" or "French". With the latest Zoom version, you may now speak in the language of your choice without the need to select the corresponding language channel. You will also notice that the platform's "raise hand" feature is now in a more easily accessed location on the main toolbar, should you wish to speak or alert the chair.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. I believe everybody is here by Zoom, so I don't need to go through that.

I'll give a reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

Now I would like to welcome our witnesses for today.

We have, from the Watershed Watch Salmon Society, Aaron Hill, executive director; from the Tl'azt'en First Nation, Darren Haskell, president of Fraser Salmon Management Council; from the Pacific Salmon Foundation, Jason Hwang, vice-president; from the B.C.

Wildlife Federation, Jesse Zeman, director of fish and wildlife restoration; and from the Government of British Columbia and no stranger to this committee, Fin Donnelly, parliamentary secretary for fisheries and aquaculture.

I'd like to welcome Mr. Donnelly back to this committee and thank him for his hard work in the past in making sure we passed Bill S-238, which dealt with shark fin importation, and of course Bill S-203, which dealt with captivity of whales and dolphins. Mr. Donnelly played an important role in getting that passed, not only in this committee but through the House as well.

Welcome back, Mr. Donnelly, to familiar territory, except you're not in the committee room as usual.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Parliamentary Secretary, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Government of British Columbia): Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: We will now proceed with opening remarks from Mr. Donnelly for five minutes or less. He knows to keep it on time or I will cut him off, because he's used to it.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you for those introductory remarks, Mr. Chair. I very much appreciate them.

[Translation]

Good afternoon, everyone.

[English]

It's great to be with you virtually. I'm coming to you from the traditional unceded territory of the Kwikwetlem First Nation and the Coast Salish peoples.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the standing committee regarding the state of Pacific salmon. My name is Fin Donnelly. Iyem Yewyews is my Squamish name.

Last August, I had the honour of presenting to this committee in my role as chair of the board of a non-profit charity called the Rivershed Society of British Columbia. This year I'm here in my new role as British Columbia's parliamentary secretary for fisheries and aquaculture for the new provincial Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries.

One main reason I am grateful to be in my new position is to support the value that so many British Columbians place on our marine environment and our wild Pacific salmon. When I was last here, I stated that we can't have healthy salmon and salmon runs if we don't have healthy watersheds. I was concerned about the need for increased government action on watershed conservation, protection and restoration. I encouraged the federal government to work with the British Columbia government, indigenous governments, scientists and academics, conservation organizations, fishers, labour groups, coastal communities and others to conserve, protect and restore salmon. None of us will be able to succeed in restoring wild Pacific salmon on our own. We must work together to ensure they are supported for their whole life cycle.

In my new role I am fully committed to working with first nations, other organizations and the federal government to restore wild Pacific salmon and their habitat. In fact, the mandate given to me by Premier Horgan states just that: "Lead work with the federal government to develop new strategies to protect and revitalize B.C.'s wild salmon populations".

When I was here last, I also asked if you have the political courage to make the tough recommendations needed in your report. Now I too am representing a government, and I can assure you that B.C. does have that courage. We will be demonstrating it in our bold, new, made-in-B.C. wild salmon strategy that is currently being developed and in working to double the size of the B.C. salmon restoration and innovation fund. Additionally, the province is preparing both a new coastal marine strategy and a new watershed security strategy. These three initiatives will help ensure timely, coordinated provincial action in areas of significance to wild Pacific salmon and their habitats.

The Province of British Columbia was pleased to see the proposed funds for restoring wild salmon in B.C. in the recent federal budget, as well as the additional commitment for the B.C. salmon restoration and innovation fund, which B.C. is working towards supporting as well. The province looks forward to discussing in detail how our governments can work together on these objectives, including through support of watershed restoration and innovation in community fish hatcheries. We also noted the funds that have been proposed for developing a plan to transition from open-net pen salmon farming in B.C.'s waters by 2025.

Given the recent decision in the Discovery Islands, we would like the federal government to commit to ensuring that any transition plan also includes economic supports for communities—the people who are directly impacted by these decisions—while the transition and the return to a wild salmon economy unfolds.

When I was here last, I said we needed bold action and leadership, along with a commitment of resources and support to help wild Pacific salmon. No one wants B.C.'s salmon populations to go the way of the Atlantic cod, but we are at a real risk of extirpation of some of B.C.'s once-renowned salmon runs. British Columbians want us to work with indigenous leadership, as well as our federal, local and community partners, to ensure these iconic species not only survive but thrive into the future. We're going to continue to build a made-in-B.C. wild salmon recovery strategy that we can all be proud of.

I hope you will join me in taking the actions needed to ensure their abundance and diversity for this generation and generations to come.

Thank you, everyone.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly. It shows your experience when you have five seconds to spare. Well done.

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

Mr. Jesse Zeman (Director of Fish and Wildlife Restoration, B.C. Wildlife Federation): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to hear the words from Fin today.

Thank you for the opportunity to be a witness from the traditional territory of the Syilx first nations.

I'm the director of fish and wildlife restoration with the B.C. Wildlife Federation. The B.C. Wildlife Federation is the largest and oldest conservation organization in British Columbia, with approximately 43,000 members.

As you're all aware, salmon are in critical care. The first thing we need to do is stop the bleeding. That means we stop killing endangered fish before they reach their spawning grounds. In 2019 the minister committed to protect endangered spring and summer Fraser chinook runs, which are 42 and 52, by limiting mortality in Canadian fisheries to 5%. This limit was exceeded by over 100% the very first year. In 2020, fisheries in the Fraser River alone exceeded this limit by over 300% for 42 fish. The minister has set a limit and DFO has shown it is unable to meet it. This scenario has been repeated for interior Fraser steelhead and Fraser River sockeye.

Scientists should identify if there's a harvestable surplus of fish and how many can be harvested by fishers. Management's job is to figure out how to keep that harvest within the limits identified by scientists. It seems DFO management needs an intervention, as it consistently demonstrates it is incapable of sustainably managing fishing.

After we stop killing endangered fish, the committee should recognize there is likely no silver bullet to salmon recovery. As a result, there is no silver bullet in terms of how to spend the money. Both the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia have separate yet overlapping responsibilities and legislation in terms of managing salmon and salmon habitat. The relationship between DFO and the province can be described as poor. Political will is the only tool we have to improve that.

In the context of stabilization and restoration of salmon, inventory, monitoring and science are the critical pieces. You have to measure it to manage it, and DFO lacks the baseline budget and capacity to adequately monitor key metrics for salmon populations. Critical information that we need includes both marine and freshwater survival rates to understand where the bottlenecks and changes are in terms of life history. From there we can identify and deal with the barriers.

In freshwater habitat, the legislative and regulatory regime needs implementation of existing tools and overhaul of others. While the relevant legislation often has tools that could help salmon, those tools are rarely used. Enforcement of legislation is low due to funding, capacity and a lack of political will to do the right thing for salmon.

With a federal goal to increase land conservation in Canada, you should be aware that nearly every piece of land set aside will come heavily impacted by resource extraction. Funding habitat restoration must be part of the budget for any new protected areas. Both the provincial and federal governments have a history of walking away from conservation areas once land has been set aside. This is the equivalent of picking a tomato, putting it in your cupboard and expecting it to grow.

In terms of freshwater habitat restoration, DFO's restoration unit has 16 positions for the entire province of British Columbia, and half of those are currently vacant. The projects it deals with are often proponent-driven and at a scale that is not meaningful for salmon. The restoration unit has no base budget. The restoration unit needs to be adequately staffed and funded and given the ability to plan at a watershed scale that is meaningful for salmon.

Ocean survival is the other piece of the equation, which is still largely an unknown. Peer-reviewed science that deals with manageable issues often points at fish farms, ocean ranching and pinniped predation. The minister's decision to deal with fish farms is sound and supported by the B.C. Wildlife Federation. The Pacific can hold only so much biomass. We and our neighbouring countries dump millions of hatchery pink and chum salmon, and to a lesser extent chinook and coho, into the Pacific. This is likely contributing to limiting wild salmon populations.

In terms of pinniped predation, investing in independent science through post-secondary institutions will give elected officials the best sense of what can be done to improve ocean survival. I ask that DFO be left out of the process other than to fund it, as the department has a habit of hiding science from the public and elected officials. The B.C. Wildlife Federation would be supportive of an adaptive management experiment with regard to pinniped predation.

In conclusion, there is no silver bullet. We're in crisis and we need to start working on solutions. What follows are the things can be done right away with immediate benefits: stop killing endangered fish; enforce current laws and update others; transfer net pens to land; add capacity for enforcement, inventory, monitoring, science and restoration; and separate DFO science and species at risk from DFO management.

● (1605)

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, sir. That was pretty close to exactly on time as well.

We'll now go to Mr. Hwang for his five-minute introductory remarks, please.

Mr. Jason Hwang (Vice-President, Pacific Salmon Foundation): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the committee for inviting me today. As a reminder, I have appeared before you previously. I'm the vice-president for salmon with the Pacific Salmon Foundation.

We thank this committee for your study on the state of Pacific salmon and the attention you're bringing to this matter.

I'll start with my three key points.

The first is that the new dollars announced in the federal budget are a great step in the right direction, but an ongoing commitment of both funding and effort to support wild salmon recovery will be required.

Second, wild salmon recovery needs an overarching plan to guide priorities and guide our investments.

Third, the current system and organizational infrastructure is not designed to manage and solve this problem. DFO needs support to reorganize and refocus, and federal, provincial and first nations cooperation is essential to success.

Now I will go into a little more detail on each of these points.

We are pleased to see in the federal budget the funding commitment for preserving wild Pacific salmon. It is imperative that we do everything within our power to support wild salmon recovery. We have the ability to make things better.

The current funding announced in the budget is for the next five years. Again, this is a great step in the right direction, but it will require ongoing sustained investment to help turn things around for our salmon.

We have not seen any detail so far as to how most of the \$647 million announced in the budget will be used. We would welcome opportunity to advise and inform decisions around how these dollars will be applied and activated.

There is a need for immediate action, but there is also a need to develop an overarching and coordinated plan that should guide investments and priorities. Recovery of wild salmon is not something that can be fixed quickly, and the temptation to pursue quick fixes should be avoided. The plan should integrate all management functions, those being habitat, harvest and hatcheries, and be supported by appropriate science and assessment. We need to turn as many things as possible more in favour of salmon in order to support recovery and future sustainability.

There is no simple one-size-fits-all approach. Each watershed or region needs a plan for the conditions for that watershed and the salmon that live there. What is needed in the coastal rainforest is not the same as what's needed in the desert-like dry interior, and what's needed in the rural north is not the same as what's needed in urban areas to the south.

