



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 032

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

• (1620)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Macataquac, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting 32 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on April 21, 2021, the committee is meeting on its study of frozen-at-sea spot prawns.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. Therefore, members can attend in person in the room or remotely by using the Zoom application.

The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will show only the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

To ensure an orderly meeting, 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 either “Floor”, “English” or “French”.

You will also notice the platform's “raise hand” feature on the main toolbar should you wish to speak or alert the chair.

Before speaking, please click on the microphone to unmute yourself. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first panel we have today. From the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we have Rebecca Reid, regional director general, Pacific region; Neil Davis, acting regional director, fisheries management; and Nicole Gallant, acting regional director, conservation and protection.

We will now proceed with opening remarks.

Ms. Reid, we're going to turn to you for five minutes or less, please.

Ms. Rebecca Reid (Regional Director General, Pacific Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you very much.

Bonjour and good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members.

As you have already heard, my name is Rebecca Reid. I'm the regional director general for the Pacific region, Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

[Translation]

My colleagues and I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee.

To start, we would like to thank you for turning your attention to this important issue.

[English]

Our aim today is to provide you with as much information as possible to support your deliberations. I am accompanied today by Neil Davis, acting regional director, fisheries management, Pacific region, and Nicole Gallant, acting regional director, conservation and protection, Pacific region.

As you know, a key part of DFO's mandate is to sustainably manage Canada's fisheries. Consistent with that mandate, DFO applies a precautionary approach to fisheries management that prioritizes the conservation of stocks. The use of size limits within the commercial prawn fishery is an important part of this approach, as it helps to ensure the prawns are being harvested sustainably and that they reach sexual maturity and reproduce before being harvested, which supports the regeneration of stocks over the long term.

Harvesting prawns at a larger size also increases the price per pound, improving the fishery's economic return. For this reason, the use of size limits has been supported by industry since they were first introduced to the commercial prawn fishery in the 1980s.

DFO has a long-standing constructive working relationship with industry representatives in the prawn fishery, and the implementation of size limits is just one example of work the department has done in collaboration with industry to strengthen management of the fishery.

Recently, DFO has been working with industry representatives to develop packaging and labelling standards that would limit access to markets for illegal products and develop packaging standards that would meet all existing federal and provincial regulations. In the course of those discussions earlier this year, the industry practice of freezing prawns in tubs of sea-water—a practice referred to as “tubbing”—was raised. Our officials noted that freezing prawns in this manner makes it difficult for fishery officers to readily determine whether a harvester's catch is compliant with the size limit, which is a regulatory requirement in section 36 of the Fishery (General) Regulations.

Industry expressed concerns about the prospect that tubbing may not meet regulatory requirements. In particular, they noted the increased importance of tubbing to many harvesters that carry freezers on board, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in weakened international markets. Tubbed prawns provide an alternative, since they are a popular product in the domestic market.

In response to these concerns, DFO met with industry between February and April to explore solutions. Through these discussions, the Pacific Prawn Fishermen's Association, which represents commercial prawn licence-holders, proposed a protocol to help harvesters ensure that their catch, including catch that is frozen in tubs, is readily available for inspection by our fishery officers. DFO confirmed its support for the protocol as an interim measure for this year while we work with industry on longer-term solutions.

While we have achieved a positive outcome for this year, I would like to clarify several points for the committee.

DFO did not ban the tubbing of prawns at sea. The key requirement is that any commercial harvester must package their catch in a way that allows for the size to be readily determined. This regulation has been in place since 1993, applies to all fisheries and is essential for DFO to verify harvesters' catches and properly manage fisheries.

As fishing and packaging practices evolve over time, such as the growing use of tubbing, regulatory issues can be brought into the light, requiring engagement with relevant stakeholders to determine the necessary management adjustments. This is a very typical practice and it is a process we have followed here.

We are committed to working with industry on a long-term solution to this issue. Over the coming year, DFO will engage with the prawn industry on the development of longer-term solutions, such as clearer packaging requirements or other measures that will help ensure the continued sustainable harvest of prawns.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your attention.

I would now welcome your questions.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Ms. Reid. I appreciate that.

We're going to now move to the next witness, Neil Davis, for five minutes or less.

Mr. Neil Davis (Acting Regional Director, Fisheries Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Chair, I don't have any opening remarks beyond those made by Ms. Reid.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Okay.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Excuse me, Mr. Chair; I am responding on behalf of the three witnesses.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Okay, thank you, Ms. Reid. Then we'll proceed to the questions.

For six minutes or less, we'll start with Mr. Arnold.

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

I was expecting more presentation, but I'm glad that we have more time for questions.

Thank you, Ms. Reid, for your presentation and for being here today to help clarify what has taken place.

In your opening remarks you mentioned that a key part of DFO's mandate is to sustainably manage Canada's fisheries. I fully support this statement and mandate, but it's unclear how DFO's reinterpretation that will outlaw tubbing will promote sustainable management of the spot prawn industry. What is clear is that the determination to outlaw tubbing has cast the future of some 600 B.C. prawn harvesters into great uncertainty.

Does DFO have a plan for assisting the harvesters who could be forced to surrender their livelihood because of the department's reinterpretation?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Thank you, Mr. Arnold, for your questions.

To be clear, DFO has not outlawed tubbing. What we have done is worked with the industry to clarify the requirements that products be readily available for inspection. In working with the association, we have an interim solution in place for this year that addresses those concerns, and we will be working with them in the longer term to address the longer-term issues around packaging and maintaining regulatory compliance.

Mr. Mel Arnold: But there's no plan beyond just not implementing the interpretation as it was put out this year. Is there no plan for beyond this year?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: The way we work with industry on a regular basis is that we collaborate on issues as they arise.

As I described briefly in my opening comments, this issue has become more prevalent of late. The question around products being readily available was discussed in a meeting a few months ago, and based on that interaction, a protocol was determined for this year. Because of the time of year, we need some longer-term solutions and we fully intend to work with industry on those solutions.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. I'm not surprised that the department has no transition plan for British Columbians who are forced off the water. When we look at the Discovery Islands decision delivered last December, this government has still not provided a plan for British Columbians who are being forced not to work in that sector.

Do you think it would be appropriate for DFO and government to have a transition plan in place before they put B.C. jobs on notice?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: With regard to this prawn issue, I think that we found a very reasonable solution that addresses the concerns identified by the industry and also meets our regular requirements to inspect the product as required.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

As you're aware, many fish stocks in the Pacific region are in decline, and some are near collapse. I believe that many of these dire situations could be improved if DFO Pacific listened to and acted on the input they are provided by British Columbians.

Do you think that this whole spot prawn fiasco could have been prevented had DFO been more diligent in listening to and engaging prawn stakeholders before throwing their futures into disarray?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: My view of the process is as I described it. An issue was raised. There was a discussion around it. Certainly concerns were identified, and then DFO and the industry reps worked together to resolve the issue, which they have done.

In my view, DFO and industry can't avoid encountering issues or concerns, but we can find ways to work collaboratively together. In my view, that's what we've done in this case.

• (1630)

Mr. Mel Arnold: It's been interesting hearing your explanations or reinterpretation on the tubbing regulation today, but no one from DFO, including the minister, provided all of these explanations earlier in the year when the fiasco came to light. Is there a reason that the explanations you brought today were not offered to Canadians in March?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I can't answer specifically to that, other than to say that we did have conversations with the industry representatives. We have a regular advisory process. Those meetings took place, and it was through them that we worked on a solution.

In my view, we did have those conversations and we did attempt to clarify our needs in terms of the regulatory compliance and to understand the interest of the industry in ensuring that their markets were protected.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

In your opening remarks, you mentioned that the size limit also allows prawns to reach sexual maturity before they're being harvested, which supports the regeneration of stocks over the long term. This contradicts some of the other testimony we've heard. It seems that we have possibly yet another interpretation on our hands.

Are you aware that female prawns start breeding at a size greater than 33 millimetres, which is above the minimum size limit?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Mr. Arnold, if I could ask Neil Davis to talk about all of the various management techniques used to manage prawns sustainably, I think we can talk about size limits and spawner indexes and other relevant factors.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Just note that there are about 15 seconds for a quick response.

Mr. Neil Davis: Very briefly I would just say that there is, with any species, some variability around when and at what size they may spawn, but in general our view is that the size limit helps to

support the objective of getting these prawns large enough to spawn before they are available for harvest.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Davis. Now we'll go to Mr. Hardie for six minutes or less.

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

Thank you to the officials for being here.

We heard that tubbing had been a practice in place for decades. What changed? Did the tubs change, or did somebody just have a light go on over their head and say, "Gee, we need to reinterpret this"? It seemed so capricious, so last-minute and so arbitrary.

Ms. Reid, can you speak to that, please?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I can, Mr. Hardie.

Also, let me suggest that Nicole Gallant could have an opportunity to respond as well.

I will say that the use of tubbing has gone up recently from being a relatively uncommon practice when there was a higher reliance on export markets and on those types of packaging. With the prevalence of COVID and a turning towards domestic markets, and from meetings that were held with the industry, there was a reflection on the intention to use tubbing more commonly to benefit from the domestic markets.

It was in the context of the conversation around the regulatory requirements about products being readily available for inspection that this was discussed. That's where the issue really was raised initially; it was based on those consultations.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Well, I don't know that "consultation" would be an apt word, because the moment the word came down that tubbing was to be forbidden, many people had the definite impression that the interdiction was immediate, that it simply wasn't going to be allowed, and it took a while to extract the information that there would be some latitude.

You say that tubbing prevents the product from being readily available, and yet we hear from the fishers that they can take a tub and thaw it out on the deck in a couple of minutes and give an inspector a very good look at what's inside the tub.

What's wrong with that?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Perhaps it would be useful to talk about the protocol that was agreed to, which addresses some of those concerns—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Well, I would like an answer to that question first, please.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: That really is my attempt to answer the question. There are a number of issues around it.

You have a frozen tub of prawns. You need to be able to assess the size. You can't do that if they're tucked into that frozen sea-water, so you need to be able to thaw the tub quickly enough so that it's effective. There are questions around how that works when you're on a boat. There are those types of issues.