Climate change is driving things and it's not going away, so the plan needs to address present and future changes from a warming climate and should focus on forward-looking solutions. The State of Washington has an approach that can be looked to as an example. As B.C.'s neighbours to the south, they face many parallel circumstances.

I would submit that we need to reimagine the management system and equip the public service and other partners and collaborators to better manage for salmon in the present day and future conditions. The current system and infrastructure at DFO is not set up for the current circumstances facing salmon. Simply investing more in a management system that isn't achieving the desired result is unlikely to get a better outcome.

There is a great need and opportunity for increased coordination and collaboration. The federal government and B.C. lack a coordinating framework for salmon-related issues, and underpinning the role of these Crown entities are the rights of Canada's indigenous peoples. There is an opportunity to establish a governance and collaboration model whereby these entities can come together to share responsibility and coordinate for salmon.

We need to keep indigenous public and commercial fishing constituencies engaged and supported as we prioritize recovery. We have their support and engagement now, and we do not want to lose them. This is a major challenge, but it's also a critically important one and one that we can address if we make it a priority.

Independent advice should become integral to the management system. The current advisory processes tend to orient toward user groups and rights holders. These have an important place in the system and should continue, but our recommendation is that we also consider a new non-partisan independent advisory approach focused on salmon recovery and sustainability.

As a final point, I've raised a number of big things that will take some time and effort to address. There are also smaller, simpler things that can be done fairly immediately.

One example would be the salmon conservation stamp. The stamp is currently just over \$6, and in recent years, has generated around \$1.5 million annually that supports grants to community organizations. Increasing the stamp to just \$10 would generate an additional \$1 million or more a year that could allow communities to do more to help their salmon and would cost each angler less than a pack of hooks.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to appear again today. The Pacific Salmon Foundation's sole mission is to support the ongoing sustainability of our Pacific salmon. We believe that by doing so, we're supporting our communities, our ecosystems and future generations.

Thank you.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

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

Mr. Darren Haskell (President of Fraser Salmon Management Council, Tl'azt'en First Nation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon to the standing committee.

My name is Darren Haskell. I'm the natural resources and fisheries manager for Tl'azt'en Nation, which is located in the headwaters of the Early Stuart sockeye. I'm also the president of the Fraser Salmon Management Council, which currently has 76 member nations from along the Fraser and the approach areas.

First off, I'd like to thank the standing committee for inviting me to speak again on the state of the salmon. I spoke previously in the summer of 2020. This important topic today is that budget announcement. The announcement of the injection of funds into the preservation of wild salmon really came as a breath of fresh air to a lot of folks out here. Some important habitat-related projects began with the BCSRIF, the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund, but the injection of funds will ensure that these projects can continue and that new ones can begin, helping our salmon for at least the next five years and hopefully for many more.

As you've already heard, many of the stocks have been in steep decline over the past years. Many different factors have been contributing to these declines. Understanding climate change and the impacts on wild salmon is something that could help us react in a proper manner to these changes. For example, right now we already know that the freshet timing has changed on the Fraser River. It occurs almost a full week earlier, and the impacts on fish passage in the Fraser during this time is really great. We know the ocean has been warming up, reducing nutrients that migrating wild salmon depend on for food during the long migration around the Pacific. Understanding the cumulative effects on wild salmon is also very important. The work that Dr. Kristi Miller-Saunders' group is engaging in with the FIT-CHIP for understanding cumulative effects on salmon has been needed for a long time.

I'll give you an example of cumulative effects building up on these salmon. The Early Stuart is a Fraser salmon stock that has a 1,400-kilometre journey right from the mouth of the Fraser to the spawning grounds in the Stuart-Takla watershed. Along the way they need to pass through effluent from industry that's flowing throughout the Fraser and make their way through mixed stock fisheries and the different changes in water temperature along the Fraser, and if that's not enough, they have to go through Hells Gate, where in certain years the velocity going through there really causes a barrier to their migration. Then after that we have now had the Big Bar landslide for the last two years, which has been a huge detriment on anything that spawns above Big Bar.

We, as Upper Fraser first nations, have had water quality monitoring stations throughout our watershed so we can keep track of what's happening in our backyard, but water quality is only a small part of the studies that need to be done to understand the environmental effects on wild salmon. The announcement of hatcheries being looked at a lot more closely is.... The word "hatcheries" used to be a bad word among first nations. If we were pushing towards hatcheries, it really meant we were already past the point of no return in terms of naturally bringing back the stocks to their previous numbers. I feel that we are at that point already. Big Bar is one of the biggest reasons for this. The amount of disruption that happened due to Big Bar has been felt by a lot of first nations both above and below the slide site. Instead of getting ready to fish for our families, we have to wait and see what shows up on the fishing grounds in order to ensure that the stocks can survive for that year.

Our elders have been concerned for years about the health of our salmon, and it's now becoming a reality. Some first nations are fortunate enough to have salmon brought into their communities from neighbouring first nations, but this may not be the case every year, as other stocks are starting to dwindle as well.

I just wanted to share some really hard numbers with you from this past year, similar to what I did last year. In the Early Stuart 2020 return, there were 30 sockeye in total that returned to the spawning grounds. That's 0.02% of the in-season expectation of 16,000. In 2019, we had 89 sockeye, so this is two years in a row when we've had below 100 spawners for that run. The early summer aggregate was about 51% of the 2016 brood year this year, similar to last year, when it was 33% of the 2015 brood year. It's the first time since 1992 that the early summer aggregate has reached below 100,000 spawners.

The summer run aggregate is 81% of the 2016 brood year, and the Chilko 2020 return within that summer run is 55,000, which is 36%. The Late Stuart 2020 return is 4,763, and it's the third straight year of decline on this cycle.

• (1615)

I really wanted to share those numbers because it shows in black and white what kind of devastation all of these declines are causing.

Right now I want to recommend that all fisheries along the Fraser be curtailed for a few years to allow for the recovery of a lot of these stocks.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Haskell. We'll have to end it there. I know you had a little bit more to say, and hopefully that will come out in the round of questioning coming up very shortly.

Mr. Darren Haskell: Yes. All right.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Hill for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Aaron Hill (Executive Director, Watershed Watch Salmon Society): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for having me here.

I'm the executive director of Watershed Watch Salmon Society, and we advocate for the conservation of B.C.'s wild salmon and their habitats.

I grew up around salmon and fishing. I have a master's degree in biology. Between my education and my work as a fisheries observer and my current job, I've been focused on salmon for about 25 years.

My understanding is that today you want to hear how government should implement the recent budget commitments for salmon, which were very welcome. We have to look at those commitments in the context of the crisis our salmon are in and the brutal cuts to salmon management over the past couple of decades.

I'm going to get right to it with some key budget items.

The first is to "stabilize and conserve wild Pacific salmon populations, including through investment in research, new hatchery facilities, and habitat restoration." That's a good start, but the objective there should be the same as Canada's wild salmon policy, which is not just to stabilize but "to restore and maintain the healthy and diverse salmon populations in their habitats".

The top priority has to be rebuilding endangered salmon runs, as required under the new Fisheries Act and the wild salmon policy. DFO has not even initiated recovery planning for the vast majority of B.C.'s endangered salmon populations, and many more have not even been properly assessed.

The bit about investment in new hatcheries is a tricky one. You've heard testimony on the growing scientific evidence that hatcheries harm wild salmon by degrading their genetic fitness, by drawing unsustainable fishing pressure, by competing with wild salmon for diminishing food supply and by spreading disease. They're also very expensive.

DFO's current risk assessment framework for hatcheries is piecemeal. It hasn't been peer reviewed. It doesn't cover all the risk factors. It doesn't get applied to all hatchery operations, and the process is not transparent. We do need a few hatcheries here and there in extreme cases, like Mr. Haskell described, but the risks need to be properly assessed, with wild salmon health as the top priority.

Habitat protection and restoration is really a much better investment, especially if it's targeted on the most critical habitats. Some of that's been accomplished already through the B.C. SRIF. The federal government could also leverage more provincial support by matching the B.C. government's healthy watersheds initiative.

There are also some important efficiencies to exploit. For example, the budget included \$1.4 billion to top up the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund. A chunk of that will likely go to flood control. There are over 1,500 kilometres of salmon habitat in the lower Fraser that are blocked off by obsolete flood control structures that need to be upgraded to deal with increased flooding due to climate change. Those upgrades can be done in ways that open up the habitat for salmon while keeping communities safe from flooding. If federally funded flood control projects are required to be fish-friendly, it could actually open up a huge amount of habitat for Fraser salmon.

Protecting habitat in the first place is actually much cheaper than restoring it later. The "Heart of the Fraser", which I believe you've heard about, is a prime example of habitat needing protection. In general, this government simply needs to stop allowing so much habitat destruction.

On the commitment to improve fishery management, we can't manage our fisheries properly right now because we don't have good enough data on how many fish we have in our streams, who's catching them, how many are being kept and where, and how many released fish survive to spawn. That's partly why mark-selective fisheries are so risky right now. We need to bring our catch monitoring and stock assessment up to national and international standards across all fishing sectors. B.C.'s commercial salmon fisheries no longer have Marine Stewardship Council certification because DFO hasn't been meeting those basic standards.

Regarding the \$20 million for consultations on phasing out open-net salmon farms, consultations are important, but they can't be an excuse for delay. The parasites, bacteria and viruses from the farms are hammering our salmon out there every day. The government promised to get the farms out of the ocean, and that needs to happen. There also should be money for helping to transition the workers and develop truly sustainable industries in our coastal communities.

Last of all, you can't put this all in the hands of DFO. There are great people there, but you've also heard a lot here about the suppression of science and the lack of precautionary management.

DFO needs ongoing, independent, expert oversight. That could be the job of the Pacific salmon secretariat promised in the budget. It needs to be arm's length from government, led by experts and not dominated by stakeholders. For an example of what not to do, I'm sorry to say that you should actually look at what the B.C. government set out to do with developing their salmon secretariat and strategy a couple of years ago, which was before Mr. Donnelly was with them.

• (1620)

That's all for me. I think we mostly know what needs to be done here. We need to aggressively take on the biggest threats that can be mitigated and the biggest impediments to good management, and we need to do it fast.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that, sir. You're right on time.

We'll now go to our rounds of questioning.

We'll start off with Mr. Arnold for six minutes or less.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank all of the witnesses. We have some very talented and very knowledgeable people here today, and I appreciate your being available.

I'll start off with Mr. Hwang. When the federal government launched the strategic salmon health initiative with Genome BC and the Pacific Salmon Foundation—I believe it was in 2012—the initiative was launched in a four-phase mandate. The committee recently heard that the SSHI has been allowed to lapse and that only two of the four phases have been completed.