A number of concerns were raised about how this was going to work, such as whether the product was “readily available” and what would happen to the product afterwards, because once it's warmed up or thawed, it's going to be ruined. There were questions of that nature.

I think the outcome—the protocol that was agreed to—finds a solution that addresses some of those concerns, and it was acceptable for both DFO and the industry reps.

• (1635)

Mr. Ken Hardie: I don't know that we've heard from the industry reps that they have landed on something that's accessible. It has been a couple of weeks since we spoke to them, so maybe there have been some new developments. We'll be interested, because they represent our next panel. I hope I hear from them that they agree with you.

Still, tubbing has been around for a long time, and you've been thawing the tubs out on the decks within a couple of minutes for a long time. Tubbing may have gone up as a percentage of the total catch, but still, how many inspections would you do in, say, the course of a season?

Also, historically how many infractions did you find with respect to the size limit?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: With your permission, I ask Nicole Gallant to respond concerning the enforcement measures.

Ms. Nicole Gallant (Acting Regional Director, Conservation and Protection, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you.

Fishery officers inspect the commercial prawn fleet throughout the season, and rarely do we actually have to thaw or have we seen tubbing take place on board the vessels. Usually the product we're seeing is live product that is easy to measure and product that is finger-packed in boxes. Rarely have we seen tubbing.

As to undersized product that we have come across and/or product that we're concerned about, in the last three years we have run into about two violations out of 41 violations per year.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I see. There were 41 violations, but only two of them involved size.

I guess we would find general agreement that the size matters to the fishers, because the little ones have no real value to them. They have no incentive to keep undersized prawns, because people don't want to buy them. I don't know if that's a fair question for you or Ms. Reid.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I think that from a sustainability perspective we agree that undersized prawns are something we want to avoid. Certainly there are management measures put in place—other ones, aside from just inspection directly—to avoid those undersized prawns, but there's also an obligation for us to enforce the regula-

tions, and the size limit is something that is important, so when officers encounter a situation, they will take action.

I think there's general agreement that larger prawns are better for the market and certainly better for the sustainability of the stocks. That's why we're inspecting to ensure there's no illegal capture of those undersized fish.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Ms. Reid, and thank you, Mr. Hardie.

We're going to move to Madame Gill for six minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses appearing today for providing us with answers. We really appreciate it.

My question is about the history of the issue we are discussing today.

On the Atlantic side, users of the Cap-aux-Meules Harbour are experiencing difficulties that are jeopardizing fishing itself this year.

When did you at the department start discussing concerns you had about that type of fishing? I would like you to provide us with four dates: the date when you discussed this; the date when the decision was made; the date when you notified the fishers; and the date when fishing begins.

I'm addressing myself to Ms. Reid, Ms. Gallant or, of course, Mr. Davis.

[*English*]

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Thank you, Madame Gill.

I think I'll ask Neil to describe the process as it occurred.

Mr. Neil Davis: Thanks, Rebecca.

As Rebecca mentioned in her opening remarks, this issue emerged somewhat inadvertently through conversations on a related topic between DFO and industry on matters of packaging and labelling. In a conversation with that group in late January, there was discussion about the increasing importance of tubbing, particularly with the pandemic and its effects on international markets for other product forms, and I think the expectation on the part of industry that—

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I don't mean to interrupt, Mr. Davis, but, since we don't have much time, could you give us approximate dates?

You say that discussions were held in late January. When did you make the decision?

[English]

Mr. Neil Davis: We began meeting with industry in early February when they raised this issue to our attention. Through the course of probably six, seven, eight or nine meetings between February and April, we had a discussion about potential options that led to basically our support for the protocol that was developed by the Pacific Prawn Fishermen's Association in April.

The association communicated that out to their members in April. I think the members may be aware that then, early in May, the minister also issued a news release that confirmed that support for the broader public.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: When did the fishing season begin, Mr. Davis? Can you give me an approximate date?

[English]

Mr. Neil Davis: The fishery opened on May 14.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: You say that industry representatives were consulted. However, according to what we heard at our previous meetings, it would appear that they were not consulted.

I want to make sure I understand. You say that you met at the request of industry representatives, and that they raised concerns over the freezing and preservation methods for prawns on ships. Did industry representatives themselves ask for a meeting and raise concerns?

I don't want to put words in your mouth, but that is how I understood your answer.

[English]

Mr. Neil Davis: You're right. The industry did raise concerns, given the concern that DFO had raised about the potential for not meeting our regulatory requirements. We very quickly acknowledged that this was an issue of great concern to the industry and immediately began this series of meetings with them to talk about the nature of the issue and what we might be able to do to resolve it both in the immediate term and also in the longer term. Hence, that series of meetings essentially began immediately after we had heard from them about those concerns.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: You are telling me that fishers' representatives were concerned about not complying with the rules. I will give you a choice of answers. Was it rather when you talked about it that they felt affected, as they were concerned about their fishing season?

Once again, I have not obtained a clear answer, and that is why I am asking you again. Did they tell you they were concerned about breaking the rules, and is that way you sat down together to resolve the issue and find solutions? That is my understanding, and I want to know whether that is indeed what you are saying.

[English]

Mr. Neil Davis: The issue was raised in the course of initial discussions that happened on another matter. When that issue was raised, both the department and industry recognized that there was a problem. Industry expressed their concern about the possibility that what they expected to do as part of their—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: What is that possibility? You do not specify. You are talking to me about a concern, but you are not defining it. What were the industry representatives concerned about?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Madame Gill.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will have other opportunities to ask questions.

I thank the witnesses.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Madame Gill. Maybe they'll be able to respond in a future session.

Now we will go over to Mr. Johns for six minutes or less.

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

My concern is that I still haven't heard a good reason why you reinterpreted the regulations. I just want a quick answer, yes or no, that you're doing this because of the size. You're worried that you can't access the tubbing because you can't thaw it out and look at it, and you're worried about size. Is that what you're measuring?

• (1645)

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I'm sorry, but I would have to disagree with the characterization of reinterpreting the rules. The rules have been in place, and we haven't changed them at all.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay.

Your concern is around size. You're checking for size. That's what you're looking for.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Our concern is whether the product is readily available for inspection. What we're trying to inspect is size.

Mr. Gord Johns: Right. You had 41 violations on the whole coast for the prawn fishery, and only two of them were size-related. Can you clarify?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I will turn to Nicole to talk about the stats.

Ms. Nicole Gallant: That's correct. On average, there are 41 violations per year in the prawn fishery. The prawn fishery is a very short fishery, lasting about four to five weeks, and on average there are about two violations per year. We have not seen one in 2020 or 2021 at the moment.

Mr. Gord Johns: I find it deeply alarming that with the reinterpretation, or let's call it maybe the rules that have been in place, the prawn fishers have been served notice. This is upsetting the livelihood of people up and down our coast because of two violations a year on average. This is completely unacceptable, as far as I can say.

Can I ask why the person who is most knowledgeable and experienced in overseeing the management of this prawn fishery, who has been overseeing it for almost 15 years, is not here in attendance to answer questions?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I'm sorry; who are you talking about, Mr. Johns?

Mr. Gord Johns: Right now I would be asking about the person who has been overseeing the prawn fishery. It's Laurie.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Do you mean Laurie Convey?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: We do try to bring senior people to these meetings. Neil Davis is the regional director for fisheries management, and I thought it appropriate that he be the witness for this morning.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Davis, you talked about conservation being an issue, and size limit. Can you explain why this is a conservation issue? Several issues come to mind. Where is the stock assessment report to support the allegation that conservation is an issue in this fishery?

Second, why is there no science representative present as a witness who could provide clarification of this allegation? Also, could you advise this committee about which scientific report or stock assessment advised the end of tubbing?

Mr. Neil Davis: Sure, I can certainly help with those questions.

On your last point, to be clear, again, we have not banned tubbing. If tubbing can occur in a way that allows for the size limit to be readily determined, then it can proceed. We are pursuing discussions with industry about what our options around that might be for the longer term.

With respect to the role of size limits in ensuring the sustainability of the fishery, or whether conservation is a concern, I think regardless of the fishery, we actually prefer to manage more proactively so that conservation of the stock does not become a concern. In the case of the prawn fishery, the role of the size limit helps in that regard, because it allows for the prawns to reproduce—or it at least supports them to grow large enough to reproduce—before they are harvested. It also allows them to grow to a larger size, which has more economic value per pound. Both of these are good things and both have enjoyed the support of industry since their introduction in the eighties.

Mr. Gord Johns: Do you have any reports that can back up your concerns? Can you provide this committee with reports on what I just asked about, around the concerns?

Also, do you not see tubbing as making the product “readily available”?

Mr. Neil Davis: It may be, but we have not had that conversation in more detail.

As Rebecca was suggesting earlier, tubbing was—at least to the department's knowledge—not a frequent practice until recently. For issues like, “What is a tub?”, “What's its size?”, “What's its shape?” and “What colour is it?”, there is no standardization, so we can't make a subsequent determination of whether the product can be made readily determinable in a way that will meet the needs of our enforcement officers.

• (1650)

Mr. Gord Johns: You're saying right now that you've been consulting the industry. Industry is saying that they weren't consulted until months after they were served notice around this change. We can't get a clear answer as to whether it was readily available or that it's always been in place. The changes that were coming.... Now you're saying we don't even know if there are changes coming.

People are looking for answers. They're looking for answers from government. I am not hearing good answers.

What are you offering? What is it that you're suggesting industry do?

We were hoping today that you'd be telling us about some of the recommendations and some of the suggestions that they could apply, moving forward, so they can get this issue off their plates and get back to fishing and feed their families.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): We have time for a 15-second answer. It has to be a quick one.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: We do have an interim protocol in place that was developed by industry. Using that, we can discuss practices, going forward, and there—

Mr. Gord Johns: The status quo is the interim protocol.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: No, it's not the status quo. They came up with a protocol to respond to the concerns, and we agreed that it was acceptable, so to me—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Ms. Reid. Thank you, Mr. Johns.

We'll now move on to our second round of questions.