Considering the valuable contributions to the science that SSHI has made in the course of the two phases that have been completed, do you think the initiative should or would continue to provide valuable science if it were resourced and allowed to continue to work through to completion?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Chair, I'm sorry, but the interpreter tells me that the microphone was not close enough to my colleague Mr. Arnold's mouth.

[*English*]

The Chair: Do you want to say a few words, Mr. Arnold, just to see if there's a difference?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Yes, certainly. I've moved the microphone closer in front of my mouth now, and up. Is this better now?

Okay. I'm getting a nod from the clerk.

• (1625)

The Chair: Okay. We'll let Mr. Arnold continue. It seems to be working. I will let him know that I did stop his time for that mike check.

You're good to go, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I won't go through all of the preamble to that question, but I will repeat the question.

Considering the valuable contributions that the strategic salmon health initiative made in the course of the two phases that it completed, do you think the initiative would continue to provide valuable science if it were resourced and allowed to continue its work through to the completion of the four phases?

Mr. Jason Hwang: I'll try to give a brief answer to that, Mr. Arnold.

Yes, it would be useful, but it should also be understood that the one thing that hasn't been done, the main thing that hasn't been done out of the four phases that were planned, was the challenge study, whereby essentially fish would be exposed to pathogens and then potential effects from that exposure would be tested in a contained facility. The reason that wasn't done was that a facility could not be arranged to do that.

In the meantime, the science that has been learned from the SSHI—the strategic salmon health initiative—and other science occurring both within B.C. and globally is indicating that we're past the point of needing to understand whether there's a science basis for risk in the effect of open-net pen aquaculture on wild salmon. With the transition announcement of 2025 already established, I think that while there's value in the science, we would need to put that into the context of what we hope to achieve from it. I want to emphasize that the utility of carrying on with the science does not at all change our view that it is appropriate, and we are fully supportive to undertake this transition.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

As you know, the strategic salmon health initiative's mandate was in direct response to the Cohen commission recommendations and the important questions that came out in 2012. The strategic salmon health initiative certainly helped to answer some of those questions.

Since the Cohen report was released, has the scientific basis emerged to support a transition away from open-net pen aquaculture?

Mr. Jason Hwang: The Pacific Salmon Foundation and I personally and professionally believe very strongly that there's a scientific basis for that transition.

One thing it would be useful for this committee to appreciate is that the recent findings from the DFO review on the nine risk assessments, which was tied specifically to the Cohen commission, was focused only on Fraser River sockeye. Even with that, there are people in the science community who feel that those nine risk as-

sessments were not fully scoped. The scope didn't include sea lice and did not include a cumulative consideration of all of the elements that were assessed, and there was an error in at least one of the studies, which scientists working with PSF and others pointed out and which I believe would be appropriate for correction.

With all of that and with the state of our Pacific salmon and with the consideration of the risks and the appropriate application of the precautionary approach, it's our view that without question there is a scientific basis demonstrating risk and that it would be appropriate to pursue the transition.

I put this to someone in the finance sector just last week when we were being interviewed for a podcast. I said that when you manage your money and your major capital, you put it into portfolios and you don't expose it all to the same risk. If you look at our wild salmon as our natural capital, however, every salmon swimming past a fish farm on our coast is exposed to that risk. To the Pacific Salmon Foundation, it would seem irresponsible to continue to do that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Throughout the course of this study, the committee has heard that hatcheries are one tool in the tool box that needs to be utilized to restore Pacific salmon. How should hatchery production fit into the overall strategy to address many of the challenges facing the Pacific salmon?

Mr. Jason Hwang: Was that for me, Mr. Arnold?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Yes, please.

Mr. Jason Hwang: Thank you.

I spent about 25 years working with DFO before I joined the PSF two years ago. My portfolio was within the side of DFO that manages hatcheries and habitat.

I believe strongly that hatcheries are an important and appropriate tool, but they're not a magic silver bullet. You don't run out and build a hatchery every time you have a salmon problem. As Mr. Hill noted, there are concerns and risks and there can be unintended consequences that come from good intentions behind hatcheries.

I believe they are an important part of the picture, but we also need to understand that salmon from B.C. and from our hatcheries go to the North Pacific. There's more salmon out there right now than there has ever been. About 40% of them are enhanced, mostly pink and chum from Russia, Alaska and Japan.

We need to think about that. We need to show leadership in Canada, use hatcheries the right way, have good plans that are conservation-driven and sustainable, and show leadership by starting to have conversations with the rest of the international community around this shared resource in the North Pacific.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

We'll now go to Mr. Hardie for six minutes or less, please.

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

It's good to have some of you back, especially Mr. Donnelly. It's good to see you again.

Mr. Hwang, I'd like to let you finish the answer you were giving to Mr. Arnold. What is the right way to use hatcheries? Are we still in the realm of opinion, or do we have science and evidence to specifically say "Do this instead of that"?

Tell us.

Mr. Jason Hwang: I believe we have a very strong body of science that can guide us well. Much of it is in play now, but there's more to do.

PSF is currently undertaking a hatchery effectiveness study, as funded by the B.C. salmon restoration and innovation fund. We will hopefully have some findings on this matter within the coming year.

In general, Mr. Hardie, I would say that there is a perception, I think broadly, among the general public that hatcheries are always good; that if you have a salmon problem, a hatchery is a really good way to fix that problem. The reality is that hatcheries essentially protect and make life for salmon better in one small aspect of their life history: when they're in the gravel and up to the point that they're baby salmon and they leave. When you put them out there, however, one big problem we have in British Columbia is that these salmon come back as mixed stocks.

Just as an example, if you have two streams that both make 10 fish and then you put 100 extra fish in one stream and no extra fish in the other and you then go fishing, you're going to catch a lot of your hatchery fish, but you're also going to catch some of those wild fish, and you could inadvertently be reducing the well-being of those wild fish, because they swim alongside the hatchery fish and it's difficult to affect that.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Hwang, I'll have to jump in here because I do have further questions.

Mr. Haskell, I believe that we heard from you particularly in the context of the Big Bar slide and the remedies there. We did hear some very interesting testimony from some of the indigenous first nations groups further up the Fraser River watershed, again about hatcheries. There seemed to be, at that time, a consensus among your community that small community-run hatcheries were maybe a good way to go forward. Am I remembering this correctly?

Mr. Darren Haskell: Yes, that's the direction we headed. The numbers that I shared earlier show that we're reaching the point of extinction on two of these cycles, with fewer than 100 returning sockeye on two of the runs—oh, man. As Jason Hwang was saying, the point is not to create fish so that we can go fishing; it's basically just to conserve these runs and keep them from going extinct. Conservation-based hatcheries and small-scale hatcheries—just to keep the run alive, basically—are what we're trying to do right now. We're just pedalling in the water right now, trying to keep these fish alive. That's where we're at.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I think that in the fullness of time, what we're going to need is a hatchery strategy going forward, particularly when we're looking at this. I hope that some of the players here today are placed in such a way that they can get together, collaborate

and give us some good advice in that regard. That would be very good.

Mr. Donnelly, are we in the lucky place of having, all of a sudden, major convergence between the B.C. government and the federal government with regard to bringing resources to bear to help out our wild Pacific salmon?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Hardie. It's great to see you as well, and it's great to be back here.

If I could just add on to the previous discussion and build into your question, I would encourage the committee to look south of our border at the State of Washington and the work that it's done over the last 20 years, which has included hatcheries. Hear the results of the governor's salmon office and what it feels has been the effect and some of the problems related to simply putting a lot of funding into hatcheries. We're certainly looking at it. The provincial government is looking at that. I would encourage this committee and the federal government to do that.

In terms of your question, Mr. Hardie, yes, what I would say is that currently the stars are aligned. Based on the unfortunate situation of some salmon stocks being so low and some salmon populations and runs being in such critical states, there is a real willingness, I believe, certainly from the Premier of British Columbia and the Province of British Columbia, with, I believe, the federal government and indigenous governments in British Columbia, to work together to develop a wild salmon strategy or a series of recovery strategies. Also there's a willingness from fishers, the industry, labour, workers, environmental organizations and conservation organizations. They are really focused on salmon.

You've heard from the organizations here—the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the B.C. Wildlife Federation, the Watershed Watch Salmon Society—and many others that are very concerned. There is, as was noted, a lot of expertise around the table here. Mr. Haskell represents nations within the Fraser watershed in his work. I would encourage the federal government to work with all of the indigenous governments and all of these partners, along with us at the provincial government, to move forward at this time if we are really going to save salmon.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly. Thank you, Mr. Hardie. Six minutes don't be long going.

We'll now go to Madam Gill for six minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

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

My thanks to all the witnesses who are here today to talk about the budget that has just been tabled.

First, I would like to ask all the witnesses whether the government consulted them ahead of the budget about the amounts that should be spent and how those amounts would be allocated.

My question is for any of the witnesses who would like to answer.

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Madame Gill, perhaps I could start, as a representative of the provincial government.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Yes, of course.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

[English]

I would say not directly for the specific amounts, but we have been in consultation, and our staff have been talking with DFO in the past number of months about how we might work together. The B.C. salmon restoration and innovation fund is a collaborative effort by the federal and provincial governments. FACTAP is another program whereby we work together. There are a number of programs in which we have been working together and collaborating. We have certainly switched information—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: So not necessarily for the budget that was tabled. Okay.

Mr. Haskell, were you consulted on the budget?

[English]

Mr. Darren Haskell: We were not consulted directly on how much funding should go for each of these issues. They are addressing some of the areas that we've sent countless letters of concerns to the department about, specifically around funding hatcheries and funding habitat work with B.C. SRIF, as well as addressing the open-net pens. Many of the nations in our group are concerned about that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Haskell, I'm going to have to interrupt you, but I'll come back to you later.

Mr. Hwang, answer quickly yes or no:

Were you consulted on requests for the budget, both in terms of the breakdown of the amounts and the content?

[English]

Mr. Jason Hwang: Thank you, Madame Gill.

I'll refer to my opening testimony: no, we were not. We're hopeful, but we don't know any detail at this point.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you.

Mr. Hill, the floor is yours.

I'm asking you the same question, and I'm really talking about the government, not the committee.

[English]

Mr. Aaron Hill: It's the same thing. We were not directly consulted about the specifics of the budget, but we put forward our asks about what we would like to see in the budget. We feel that they were reflected in the breakdown of what's in there. It's the im-

plementation that really matters, and that's what we're focusing on now.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair? I've lost track of the seconds.

I'm going back to the witnesses.

I'm a little surprised that we have come to the point when decisions are made to allocate specific amounts over five years without knowing exactly how we will spend the money. Based on your testimony, we conducted a study on what is important to see in the budget. You have been talking about it for almost a year.

I have heard the word “bold” several times. Mr. Donnelly and several others have used it. So could you tell me what's bold about it?

Do you think the budget is bold, given the breakdown, which I think is a little fuzzy?