Mr. Calkins, you have five minutes or less.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Acting Chair, in your new role.

I want to thank the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for doing something that not even the COVID-19 pandemic could do, which is to bring the four political parties together in unanimous agreement about something that appears to be an egregious overstep on behalf of the government. I've never seen, in the 15 years I've been an MP, an instance when absolutely nobody among the elected officials sitting around the table is in agreement with what the government has done. I have heard no justification that would change anybody's mind at this point.

Here is my first question. Is there any indication that prawn populations are in decline because of tubbing?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: First of all, to the committee, we are doing our best to respond to your questions. I am sensing a lot of frustration and concern.

The issue around tubbing is about products being readily available. That regulation is across the board, so it's not just related to prawns. It applies in this case, and it was raised as part of a separate conversation because tubbing is becoming more common. It was raised as an issue in connection with our need to make sure we can inspect the product and how best to do that. That led to the conversation about whether or not inspection is possible with tubs and ultimately to the development of the interim protocol.

From my perspective, the issue was raised; it was discussed appropriately with the association, and a solution, which we agreed to, was found. We need to continue to work together.

This is a very typical process when working with industry reps. Issues are raised, we work on them, and we do our best to resolve them.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That doesn't answer my question, Ms. Reid. My question was this: Is there any indication that prawn populations are in decline because of tubbing?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: The question makes the premise that tubbing is causing a conservation concern, and that's not the case. It's not the intention, and it's not the nature of our concern—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You fail to make the point that you have an enforcement issue. I'm a former conservation officer. I'm a former national park warden. I understand fully the idea of leaving things marked so that they are easily accessible for law enforcement. You've told me that you've had a whopping two out of 41 cases, on average. If it's not a case of conservation concern—and it clearly is not, because size does not matter when it comes to prawns for conservation, as has already been admitted here—so there must be a reason for doing this that meets some type of conservation rationale or some other type of rationale for enforcement.

I've heard that it's a whopping two cases out of 41 charges that are laid on average every year. Then I've heard some startling things coming out of the mouths of some of the people here, saying that the regulatory changes were made to meet the needs of enforcement. I thought perhaps maybe we would just meet the needs of the fishermen to the best of our ability and let them carry on with their lives and their livelihoods.

I guess the question I have is this: Do the fishers refuse or remain non-compliant when they're asked to thaw a tub?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: There have been no regulatory changes made. These regulations have been in place since 1993. When inspection of their product is requested, the fishermen are compliant. Nicole can speak to that more specifically.

This isn't a question about whether people are resisting the enforcement or the inspection. It's about how to produce the product in a way—

• (1655)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: But you just told me, you just told this committee, that it's not a conservation issue, that there is nothing threatening the populations. I have heard from Mr. Davis that the changes are being made to meet the needs of enforcement. I've heard your enforcement official basically say that there's a whopping two fines levied every year for not meeting the size requirements. I've also heard your enforcement person say that most of the enforcement actually happens when the prawns are live and not when they're in the tub environment at all.

I mean, we're just going around in circles here. Nothing that you're saying is adding up or making any sense to justify a rationale for what's happening here. I'm asking very basic questions.

Maybe you can answer this question. How long does it take, on average, for a fisherman, when asked, to thaw a tub? How long does that take?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: If possible, I'd like to address the issue you raised before, around conservation, because I think that's the key.

We don't need a conservation concern before we take action to protect the sustainability of a fishery. We don't wait—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Are you saying that size...? These are the only prawns in Canada that are regulated by size for conservation. Everybody who knows anything about prawns and their life cycle knows that size isn't usually the determining factor in the ability of prawns to reproduce. They start out as males for the first couple of years of their life and switch to being females. That's why we throw berried females back in the water when we're fishing them. Everybody knows that life cycle.

You can't say it's conservation. That was the very first question I asked: Is there any indication that prawn populations are in decline because of anything that's happening? Nobody said yes.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: What I'm trying to—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

Ms. Reid, you have time for a very quick answer. You have about 10 seconds.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Size limit is an important part of ensuring conservation, but it's not the only measure we put into place. It's one factor of many that we use in order to ensure a sustainable fishery.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Ms. Reid.

Mr. Morrissey, you have five minutes or less.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I believe my colleague Mr. Cormier is next.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): I'm sorry. Go ahead, Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can't believe you forgot a New Brunswicker just like you, but it's totally okay.

To all of the witnesses, you're saying that there's a lot of frustration. Well, of course there is. We're getting calls from those fishermen. We're getting calls from the industry. They're trying to understand what happened. So far, I haven't gotten any answers.

Let me come back to this. You said that there were 41 violations and only two were on size limits related to those violations. Is that correct?

Ms. Nicole Gallant: That's correct.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay, so you mean that for only two size violations, you want to change fishing that was going on for many, many years in a matter of, I think, two months.

I'm not sure if you know this, but my father was a fisherman all his life. Changing the way you fish doesn't happen overnight. You need time to organize yourself. You need time to prepare your gear and everything. For example, here on the east coast we're fishing lobster. If there is a size violation, we fine those people and take some of them to court. We don't change the way we measure lobster the year afterward.