You talk about implementation, Mr. Hill.

I'm addressing all the witnesses. Do you think it's a bold budget that seems to reflect the needs of the community? I'm talking about both the amount and the specific content in a few lines in the budget.

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Chair, perhaps I'll start. I appreciate the question.

I think that B.C. is eager to work with the federal government in developing new strategies to protect and revitalize B.C.'s wild salmon populations, including furthering our partnership on the B.C. salmon restoration and innovation fund. As has been stated here, this is a good start. More needs to be injected—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Donnelly, my question was: was it bold? Are we really making a big move to help Pacific salmon?

The word “bold” was really key to my question. Is the budget bold, or is it a fairly vague response to a request, like a yes or no, but with no specifics?

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly: It's a great question. I always want to see more.

It's certainly one of the biggest investments that we've seen from a federal government in the last decade. This is certainly a good step in the right direction, and if it isn't bold, it's pretty darn close.

Mr. Aaron Hill: I could take a go at it, if that's okay.

I agree that it was...“bold” might be the right word, but you have to take it in the context of the brutal cuts to salmon management functions that we've seen over the last 20 years and the extreme crisis that we're in. While it was very welcome, it's really only what we need to just get our heads above water, and only if we don't mess it up.

It's absolutely essential that it be invested properly, with restoring critical habitats, filling those critical gaps in stock assessment and catch monitoring, making our fisheries more sustainable, getting the fish farms out, being extremely cautious with how we use hatcheries, and addressing the chronic management problems and dysfunction at DFO with independent oversight.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Hill, if I follow what you're saying, does it mean that we had actually fallen behind and we have managed to catch up?

So I would take out the word "bold". Actually, the budget does no more than try to replace everything that was previously taken away. That's what it looks like right now.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Madame Gill, but you've gone over your six minutes.

[Translation]

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

[English]

The Chair: We'll have to get that perhaps in the next round of questioning.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for six minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do appreciate the questions from my colleague Madame Gill around the lack of consultation. The devil, I guess, we'll find in the details. We've been pushing very hard for the record amounts of money that will be necessary to bring wild salmon back to abundance. We were looking for a fivefold increase in the B.C. salmon restoration fund.

Mr. Hwang, you talked about having a wild salmon recovery plan. The system is not currently set up to bring wild salmon back from the state they're in. Can you speak a bit about what you'd like to see in the Pacific salmon secretariat and a restoration centre of expertise and how you think that should be developed and unfold, with, I imagine, a nation-to-nation-to-nation governance model with stakeholders? Can you speak about that?

Mr. Jason Hwang: Sure, Mr. Johns. Thank you for the question.

I'll do my best to be brief. The idea of the secretariat is positive and enticing, but it will depend on the details.

I think it will help within DFO if they can reorganize around the idea of supporting salmon recovery and sustainability. Right now, the department is still organized around the old days, which means organized around going fishing for abundances of wild salmon, and circumstances have changed. There needs to be a change whereby the department's management objective and structure shift. I think the secretariat can support that.

It should also include collaboration and co-operation with B.C. Essentially DFO manages salmon and habitat and B.C. manages

land and water. You can't manage those things independently. They're the same thing, and the jurisdictions that have that authority would ideally co-operate.

As I said in my opening statement, first nations and indigenous rights are critical. They are closest to the land. They're the ones in the homes where these salmon go back. Those things need to be integrated. Some ability to have independent participation that is able to report directly to senior levels and to elected officials would be ideal, because there can be tensions within any organization or structure, and the ability for an entity to speak freely based solely on the best interest of wild salmon sustainability would be ideal.

• (1645)

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you very much.

Mr. Donnelly, it's great to see you here. Obviously I wish we had a B.C. fisheries minister—certainly we have a great Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries in B.C.—but it's really good to see you here in your new role.

Can you speak about the same question, around the Pacific salmon secretariat and how you see that unfolding? What do you think would be the best way to move forward in terms of tackling the situation we're in, given Mr. Hwang's comments about the system right now not being ready and not being developed to address the situation we're in? Could you also maybe comment on the importance of collaboration at those management tables with, for example, West Coast Aquatic in my riding, and on how they need to be resourced and involved in this process as well?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Johns. It's nice to see you as well, my friend. Thank you for the question.

To build on what has been said, it is important to note that we're in a dire situation, and, as Mr. Hardie pointed out with his question, there is a uniqueness at this moment and a willingness for us to come together. As Madame Gill has pointed out, there is a budget amount. There still needs to be a state of co-operation, with the federal government working together with B.C. and indigenous nations, and there is a willingness to do that.

The salmon secretariat must go beyond DFO. It must be working together with the province and with the nations within British Columbia, and there must be a willingness, as you say, Mr. Johns, to reach out to others that play a vital role, whether in restoration, in restoring watersheds, or in other elements of how we're going to address wild salmon recovery.

Again, if we look south of the border, we have a model there. In 1998, the State of Washington put rebuilding plans into legislation. They've now had 23 years of working towards rebuilding their salmon populations. They still have issues with, as Mr. Hill and Mr. Zeman mentioned in their opening remarks, damage to this habitat through practices that continue today. That is a challenge. I think the salmon secretariat can play a role in bringing the co-ordinating governments together to address the issues that are continuing to affect salmon and salmon habitat, looking forward with regard to how we revitalize and work together to recover salmon populations in those critical watersheds and those systems that are under the largest threat.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you. I think I have about 30 seconds left, so I'm going to give those to you, Mr. Haskell, to comment on that as well.

Mr. Darren Haskell: Well, collaboration is a key word in there, meaningful collaboration, getting all the parties involved, because we're all trying to get to the same goal here of preserving wild salmon of the Pacific. It's right in the budget.

We've had ways that have worked in the past, and other ways that haven't. I like the idea that Mr. Hwang had of having that independent scientific approach and having that input from that side of things.

As of right now, the stakeholders that are involved in the management of sockeye take science advice, but the science branch does not have a direct say in the final decisions that are made.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

We'll now go to our second round of questioning. We'll start off, for five minutes or less, with Mr. Calkins.

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

I want to start by asking Fin.... Can I call you Fin, and you can call me Blaine, like we did for years in the committee? Is that okay?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: That sounds great.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Fin, my questions are for you. Congratulations, by the way, on your new role with the provincial government.

As you know, last December Minister Jordan released her Discovery Islands decision. To my knowledge, there was no plan for workers or the communities therein, in British Columbia, who really do depend on those salmon farmers for jobs and paycheques. They're fairly hard hit.

My first question for you is this: Were you, or was the provincial minister or the provincial government, ever consulted with by Minister Jordan prior to the release of her Discovery Islands decision?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you for the question, Mr. Calkins, and it's great to see you. Thanks for the note. It's great to be back in my new role.

You do ask a very pointed question. I agree there needs to be support when decisions are made. The Discovery Islands decision definitely could impact workers, and we've identified that support needs to be there if workers in aquaculture are impacted by that decision.

Two issues are happening. One is the Discovery Islands decision, which is affecting 19 farms in British Columbia. There's also the transition process, which is happening concurrently.

The federal government has been in consultation with us on a number of items. It has been working closely with us. On one of my first calls, my federal counterpart talked to me about being involved with the transition process. We worked together on that part.

I believe that series of consultations has now finished. There was a preconsultation and then a consultation process that just wrapped up, and a report is being submitted. I believe the recommendations that come out of that consultation will drive the transition process. There is funding in the budget for that.

In terms of the Discovery Islands decision, the province is still waiting to see the outcome. As you are aware, there were court challenges. One of the proponents was successful in their court case, with the injunction. We're waiting to see what will happen with regard to that, and the next steps. My understanding is that it will continue and will move through. We're anxiously awaiting the decision of the minister, as she now will have to respond to that case.

In terms of collaboration, that is certainly what we heard. The Discovery Islands decision was very different from a process that the provincial government used a year or two earlier, which is more commonly known as the Broughton Archipelago process. That was seen as much more of a collaboration that involved more than just government to government. It involved government to government to government and industry and others directly affected by the decision.

Is there a need for increased collaboration and working together? Absolutely. That, I believe, will continue and needs to happen in this next transition process. We'll have to wait to see what the federal minister is going to do with regard to the court injunction and in looking at those licences.

Where the provincial government comes in is we will be looking at renewing tenures. That means negotiation with the nations that are impacted in those territories where those tenures occur. Many of those tenures are going to be renewed in June 2022, which coincides with the timeline of the 18 months of the decision on the Discovery Islands.

• (1655)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay, thank you. That was a long answer. I'm not sure I have any time left at all, but I want to flesh this out a little more with you, Fin, if I can.

It sounds to me, if I can paraphrase just a little, that there was no transition plan. The transition plan for the Discovery Islands was basically stood up after the announcement. Is that correct?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: You're best to talk to DFO and the federal government, but our understanding is that we learned of that, as did many of the industries and local governments and others affected, when that decision came on quickly. Our concern was that workers who would be impacted by that decision would not be protected. My understanding is that there is no package and no transition for those workers, should they be impacted.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Therefore, when it's in the budget that—

The Chair: Mr. Calkins, I'm sorry. Your time has actually gone a bit over. Those long answers will fill the clock pretty easily, but they were informative at that.

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

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): My question is for Mr. Haskell.

First of all, I'm coming to you from Eskasoni Mi'kmaq community. We heard the testimony in this study back in the summer about the importance of salmon for indigenous peoples in British Columbia, both for cultural reasons and for subsistence. In Mi'kmaq country, we have some of the same issues with climate change affecting salmon stocks.

There's a fascinating documentary right now on APTN called *Gespe'gewa'gi* that looks at the fisheries management in Listuguj, Quebec, where they're taking a lead role as an indigenous community in facilitating the hatcheries. They captured it on video. I thought what they were doing was amazing.

I heard you talk about a bit of reluctance about about the hatcheries. I wonder what you're hearing from indigenous communities on the west coast about hatcheries and their productivity. As well, if it's not hatcheries, what does indigenous knowledge teach us about best practices to restore the salmon stocks?

Mr. Darren Haskell: It's not hatcheries. It was actually just elders talking about restocking the streams themselves, taking from one stream that had an abundance of fish and physically taking them as they're spawning and bringing them up to streams that they know are in trouble. We've heard those stories for years up here from the elders.

From the west coast, we've heard stories that they've gone to this point where they're talking about extensions for their runs. In some cases they worked out really well, and in other cases they haven't.

As was mentioned before, hatcheries can be really tricky in terms of water quality. Everything has to go right for hatcheries to work out properly. I've heard success stories from the west coast and I've heard some really not very good stories when it hasn't worked out and a lot of money was spent and they didn't get results.

Going about this properly is the important thing if we are indeed going to go down the road of hatcheries. As was mentioned before, there are a lot of things that need to go right for it to happen properly. We know the risks of hatcheries and we don't want to do any more damage than has already been done to the salmon here.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Now that there's a commitment of \$647 million over five years—and I'd imagine a big part of that will be collaboration, as I've heard from the provincial government—what are you hearing from the chiefs about the kind of collaboration they would like to see in making sure that indigenous knowledge and indigenous culture is part of the solution moving forward?

Mr. Darren Haskell: They don't want to go with the status quo, I guess they would say, because they've been around for years and they've seen what some of the past governments have called collaboration—you know, meeting, consulting and checking your box to say that you've met with these people. They really want to see results from all their input into collaboration.

In the past, they haven't seen the results from the input they're given. They've always been told that all the chiefs in B.C. or all the chiefs who are involved in this conversation need to have consensus and have to agree on the same answer; otherwise, it's just taken as a recommendation. There's always a plan in place already before they even talk to the chiefs.

Seeing the recommendations that are made by chiefs in the collaborations and seeing the results of those recommendations and how they're implemented will be important. How things are implemented is going to be the main thing here.

• (1700)

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Mr. Chair, do I have much time left? Okay, I have one minute.

Mr. Hwang, you said that the State of Washington is doing a lot of things right. If you could make recommendations based on what Washington is doing right to what we could do right in British Columbia, could you quickly go over in a minute what those recommendations would be that you would like on the record?

Mr. Jason Hwang: The main recommendation that I think we could borrow from is that they have a plan, so when new money comes in, they don't say, "Hmm. What are the priorities?" They can go to a plan that has been developed, a plan that has included their indigenous peoples, their technical people, their regional people, and say that these are the things that we have agreed are the important things to do on this priority basis.

They do a lot of things wrong down there too, so I don't want to make it sound as though they have it all figured out. However, the thing I like is that they have a plan that has been developed collaboratively that guides their investments and priorities.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Battiste. You were right on time.

We'll now go to Madame Gill for two and a half minutes or less, please.

[Translation]

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

My question is for Mr. Haskell as well.

What he said earlier caught my attention. He talked about budgetary measures, which are particularly important to salmon recovery, but he also talked about non-budgetary measures. I think he mentioned the decline in the stocks.

So I would like to know whether non-budgetary measures are needed to help with the salmon recovery. Also, could any measures undermine the efforts described in the budget along the same lines?

[English]

Mr. Darren Haskell: A lot of the things I want are just budgetary. I guess it would be the involvement of industry folks in terms of keeping in line with environmental guidelines that are put in place. We hear that it's always a balance between the environment and economics.

Economics plays a huge part in how environmental laws are followed in this area, and not only in this area but along the Fraser. A couple of years ago, economics played a big role in how the Mount Polley disaster was responded to.

The people on the ground who are being affected are really important in how this rolls out and how this response to the recovery of the salmon is implemented. Having the people on the ground involved right from the get-go, and in the planning, as Mr. Hwang has said, is specifically very important.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Actually, I think you mentioned the decline in the stocks, Mr. Haskell. I wanted to check whether that's what you said. In your presentation, I think you said we should plan to decrease the fishery.

Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Darren Haskell: Yes, I did.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: So that would be something to consider. Without that measure, would recovery efforts be undermined?

[English]

Mr. Darren Haskell: Sorry; did you ask if it be detrimental if the fish aren't going to be taken?

Please repeat the question.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: If the level of the salmon fishery is not reduced, could that affect the recovery effort? That may be a truism, but I'm asking the question anyway.

[English]

Mr. Darren Haskell: Yes, definitely, that's what we've been saying for years. Because of the disaggregate management that's going on in the Fraser, it's already been a hindrance and a contributory to the decline. A lot of the stocks are past hope.

There's a saying, and the phrase is kind of sad, that "There's no hope past hope." A lot of times you say it in terms of the management of the stocks. A lot of these upper Fraser stocks have to get through those mixed-stock fisheries. Early Stuart travel with chinook, and there are a lot of chinook fisheries. A lot of times, later in the year as well, if there are chum fisheries, then that has an effect on late-run sockeye. The mixed-stock fisheries and the aggregate management are definitely issues.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Thank you, Madame Gill.

[Translation]

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

[English]

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Hill, you talked about habitat protection and restoration. I really appreciated your comments there about the importance of in-

vesting in restoration, the critical piece of habitat protection and certainly about industry and its impacts.

I know of a project in my riding called Kus-kus-sum in the Comox Valley. The expectation was to buy some private land to protect the bottom of the Comox Valley, the estuary, a very important salmon-bearing area. It received a commitment from local government and from the local first nations and got the province on board, but the federal government didn't have any fund opportunity to buy conservation-critical property. It ended up that the province had to double down and cover the federal portion as well to save the project by buying this critical piece of salmon habitat.

Can you speak about the importance of the government creating conservation financing and other levels of government funding that can leverage foundations to save critical habitat?

Mr. Aaron Hill: Thank you, Mr. Johns. That's a really great question. It's an important issue.

There is an allocation in the budget in the billions of dollars—I forget the exact amount—for helping Canada meet recovery targets for land and water protection. That should definitely be applied to some critical salmon habitats. I want to provide you with an example from the lower Fraser.

I mentioned the issue of flood control and all of these flood control structures that are blocking salmon habitats. A lot of those are dikes built along sloughs that protect farmland and communities from flooding. One of the ways you can actually increase the habitat is that if you acquire land from farmers and other landholders and move the dikes back a little bit so that you give the river a little bit of room to flood naturally and it's still safe for communities, it opens up the habitat in a way that's really good for salmon. It gives them a safe nursery habitat that they can hang out in during that really vulnerable early life stage. That's—

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm sorry to cut you off, but time is running out.

The previous federal funding for protected areas was for large swaths of land. Can you talk about how important it is to have targeted funds for smaller pieces too, of the kind you're talking about, that are critical in wetlands areas?

Mr. Aaron Hill: Yes, it's absolutely essential. I think that needs to be made clear to landholders and municipalities and to people who can actually benefit from that and really make it happen, because it is essential.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

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

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming out this afternoon.

Mr. Zeman, you mentioned in previous testimony the impact that poaching is having on Pacific salmon. You specifically mentioned the concern with illegal netting. Do you believe the federal government should invest in fisheries monitoring for illegal harvesting, and if so, what are some of the key investments that you would like to see in order to make a difference?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: That's a great question, Mr. Mazier. Mr. Haskell actually referenced this as well.

Last summer we had the worst sockeye return in the Fraser River's history. We had 293,000 fish show up. We normally have 10 million. That's a 97% decline. It was so bad that the scientists in DFO recommended that we not run the test fishery.

With regard to those fish that were headed up towards Mr. Haskell, there was an illegal fishery on the mid-Fraser last year where over 10,000 of those fish were caught and killed. In that fishery as well, there were four steelhead from endangered interior Fraser steelhead that were caught and kept. We have not only one endangered run that's being imperilled; we have two. The number of Chilcotin fish this year will be 80 fish, so we potentially caught 5% of them in a matter of weeks in an illegal fishery. Tens of thousands of fish disappear on the Fraser every single year due to a lack of investment in enforcement. When we get down to stocks that have 50 or 80 or two fish, it's very easy to drive them to extinction.

The investment there is definitely in collaboration and education, and it's also in enforcement. Try as hard as they might, there are simply not enough folks in enforcement to do their job. I would say that supporting them and increasing enforcement on the river, and also building round table processes where everyone can see themselves in protecting fish would be highly valuable for the Fraser River.

• (1710)

Mr. Dan Mazier: Okay, great.

Mr. Haskell, you were mentioned in that. I don't know if you want to follow up. Do you have anything to add?

Mr. Darren Haskell: I think enforcement is important, especially in those areas that were mentioned. We hear directly from some of the enforcement officers in that branch at some of our meetings during the off season. The number of man-hours they put in to try to cover the very large areas they're assigned just burns these guys out.

I know a couple of the fisheries officers. I work with them. One is basically in Prince George, and he goes as far down as Williams Lake, as far north as close to Fort St. John, and out west towards Terrace. That's one area. I think they might have had a new officer this year. There might be two or three guys who are covering that entire area. That's just an example of the areas they cover. They've also taken from that office to assign people permanently until the Mount Polley investigation is done as well.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Wow. That's quite the area. I'm learning lots on this committee. I'm from Manitoba, so I'm a prairie boy learning lots about fish.

Mr. Hwang, there's been a lot of discussion about pinniped populations decimating juvenile Pacific salmon populations. How do

you believe the government should manage this concern that is contributing to ongoing stock declines?

Mr. Jason Hwang: It's a provocative one for sure. It's a polarizing issue, and it's a difficult one. I think the evidence demonstrates that there is significant predation. At heart, I'm an ecologist. Salmon, pinnipeds, predators and competitors have lived together since—to use a first nations term—time immemorial.

The idea that we would go out there with a simple solution and make everything better is probably unlikely to be successful. The kinds of things that we're supporting at PSF is understanding what kind of human-caused changes we have introduced to the ecosystem. Things like booming logs in estuaries that make perfect haulouts for seals and sea lions in places where salmon concentrate are probably contributing to increased predation. We were thinking that the way forward on that, at least for us, is to support undoing the ecological changes that give these pinnipeds an advantage to try to restore the natural balance.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Does anybody else want to comment on that?

You said it's controversial, and I'm getting that from other witnesses as well. I will throw this wide open. Has anybody helped to move that conversation forward instead of saying, "Oh, it's too touchy; we can't talk about it", or researching it? Is there anybody effectively moving this whole conversation forward in good faith? That's my question.

Mr. Jason Hwang: I can give a brief response from the PSF side.

We've been moving it forward along the lines that I spoke to. Some of the studies that we did were partly identifying the degree of predation from pinnipeds on juveniles and adults. We are carrying on with studies now trying to understand where these things are happening so that we can understand management measures that could reduce the advantage.

I'll stop there, because I'm sure others want to weigh in.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mazier. You've gone a little bit over time.

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

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thanks to all of the witnesses here today. Fin, it's great to see you again.

Look, I come from New Brunswick, so my knowledge of the B.C. salmon industry is a little limited, but I know some of it. As just a quick comparison, here in New Brunswick, for example, or in Atlantic Canada, the Atlantic salmon is also in danger, if I can say that. There have been a lot of things done in the last couple of years to make sure that the returns were coming back. For example, in Greenland, they have a commercial fishery. There's was some big talk with some conservation associations, just like you guys, and they were able to lower the take in commercial fishing in Greenland.

If I take the land-based aquaculture aspect, I think all of you agree to have more land-based aquaculture. That's great. Again, the catch-and-release policy is in effect in New Brunswick, and I think it was the way to go, but if we just remove the net from the water and move to a land base without dealing with commercial fisheries, how are we going to make sure that all of the fish are going to come back?