Why, if there were only two violations like that, do you want to change a process that's been going on for years? It seems there is no conservation issue whatsoever. Why are you changing the rules all of a sudden, giving the industry no time to prepare themselves? It would be like asking them to mow their lawn with a snow blower during the summer. It would take time to adapt, right?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: If I can respond to that, the answer is that we're not asking for a change. What we've said is that this is the practice that's been in place, the expectation that's been in place all along, so we don't see a change. What's changed is the increased use of tubbing. That means we need to make sure we reflect on how to properly inspect those products. We're not asking for a change in fishing. We've come up with a protocol to allow for the use of tubbing. We continue to want to enforce the size limits as an important part of conservation. That hasn't changed. None of that has changed.

Mr. Serge Cormier: You have inspected those prawns for many years. You still want to change the way that they use tubbing, if I may say so.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I would say that what Nicole said is that the use of tubbing was very uncommon and there are other ways that the prawns are kept either alive or frozen, such as finger packed and frozen, that are easily and readily available. Those are very easy to inspect. It's just the tubbing that's hard to inspect, because the prawns are hidden in the ice and you need to be able to thaw them. It's that part of it. If there's going to be an increase in prevalence because of the change in markets, then we need to make sure that practices and protocols allow us to inspect the product. That's really what we're interested in.

• (1700)

Mr. Serge Cormier: You said that you met with the industry in February. The fishing season is starting in May, right?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: That's right.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Again, how can industry members prepare themselves for those changes in a short period of time? For some of them, I'm not sure how long the season is, but sometimes fishermen are making their living in one or two months. Don't you think that a last-minute decision like that should be planned way ahead of time? I've seen some decisions on the east coast here that are also very problematic. Why are you making decisions like that or trying to change something in a period of two weeks? It seems to happen a lot with this department.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I would say first of all that there hasn't been a change—this practice has long been in place—and second of all that the industry has responded appropriately. We have gotten agreement on the protocol and we have a way forward.

The fishery has started, and you're right that it is a very short fishery, so we're glad that we have the protocol in place to respond to the interests for this year.

Mr. Serge Cormier: What about next year? What's the plan for next year?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: For next year we need to continue to work with industry on some of the issues that Neil raised. If tubbing is the preferred packaging, then let's talk about what that looks like and how we can come up with methodologies going forward to make sure that the fish are readily inspected and to determine what that looks like. There are going to be conversations with industry, and I'm sure we can find a solution.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I think my time is pretty much up, Mr. Chair, according to my timer.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: You're pretty close. Thank you, Mr. Cormier. Well done.

Thank you, Ms. Reid.

Now we're going to go to Madame Gill for two and a half minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to ask questions about inspections.

A number of committee members have said that two violations out of 41 concerned prawn size. If memory serves, Ms. Gallant said this happened over a three-year period.

How many inspections take place annually over the four weeks of fishing?

Mr. Davis, Ms. Reid or Ms. Gallant can answer.

[*English*]

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I would like to ask Nicole to respond, please.

Ms. Nicole Gallant: I can look at the statistics. I don't have them at my fingertips at the moment, but they are on my computer. I just have to open them up. Right now I can give you an example for a one-day period.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: If you like, you can send the information to the committee. That way, we could continue the discussion. I just wanted to have an idea of the number of inspections.

Ms. Reid said several times that no changes have been made. With all due respect, had no changes been made, we would not be here right now.

You talked about prawns taking a very long time to thaw. How much time is needed? Fishers told us that it takes about two minutes.

I was wondering how many inspections were carried out annually. That should help us figure out how much time is spent thawing and measuring prawns every year. That does not depend on the freezing.

Based on the current protocol, how have you managed to accelerate the measuring of prawns?

[*English*]

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I think, Madame Gill, that's exactly the point. The industry came up with a methodology to rapidly thaw the prawns that DFO found to be acceptable, so we could work with them. The fishery officers could inspect readily and could look at the prawns.

That methodology—which perhaps the next panel will speak about—really does address the concern that we raised with the organization. They were worried about what that meant. We worked together with—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: However, they were talking to us about the previous method. They actually told us that it took two minutes or two and a half minutes to thaw them. They told us that before the discussions to change the protocol or the methodology took place. I

don't know whether this is a satisfactory time, as it is not up to me to assess it.

How has the possibility to carry out inspections improved in terms of time? How much time is being saved?

• (1705)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

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

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Madam Gill. Just give a quick response, please, Ms. Reid.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: We have an agreed-upon protocol that both industry and the DFO have accepted, so I think the solution has been arrived at for the season. I think we have addressed the concern that was raised by both the officers and industry.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Ms. Reid.

Now we will go to Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes or less.

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

Ms. Reid, you talked about an increase in tubbing. Can you talk about the percentages of the increase and what the numbers look like?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I cannot, specifically.

I would ask Nicole to speak to that aspect, please.

Ms. Nicole Gallant: I actually think that Mr. Davis would probably be better to speak to it.

Mr. Neil Davis: Mr. Chair, yes, I am happy to.