Do you know what I mean? I think it's certainly a great idea to move to a land base, but at the same time, Mr. Hwang, how do we deal then with commercial fisheries if they want to have more quota or they want to have different methods of fishing? Is this something that you're thinking about at the same time as you're thinking about moving to a land base?

• (1715)

Mr. Jason Hwang: Mr. Cormier, I'll just see if one of the other witnesses would like to start. I've used a lot of airtime here today and I think I've cut everybody off.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Does anybody else want to take that?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I'll step in quickly.

I illustrated at the beginning the issues around endangered stock. The minister had set limits around fishing and a max mortality in Canadian fisheries of 5%. We don't even come close in terms of management. I think, for a number of these runs in population, fishing is simply out of the question at this stage of the game.

In terms of just aquaculture or just commercial fishing, we deal with this in the wildlife world as well. "Cumulative effects" are the words of the day, and as Mr. Hwang has said and as I'm sure all of my colleagues here will tell you, it's not one thing. We have habitat issues; we have changes in the marine environment; we have aquaculture. We have a whole bunch of things. It's going to be different in different places, and the trick is to get on with it and just start looking to solutions.

As Mr. Hwang has also mentioned, DFO is a "fishing first, fish second" agency right now in terms of culture, and it needs to be fish first. That needs to be the focus; otherwise, none of us are going to get to go salmon fishing.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Fin, I would like to have your comment on that.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Well, I can't disagree with what's been said, and I actually see that Mr. Hill would like to get in his time.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Sure.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I would add one thing, and it's with a couple of comments that have been made. I think the biggest thing we need is to work together. Certainly Washington state has identified that one of their biggest successes has been federal representatives and state representatives and city and first nation representatives all coming together. That is one of their biggest successes. That's what I think we need to point to, rather than looking at any of the divisive issues that are going to be polarizing and harder to act on.

You're absolutely right, Serge. We definitely need to look at the fishery and how it's managed and look at selective or—as Mr. Zeman has pointed out—mixed-stock impacts, and there are solutions there. There are many solutions, whether it's with habitat or com-

munity hatcheries. We need to look at those that we can come together on and agree on.

I'm sorry. I hope I've left a few seconds for Mr. Hill.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Go ahead, Mr. Hill.

Mr. Aaron Hill: I do think there are opportunities to fish selectively. We need to know that we're only taking the harvestable surplus of a known stock that has a healthy harvestable surplus. That's why we need that better catch monitoring: It's so that we know what we're catching and where we're catching it and that it's from a healthy stock. We need to transition our fisheries from the mixed-stock fisheries more to what are called "known-stock" fisheries, using selective technologies. There's a lot of opportunity there.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you very much for your great work. I hope there's some salmon left for me to fish for in those beautiful rivers and maybe swim with you, Fin, on the Fraser.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I'll look forward to that, Serge.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

We will now go to Mr. Bragdon for five minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you to each of the guests today. We so appreciate hearing the testimony that we have heard today.

I would like to address my first question to Mr. Donnelly.

Congratulations on your appointment, Mr. Donnelly. To be able to draw from both federal and provincial experience is great in the role you're serving in, for sure.

My colleague raised a couple of questions around the decision to transition away from open-net pens in the Discovery Islands, but my understanding from your testimony is that you were given no notification of that. I just want to follow up. When the B.C. government realized that there was no plan from the minister to support the transition that she had just initiated, how did the B.C. government respond?

• (1720)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thanks for the question, Mr. Bragdon. I'll add that I was also a municipal city councillor, so I have all three to look at there.

Yes, in terms of the Discovery Islands decision, the premier was very loud, and you heard about his concern for workers right away. I think that if there had been a package that came with the announcement of cancelling those licences, you would not have heard the concern from the province. Our concern is for those workers and for their communities. We have certainly heard from the mayors of those impacted communities as well.

I think that's one of the things that needs to be considered in this transition and as we go forward with the fallout of what has happened with the DI decision. That is why I think that there is a willingness for the province, for us, to work closely with the federal government as we move forward, because, as many of the witnesses have said, it is a series of cumulative impacts that are affecting wild salmon. We need to address all of those as much as we can with our management decisions in order to give salmon a fighting chance.

There's one thing that I would add, and I think others have asked this question: What more could be done? I think it's looking at our decisions in government through a watershed lens or a salmon lens. Once we do that, it will start to become much easier to see what the solutions are. Unfortunately, addressing the issues will still be complicated, because we've left it to this point, but using a salmon lens, certainly in the province, will start to help with those decisions.

I've heard from aquaculture industry representatives who say that absolutely they are focused as well at maintaining wild salmon and the wild salmon economy. There is an absolute interest in all of us getting this right and working together.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

In a follow-up to that, I think the more responsible approach would obviously be the proper and thorough engagement of all sectors, especially those that are going to be affected by these decisions on the front end, including municipalities and the indigenous communities that were affected, as well as the municipalities and the industry stakeholders and the farmers themselves.

With that in mind, do you believe that when the rug was pulled out from underneath them, there should have been a transition plan announced simultaneously, so that the sector, those whose livelihoods were directly affected and the communities that were directly affected didn't just have the announcement to deal with but had a transition plan to go with it? Are you encouraging your federal counterparts to come up with that plan in conjunction with you folks?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: We are, absolutely, Mr. Bragdon. I'll give a much shorter answer than I gave your colleague Mr. Calkins.

I don't know, Blaine; was it a compliment that I gave a long answer? The jury is out.

I think, Mr. Bragdon, that the way you have phrased the question is exactly right. That is ideally what is needed, and certainly industry has said that there's a willingness to work together with the province and the federal government and first nations to come to a solution that works. They realize that they've had management issues over the past. They have made many changes over the decades. They also know that in order to continue growth, which they have been unable to do, they need to change their practices.

That means everybody needs to come to the table to work at this solution. Whether we explore new technologies to allow growth in that sector is a question that has to be on the table for discussion.

We've heard loud and clear, and certainly in British Columbia, which is operating under DRIPA, that first nations are rights and title holders who are at the table. They are creating discussions and

they have a concern about their territories. We, as the provincial government, have a concern about wild salmon and we want to see a flourishing aquaculture sector. We therefore need to get this right.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bragdon.

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

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

Mr. Zeman, earlier in your testimony you were saying that you would recommend separating DFO science from DFO. Why would you do that?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I would say we should separate DFO science and species at risk from DFO management, and I think this is a reiteration; I can't remember who, but someone else mentioned it. Quite often there's a sense....

I've lived through the CSAS process around interior Fraser steelhead, in which it appeared that after we went through a peer review process, the ADMO's office changed the wording in the document. That illustrates the why. There seems to be a culture around hiding some of the science and the recommendations.

I think there needs to be a separation between state and church inside of DFO, in the sense that science tells you what's available for harvest and what you should do or shouldn't do. That should be public information. After that, management can make a decision, but hiding these documents and hiding the paper trail that science provides is not, I think, in the public interest, and it's certainly not in the interest of wild salmon.

That's why I would make that reference, for sure.

• (1725)

Mr. Ken Hardie: There used to be a separation, was there not?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes. You could talk to one of the big names—David Schindler, who recently passed away—and he would tell you that originally, before the days of DFO, the office in Winnipeg was full of scientists, and in a matter of years it was full of MBAs and very few scientists. That continues until today.

As has been said, DFO is about fishing first and fish second. We are at such a critical point with our salmon that we cannot afford to have that mentality. It has to be fish first, fishing second.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Donnelly, I want you now to put all three of your government experience hats on. We're aligned, as you said, for a new era of collaboration between the federal and provincial governments. Do we need to incorporate municipal governments as well?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I would say yes. I think you need the third rights and title holder to add to the provincial and federal; I think you need indigenous governments in it. That's certainly a critical element in British Columbia.

However, beyond that, I think that by having industry, municipal governments, the environmental groups, the non-government sectors—conservation organizations, the groups around this table—participating, you hear the wealth of knowledge that exists.

I would say that absolutely the municipalities are going to play a key role in doing the watershed restoration in their municipalities. They have been doing it. If it comes to fish passage and fish connectivity, they're already doing it. What's needed is a coordinated effort beyond their municipality so that we can stitch them together within watersheds and within ecosystems throughout the province.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'll call it there.

Mr. Hill—or actually anybody, but I'll go to Mr. Hill because I haven't asked you a question yet—a lot of money has been spent over the years in various programs, but I don't get the sense that anybody has had the big-picture map to show that this is happening here and this is happening there, and we're doing this and we're doing that. It seems to be in bits and pieces. There has been no strategic coordination among all of these wonderful one-offs that have been happening. The cumulative benefits don't appear to be there.

Am I wrong?

Mr. Aaron Hill: You're right.

There is a strategic plan, and it's called the wild salmon policy. What's special about it is that it has a set of strategies and action steps that include an accountability framework; however, none of the strategies have really been implemented. Strategy one is to assess the status of wild salmon populations. Strategy two is to assess their habitats, and it goes on.

I think actually implementing the wild salmon policy more or less as it was written would get us most of the way to where we need to go. Justice Cohen saw the value in it and recommended it. We've been saying for years that it needs to happen.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

We'll now go to Madame Gill for two and a half minutes or less please.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like Mr. Zeman to talk a little more about the importance of science and the importance in the budget of gathering independent, accessible scientific data.

I mentioned non-budgetary measures as well.

Could he comment on how much of the budget is allocated to science?

• (1730)

[*English*]

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Madame Gill, thank you for the question.

I think this is important, and maybe I should have said this up front.

I've been working on some graduate research for the last seven years around funding for natural resource management. This is very germane. In terms of the role of science, if you want good policy and good science, you put scientists in charge of those research questions. There's huge value....

Everybody has referred to Washington state. Let's start with where Washington state's money comes from. They get \$600 million in hydro compensation. The NOAA shows up with over \$1 billion, and the fishing wildlife budget is \$220 million. They have orders of magnitude more than what we have in B.C.

For the science piece under that, the strategic avenue through that is that we have all of these public servants who are called “professors” who have students who are exceptionally intelligent. Quite frankly, we don't pay them a lot to go out and do work. That is the place to run science out of. It's to offload a bunch of these questions onto academics and people who can put you in front of the answers.

I certainly am concerned when I see things internalized inside of DFO, because I'm very well aware—and the ATIP shows—that quite often, if the answers don't line up with what managers want or what the top end of DFO wants, the science doesn't see the light of day. I think that's where the independent piece around science goes, even in terms of the secretariat. Having people who are great scientists and who are outside of the DFO world in charge of these research questions is definitely where the investment should go.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: You talked about professors and students.

So you're basically talking about university research?

[*English*]

Mr. Jesse Zeman: We have some of the top researchers in the world here in British Columbia. They love salmon and have an affinity for it. If the federal government invested in a chair at a couple of universities, I think you would see a huge return on investment through that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Okay.

I was just going to ask you whether it would be useful to have a university chair for the Pacific salmon issue. You have answered that question.

I have one last general question. In terms of next year—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Madame Gill. Your time was over when Mr. Zeman finished.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: My time's up already? I'm having too much fun, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

[English]

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for the important work that you're doing in advocating for wild salmon.

Mr. Hwang, we saw \$20 million in the budget for transition and planning around open-net salmon farming. Does this give you confidence, seeing \$20 million and hearing the government pivot...? Well, we don't know which one it is—whether it's to have a plan by 2025 or to move away from open-net salmon farming by 2025, which is our election campaign promise.

Do you have confidence that the government is going to meet its 2025 plan and commitment? Which commitment is it?

Mr. Jason Hwang: “Confidence” is a strong word, Mr. Johns. I don't think I would choose that one. I would say “hope”. I think it's a good signal. I think it is a complicated issue, as others have spoken of. The communities and the people affected are very important in terms of the transition.

Underpinning it all, and the thing that we know about in terms of Pacific salmon, is that it's vitally important that it happen. This isn't a quarrel with the industry per se; it's a concern about the risk and impact to wild salmon. For us, that's the priority. If these funds are to support that transition, then it would get our vote.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Fin, on behalf of all of us, and this isn't partisan. Everyone is glad to see you in this role, so again, congratulations. On behalf of salmon, it is great to see you there.

In terms of the question I just asked Mr. Hwang, what kinds of supports do you see needed in moving away from open-net salmon farming? We saw Discovery Islands. The workers are wondering what's going to happen next. The communities are wondering what's happening next. There are companies that want to move to land-based salmon farming. What kind of investment and what kind of resources are necessary, and how do you see this proceeding in relation to the federal government and its role?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thanks for your kind words, Mr. Johns.

Also, your question is bang-on. What's needed is a signal from the federal government on clarity. What are we transitioning to? Industry has that question. That is what's next and what needs to be answered.

One thing industry and municipalities most enjoy is certainty. They want to know what the rules are and how we play within them. One thing the government can clarify is exactly what the vision is, what the process is, and how we can engage.

Certainly there has been a point in the province saying that we actually did a good process in the Broughton Archipelago. That's pointed to as the gold standard of involvement and clarity, but I think we should at least achieve that, if not a greater standard. That comes from a willingness from all to commit to working together.

• (1735)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

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

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

I want to start out with Mr. Zeman and Mr. Haskell. I'll direct my question to them.

The government has added resources to the B.C. salmon restoration and innovation fund, yet it has not even paid out the funds that it had in recent years, and valuable proposals were rejected at the same time. At the meeting on July 23, 2020, Mr. Zeman told the committee that in the first year of the BCSRIF, and I'll quote, “there were actually applications from first nations to transition to more selective methods, and those applications were turned down.”

We've heard repeatedly that non-selective fishing is hurting at-risk stocks of salmon. Then we heard that proposals from indigenous communities wanting to move to selective fishing methods were rejected by BCSRIF.

I'll ask first Mr. Zeman and then Mr. Mr. Haskell. How do we ensure that the funds provided for the BCSRIF actually make it to the projects on the ground and achieve the results?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: That's a great question. I do have a running spreadsheet, and in the world of salmon conservation we certainly talk about SRIF and some missed opportunities in terms of funding.

How do we get there? We have Mr. Donnelly on the line, and I'm hoping that he can help straighten that process out a little bit. However, we can talk, and we've been talking about money.

My background is in business. Again, this is return on investment. We need to have it in our minds that these things we're going to fund are going to make more fish. That's the overarching priority, so when I hear “salmon restoration and innovation fund” and I see that \$600,000 is going to Canadian groundfish research, I question who is running this ship and whether it is really about salmon.

There are definitely some examples that make it very clear that the agency, DFO, had interests it wanted funded through this fund that were non-salmon-related. I would lean on my colleagues here, and certainly on Mr. Donnelly, to help straighten that out to make sure there is a line of sight and so that when the technical review happens on salmon restoration and innovation fund applications, the peer review or the technical review process is not overturned at a later date by someone else's decisions.

Mr. Darren Haskell: I'm somewhat in agreement there with Mr. Zeman, because the breakdown of projects that actually have been funded shows that a lot of them are focused right on the Lower Mainland area, the southern half of B.C. There were a few proposals that were sent in from Upper Fraser nations that were declined for various reasons, but at the time, we didn't know the approval process. Having a clear approval process would really make things more transparent and make people realize what it takes for these projects to be approved.

Another opinion, my own personal kind of thing, is that because of the announcement of that fund, they want projects that have a lot of publicity and pictures to show what they're doing with the money. That's always important, but having a wider lens on who is approving these projects would really help the process.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Mr. Haskell, when you appeared earlier in this study, in July of 2020, you touched on the implementation of the Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement. Can you provide us an update on where the implementation is and whether the annual work plans are in place for the coming year?

• (1740)

Mr. Darren Haskell: It's perfect timing for that question, because we have developed a Fraser salmon management board and a joint technical committee, which are going to do the bulk of the hands-on work.

The Fraser salmon management board is made up of both DFO and first nations members. It's kind of stalled at the moment because of funding. We developed this and we had a three-year plan that transitioned from the original group, which was FRAFS, into the Fraser Salmon Management Council. The funding that we proposed and that we need to get this board to do this important work really has not flowed from DFO. We've basically been stuck with the same amount of funding to do three times the amount of work in this next year.

That's why we're stalled, and—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you. I know I only have a few seconds left and I want to get this piece in.

Mr. Chair, before my time runs out, we had discussions at our meeting on Monday about the announcement on the spot prawn issue. The parliamentary secretary stated at that meeting that if the committee members felt on Wednesday that further action was needed, because they didn't feel that enough action had been taken in the previous 48 hours, then we could deal with it.

Mr. Chair, I would like to make sure that once we've finished with these witnesses, we have time to discuss this issue, as promised by the parliamentary secretary.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. Your time is up. It was up when you started your final statement, but as I said earlier, there will be some time carved out to deal with some discussions of the schedule. I will do that very shortly.

As time has expired for you, I will move to Mr. Hardie. You have five minutes or less, please.

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

Enforcement seems to be an area where obviously much more effort is needed. In the various studies that we've done on fishing conditions in the west coast, the idea of indigenous guardians keeps coming up.

Mr. Haskell, is it fair or reasonable to engage indigenous communities in that kind of policing, that kind of monitoring?

Mr. Darren Haskell: Yes, I think it is. I think it's been shown to work in some of the coastal communities where they are out there checking people and protecting the stocks. Where there were some hiccups, I guess, was in the implementation of it all—where the authority lies and whether our guardians are allowed to serve citations, make charges or seize equipment. I think that was the biggest issue with trying to roll out a guardian program with a lot of the inland first nations. That came up with the fisheries officers, the DFO side of enforcement. It just became very political, I guess, after that, about where the jurisdiction and authority lie and what kind of role they would have. Would it be just kind of pointing and saying, "Can you please get out of here?" without having real authority? I think that was a big issue.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Can we say then that it's worth another look and a refreshed strategy?

Mr. Darren Haskell: Definitely.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Good.

Environmental assessments are a big deal, particularly when you get to the lower Fraser Valley with all of the residential, industrial and agricultural development that goes on there. I also wanted to ask specifically about that process and your level of comfort with it.

As a particular example, the Port of Vancouver does its own environmental assessments, and there have been a lot of concerns raised about the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 development. Is this an area where the federal government should look at mandate letters or letters patent and maybe make some changes about how these assessments are done? I don't know who wants to take that on.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I'm happy to jump in, and I see Mr. Hill is also indicating that he is interested.

I think this absolutely is. It's one of the most complicated areas in British Columbia in terms of competing jurisdictions and complexity of issues, but it also offers a tremendous opportunity to look at how the port, the federal government, the provincial government, indigenous governments, municipalities and all the players, even universities—UBC is right there, and SFU—and others could come together to look at issues that were formerly addressed by what used to be there, which was the Fraser River estuary management program. They could look at bringing that back, ideally in better than a 2.0 form, a 3.0, with co-government. They could look at addressing the critical issues and look at all the restoration that's happening, including the fish passage that is being addressed in the estuary and the Fraser Valley, which I know Watershed Watch and other organizations are working diligently on in their municipalities.

This is absolutely an area where there is an opportunity to leave a legacy, not just for this year or the next political cycle but for the next hundred years, which is really what the port operates under. That's the context we should be looking at to address the Fraser estuary impacts, because those impacts also affect the food the southern resident killer whales rely on.

Mr. Hardie, you've touched on a really important point where I think there could be co-operation and real movement made.

• (1745)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Hill, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Aaron Hill: Yes, I am in complete agreement with Mr. Donnelly.

I want to add that the issue is really about addressing the cumulative impacts on salmon habitat, because they suffer death from a thousand cuts. I keep harping on the wild salmon policy, but strategy 2 of the wild salmon policy really is about understanding those cumulative impacts on specific salmon populations and specific habitat. Implementing that strategy and the action steps in it, in addition to the things Mr. Donnelly has laid out, will also take us a lot of the way we need to go.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

That concludes our rounds of questioning to our witnesses today.

I want to thank all the witnesses for their wealth of knowledge that they have shared with the committee today on this particular study. We will bid farewell to our witnesses as they sign off and we deal with a little issue that I want to bring up.

To each of you, stay safe and stay strong.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for your time. Thank you, committee. It was great to see everyone.

The Chair: I believe witnesses have signed out.

I want to bring up an issue with regard to our upcoming meetings and requests for any witnesses on the salmon study. We did invite the minister to appear again at the committee in relation to this study. The clerk has informed me that the minister would be available only after the constituency week in May, which leaves time very tight after that.

I have two proposals that I'd like to put forward, and the committee can decide which one of them they want to go with, or neither one. It is up to the committee.

Number one would be that we hear from the minister before we begin drafting instructions, which would surely result in our inability to table a report on salmon before the end of the session. If we hear from the minister before the drafting instructions, we won't get this report tabled.

Otherwise, we can hear from the minister after the break week and proceed with the drafting instructions and setting a deadline for recommendations on the salmon study, as planned.

I see Mr. Bragdon. You have your hand up.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we can proceed with the drafting instructions prior to the minister appearing before the committee again, so that the analysts can get under way with the drafting. Then obviously the questions that may come to the minister may not be exclusively to the Pacific salmon study. They may be pertaining to other issues as well.

We're fine with it being after the drafting instructions.

The Chair: I thought that would be the safest way, but again it's up to the committee.