We don't collect data that will give us a definitive answer, but we do have estimates from industry. The estimate from industry is that it has gone from up to about 10% of the catch last year, with an expectation that it may grow substantially again this year to as high as something like 20%.

Mr. Gord Johns: Wow, so we're doing this whole thing based on an estimate of 10% to 20%, potentially. It's an estimate. We don't even know. You're not even keeping track. There is no report, no information.

We talk about a protocol agreement in place with the industry right now. My understanding is that three tubs would be readily available for inspection, and that if the prawns are undersized, you would inspect more.

That sounds fair. Everybody would be fine, I think, moving forward, if those were the rules of engagement for decades to come, but that protocol isn't good enough or we actually wouldn't be here. I can assure you of that. The industry wants more definitive answers on this issue.

My concern is that the minister cited conservation on this issue, yet it isn't a conservation issue. I'm asking you this: Will you back down on putting pressure on the industry and stick with the protocol in place right now in years to come, or is the minister actually pressuring you to keep putting pressure on the industry, keep placing uncertainty and unfairness on these families and keep the coast at risk because of two violations?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I would say that the prawn industry is economically very important to British Columbians and to local communities, so there is no question about our interest in ensuring that we have a sustainable fishery.

The long-term solution is simply something that we need to work with industry to arrive at. We did this year, and I'm certain we will in the future. We need to collaborate with them and work with them on this issue, so I think we can. We need some time to talk about it further. We have a solution right now and we need to continue to work with them, as we do when issues are raised on any matter of concern.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Ms. Reid. Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Now we're going to go to Mr. Mazier for five minutes or less.

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

Ms. Reid, this committee has heard many times that the decisions made by the DFO without consultation are having damaging impacts on the people in the communities that depend on Canadian fisheries. However, you mentioned the important role of consultation and collaboration in your remarks. Does the DFO have any standards for consulting with parties affected by DFO decisions?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: We have consultation practices. We have a regular advisory process for each of the industries, and we work collaboratively with them. We have managers who specialize in particular species, and they work and develop relationships with industry representatives and others. In that way, I think we have a very rigorous consultative process across the board. In this case, we have a strong advisory and consultative process in place.

Thank you.

Mr. Dan Mazier: As a follow-up question, does DFO have any standards for consulting with the parties affected by DFO decisions?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Regarding standards, I'm not exactly sure what you're looking for, but I will say that we have regular advisory processes with industry. We also meet with others, such as the recreational sector and indigenous groups, on issues of importance and concern. We have people assigned to the task, so in that way we have regular advisory processes that allow for this consultative process to occur.

Mr. Dan Mazier: How does DFO determine if they've consulted enough?

• (1710)

Ms. Rebecca Reid: We work with industry all the time; there's a back-and-forth about this. If industry has concerns, we are responsive to them. We want to work with them and we want to have a

sustainable fishery. In that way, I'm not hearing any concerns that we haven't been consulting enough with industry.

Mr. Dan Mazier: You haven't?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I'm hearing concerns about how the tubbing issue was raised, but in general, our advisory processes with industry are rigorous. We have a regular process that we follow and we have an integrated fisheries management plan that we develop every year. We consult on the content of that plan and on the fishing plan, and it takes place every year regularly.

Mr. Dan Mazier: What do you have to say to all the harvesters, businesses, first nation communities and people who feel blindsided by this decision from DFO? What are you telling them and what would you say to them?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: What I'll say is that we haven't banned tubbing. We have agreed on a protocol to inspect products to make sure that size limits are respected. We believe in having a sustainable fishery, and size limits are an important part of how we ensure conservation and manage for sustainability.

Mr. Dan Mazier: You mentioned the importance of sustainability in the prawn harvest. Does tubbing limit the sustainability of the prawn industry? If so, is there any scientific basis for this conclusion?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: The concern over tubbing is about whether the product can be readily available for inspection. That's the concern. There's no concern about freezing prawns in sea-water, other than you can't see them to see if they're meeting the size limits. If you can find a methodology to assess size limits, then the issue is resolved. That's what the protocol does. It sets out a protocol to allow for a ready inspection to ensure that size limits are being respected.

Mr. Dan Mazier: However, my question was whether tubbing limits the sustainability of the prawn industry, and if so, is there scientific evidence to prove that?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Again, it's not the tubbing. It's the size limits that we're trying to ensure. The issue with tubbing is that you can't readily inspect the product. If you can resolve that issue, then the package you put the fish or the prawns in is not a concern. It's about whether they're readily available for inspection.

Mr. Dan Mazier: How am I doing for time, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): You have about 30 seconds, Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: The Prawn Industry Caucus told this committee about the economic impact that frozen-at-sea prawns have on the people who harvest them and that local businesses rely on them. If DFO follows through with prohibitive tubbing, what is the transition plan for the 600 families that depend on spot prawn harvests in B.C?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: DFO intends to work with the industry to find ways to readily inspect product. Tubbing isn't banned. We just need to find a way to readily inspect the product.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I'm good. Thanks.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Mazier.

I believe we have time for one final questioner before we wrap up this segment of testimony.

Mr. Morrissey, you have five minutes or less.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the three DFO officials who are appearing before the committee.