Mr. Morrissey, you had your hand up.

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

I have a question. I had submitted a list of four or five names on the salmon study. Do we know where those went to?

The Chair: I'll have to ask the clerk to help me with that question.

• (1750)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes, they were submitted to the clerk. I would just like to know if they're going to be called and if they're available to appear on short notice.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tina Miller): Mr. Chair, I am working on Monday's meeting scheduled for salmon. With the analysts, I pulled selected witnesses from the lists that were provided, and yes, I have reached out to some of the witnesses on that list for Monday.

The Chair: Thank you for that very much.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thanks, Chair.

I agree with Mr. Bragdon and the others. This is the most practical solution to having this study tabled in the House before it adjourns in the latter part of June and hearing from the minister as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Johns, you have your hand up.

Mr. Gord Johns: First, I absolutely support Mr. Bragdon's plan. We need to get this study in.

With regard to witnesses, I know this committee has been great with providing some flexibility in other studies. After the deadline, we added a name that was really important to us, and I'm hoping that person will be able to appear as well.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Mel, you have your hand up. Is it on this salmon study issue?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Yes, it's on the study.

I heard the clerk mention that she is lining up witnesses for Monday. Could the clerk distribute that list as soon as possible, please? I agree with Mr. Bragdon that we should proceed with drafting instructions and see the minister at a later date.

The Chair: Okay. Tina's nodding her head to that suggestion. I'm seeing thumbs up from other members. I'll take that to mean that the clerk now knows what schedule we want to stick to as we go forward.

Mr. Arnold, you wanted to speak to something on the spotted prawn.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Yes, I just wanted to make sure this would fit in today. I quoted what the parliamentary secretary had said. I believe Mr. Bragdon has commented on this point, so I will let him go first.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bragdon.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you, Mel, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to make sure about this. I know there was an urgency around getting some clarity and certainty for our prawn harvesters. I know Mr. Johns is compelled by this as well, and other members of this committee. I know there's a statement. It pertained to, it seemed, this season exclusively, but for those who are in the prawn harvesting business, just one season alone is pretty hard on planning purposes. I think they would like to have more certainty for the longer term.

I'm wondering if the parliamentary secretary can bring more light to this or provide a little more clarity for the rest of us. I know we saw the statement today, but it seemed very much limited to just this season, and I think the prawn harvesters would like to have a bit more certainty than that as it relates to this change in the interpretation of the regulations. I look forward to hearing from the parliamentary secretary.

The Chair: I understand your concerns, Mr. Bragdon, and I will let Mr. Beech respond.

My understanding of it was that we would get some certainty that nothing would change for this upcoming season because they really don't have the time to really adapt to the change. I don't want to speak on behalf of Mr. Beech, but he did say that we would know for certain, or that the harvesters would be given a guarantee, so to speak, that it would be this season. That's my memory on it. If somebody wants to correct me on it, they can.

Go ahead, Mr. Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): I'm happy to address this question, and thanks for the opportunity for the clarification.

My understanding was that there was a desire from committee members to get clarification as quickly as possible, given the testimony that was given, and that it couldn't wait until we spoke to officials because people wanted to start acting on this season and planning for this season. We were able to provide that clarification in less than 12 hours, with the release going out at 10:30 in the morning on May 4. I'm very happy that happened.

I would suggest that everyone on the committee prepare for the officials who are going to be meeting with us next, and then we can go from there. This solution that was provided was obviously not done overnight; it was done in consultation with industry, which the department and the minister has been engaged with.

For right now, in the short term—that 24-hour window—I think we met our commitments, and I look forward to the committee's next part of the study with the officials.

● (1755)

The Chair: Mr. Johns, you have your hand up. Is it on this particular topic?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes. I think Mr. Arnold is ahead of me, though.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

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

The discussion on Monday was about the concerns of the harvesters, and it's not just a one-year project for some of these harvesters. They have to make significant investments—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt the proceedings again, but the same problem is happening with Mr. Arnold. The interpreter tells me that it is difficult for him to do his job.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, move your mike up.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I've moved it up. I hope that's better. I'm getting a nod from the clerk.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll start over for Madame Gill.

On Monday the discussion was because these harvesters need certainty. They're making significant investments in their vessels and paying tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars for freezers. That equipment isn't just a one-year process or a one-year investment for them. They also need to line up suppliers for their products, such as the tubs they're using. All of those pieces come into play. They're looking for long-term certainty and they were looking for an indefinite or a permanent reversal on this reinterpretation. That was what we'd hoped to see back from the minister.

The commitment was that the committee would discuss it further if we weren't happy with it. We've heard from the stakeholders that the statement put out by the minister and the parliamentary secretary was just more of the same. It's a status quo for this year with no commitment after that time, and that's not what these stakeholders need.

Around this committee we saw members from all parties nodding heads, realizing that this reinterpretation was impacting the harvesters and the communities they support. It needed immediate action, and all we saw was a restatement of the position that it is not going to be enforced this year, and nothing beyond that. That's not what the harvesters and Canadians are looking for.

That is why I think we need to see a stronger statement or a stronger position, and a longer-term position from the minister on this reinterpretation. Perhaps the regulation needs to be changed, because from what I see, it is in the wording of the regulation, and enforcement staff are expected to enforce the regulations as written. The minister has the power to change those regulations, so we need to know why the reinterpretation was implemented and why it cannot be reversed. Why is the minister dragging her feet on this?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Johns, you had your hand up.

Mr. Gord Johns: I agree. It's not very often that we all agree on one thing, and this is something we all agree on.

The whole coast thinks this is an injustice to these fishers and their way of life, something they've been doing for over 50 years. Yesterday's announcement of relief for one season wasn't good enough. They're still going out fishing worried about their future. This is unnecessary.

We were expecting a much bolder statement. Our committee was unified on Monday in joining coastal British Columbians on this issue.

I know, Mr. Hardie—and I really appreciate you on this committee—that you wanted to hear from DFO regardless. I actually don't. I actually hope they pull back on this and kill this thing right now, and in the next couple of days tell the fishers that they can do what they've been doing for 50 years and keep managing this good fishery.

Let's use that extra study for salmon or for something we need to continue to get done before the House adjourns in June. That would be the better use of our time and of taxpayers' money and would be in everyone's best interests.

These fishers are reeling from COVID. They are reeling right now from last year and from this year, and the price is impacting them. It's the last thing they need to add to their plate right now.

The Chair: Before I go to the next person with their hand up, I will note that our time for the committee has expired. If we want to continue beyond this point, I'll need unanimous consent.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Bragdon.

• (1800)

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to echo what Mr. Johns just said and what Mr. Arnold said.

We heard very emphatically and clearly from the harvesters. The prawn harvesters were very clear. This isn't just for this summer. They need certainty, and with COVID and what has happened, there is more than enough uncertainty out there for a lot of our harvesters and a lot of our working people.

If we can do something—and we know who can do something—and if the minister can do this right away and get this cleared up expeditiously, as quickly as possible, we will have gone a long way

in helping these fish harvesters sleep a bit better at night and in solving a problem that's within the power of the government to solve quickly, rather than having further delays, more examinations, and further testimony. We don't need those things. We're all in agreement. This is just a matter of the minister making a decision and doing what's right for these harvesters.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Hardie is next.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We need to make evidence-based decisions. Until I hear what the DFO's rationale was for this sudden change, I'm not prepared to just say, well, it was all wrong, and let it go.

Now, 99% of me says it was a bad decision done in a very poor way. I hope that when we spend one more session, get the DFO in, get their rationale and—pardon the expression—send them away with their tail between their legs, that will do it. The certainty that the harvesters need will come soon enough. One more session with the DFO to hear what they have to say is not going to make a huge difference in the long run in terms of providing the certainty that they need, but it might give us what we need in order to say in no uncertain terms that the change they're proposing shouldn't go forward, period.

That's where I've landed so far, but I need to hear from them. We need to make sure that we know all the angles. We've heard from one group that has a lot of self-interest, as they have the right to do; let's hear from the other one before we really come down and follow our nose and our intuition on this.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Arnold again.

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

These harvesters are set to go out on the water within the next few days. Their livelihoods and their investments are at stake. Surely the minister can take stronger action than what she has done on this, rather than just repeating what has already been said, which is that they're not going to enforce it this year. The key piece here is “this year”. There's no certainty there.

As I said, the vessels, the equipment on these vessels and the infrastructure to support them are a multi-year investment and a multi-year process. These harvesters need certainty as soon as possible. Once they hit the water, they're busy people. If they're out on the water, they don't have time to follow what's happening at the committee or when the witnesses appear. They have to rely on what happens once they hit shore again or what they hear on the airwaves. They need some certainty before they hit the water this year, and the minister has the authority to do that. Why won't she?

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey is next.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, I believe my colleague Mr. Battiste had his hand up before I did.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Go ahead, Mr. Battiste.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: To Mel's point, I think the certainty that the fishermen needed was given by the minister addressing this year's concern. I realize that there's a longer concern that we need to address. As a Mi'kmaq person, I might not always agree with what DFO states, but I always want to hear the rationale as to why they made that decision, if for no other reason than to make sure that we don't make the same mistake again and have to do this again through committee.

I'm really curious to hear the officials speak, but I'm in agreement. It doesn't seem as though it makes a lot of sense, but I want to give them their opportunity to hear that. I think the urgency has been dealt with, but I also feel we need to ensure that when we're looking at how DFO is making decisions, we as a committee understand the rationale and how this came to be.

Right now, no one understands what that rationale was and I'm really curious to understand what that is. I would say that the urgency has been met with the minister's points. I believe there's one more committee meeting that Gord proposed for this issue, and then we're going to make our recommendations. I think we're all on the same page as of right now as to what those recommendations are, but we should really listen to hear our officials out, if for no other reason than to make sure that we don't make the same mistakes again.

• (1805)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, I need just a clarification. I have another meeting that I'm moving to. What's our timeline here? Do we need consensus to continue on?

The Chair: We have about five more minutes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. Chair, what happens at the five minutes?

The Chair: If there are no other comments, we can adjourn now.

I see Mr. Johns has his hand up.

Mr. Gord Johns: I think Mr. Arnold, Mr. Bragdon and I have made our point in regard to the minister that it isn't good enough. We are expecting a lot more, and so are the fishers and the coastal communities that rely on this fishery. We are expecting that the minister would be listening to their testimony and our concerns. However, I don't think we should continue the conversation at this point.

I think the point is clear. Mr. Beech can take back to the minister our feelings and share them with the minister.

We're not satisfied with that statement. If that was what the government was thinking, it didn't do the trick. It's not appeasing people.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Johns. I'm sure Mr. Beech heard you loud and clear and as well as I did.

Thank you, everyone. On that note, seeing no further hands up, the meeting is adjourned.

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