You can sense the almost unanimous frustration of the members of this committee. You have repeatedly stated that you're not imposing any change, but you certainly caused a lot of anxiety among fishers with the move you initiated this past winter.

You've interchanged things, Ms. Reid. Several times you've come back to conservation and size. We had fishers before this committee who stated that they've been using this method for 50 years and that it's not a question of stocks.

You are repeatedly going back to "readily available for inspection", but you didn't answer this: How much time does it take to thaw a tub of prawns?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I did try to suggest that we explain the protocol, because the protocol will answer that question specifically.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No. My question to you, Ms. Reid, is this: How much time does it take to thaw a tub of prawns?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: The answer to that is that it depends on a number of factors that need to be taken into account—

• (1715)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. Give me a range, then, Ms. Reid. Give me a range. Give me a time. Is it five minutes? Is it 10 minutes? How long does it take?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I haven't thawed a tub of prawns myself—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No, but you're the senior person at DFO, and basically the whole issue we've been hearing about before this committee is that a tub of frozen prawns has to be readily available for inspection by your officials.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Right, so you would need to know the size of the tub. Is it one pound? Is it 10 pounds? What temperature is it frozen at? What's the exterior temperature? What kind of thawing process are you going to use? Are you going to use water? Are you going to use boiling water? To say how long it will—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Let's go to the simplest one. Anyway, you seem to be waffling all around the edges—

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I'm not waffling. I'm just trying to point out that there are a number of different factors.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Ms. Reid, from my listening to the evidence that we've been getting, the answer is not satisfactory. It seems to be waffling all around the edges.

We have an industry that is quite mature. We have an industry that appears relatively regulated. We have heard no evidence given by your officials that violations are a serious issue that's affecting conservation and the stock.

That appears to be an interpretation, which I fully understand, but let me correct something. Is there not a methodology that you could use that identifies a frozen tub of prawns to the vessel that caught it? We use it on the east coast extensively. It's called traceability. Then, if you can identify the tub of prawns to a vessel, it would make no difference how long it takes to thaw those prawns. From an enforcement perspective, once you document that you took them out of a particular vessel, you should be able to relate the prawns in that tub that you seized back to the vessel, so the time to thaw should not be an issue.

Would I be correct?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I think you are raising some excellent points around standardization of tubs, and I think that should be part of the future protocol.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Really, Ms. Reid, it's an academic question, this standardization of tubs. Whether I have one pound or two pounds, it might take two minutes to thaw one and four minutes to thaw another. It's an academic question. It really doesn't involve the fishery.

What we have here, what we see and what I see, is the proverbial sledgehammer to kill a fly. DFO has swept in with enforcing regulations, which it has the authority to do, in a fishery that is seeking out the most lucrative market it can at this time, which is the ability to go directly to the consumer, which makes sense. We want the fisher to get the maximum amount of gain. We should be there working with them to get in, and no evidence has been given to this committee as to why DFO would have reacted so fast and forcefully in the past several months, which really, really upset this industry.

When I pose specific questions, that's why I say I get waffling around the periphery.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: There's no question that people are upset—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Oh, yes, we understand that, Ms. Reid. We had them before this committee. They're very upset.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I would say that the issue was raised and that within two months it was resolved, and the fishery hadn't opened yet. The fishery is now open—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. Who raised the issue? You referenced several times that the issue was raised with DFO. Who raised the issue with DFO that forced your department to take a look at how it's enforcing the regulation? Who raised the issue?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I wasn't part of that meeting, but I can ask Neil to describe—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No, Ms. Reid, that's not an acceptable answer. I asked a question. I want the answer to it.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Well, I can't.... I'm attempting to answer the question, but I assume you would like to hear it directly rather than second-hand.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Sure. Fine.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Our time for that has expired. Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

Maybe, Mr. Davis, you want to give a quick answer to that question.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It's important, Chair, that we find out who raised the issue with DFO that led to this.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Go ahead, Mr. Davis.

Mr. Neil Davis: The conservation and protection officers who were part of that working group on traceability in packaging raised the issues when industry had noted the expectation that prawn tubbing would continue to be more important to them.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Davis. Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

Just before we wrap up this segment, I have received a question. I am fine with allowing each party representative to ask one more question, but that's it. It's one question and one answer each. If that's the will of the committee, I am fine with allowing one more here with the department.

Do I have a thumbs-up on that? All right. We'll go one more round.

We're going to start with Mr. Arnold with one question, and then we'll work our way through.

• (1720)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity for one more question.

Ms. Reid, we've heard today that there were two incidents of infractions regarding size limits for prawns. We haven't heard how many inspections were actually done, only that 42 fines in total were listed, but probably many more inspections were done. Then we had a sudden change in interpretation.

How many infractions involving illegal nets and illegal fishing were identified on the Fraser River last year that affected at-risk steelhead and at-risk salmon? How many fines were laid? What action has your department taken to stop the illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing that is taking place on the Fraser?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: I can ask Nicole to give the statistics, but we may need to get back to you on those particular numbers.

Ms. Nicole Gallant: I do not have the statistics at my fingertips for the Fraser River. I would have to get back to you on that one, if the committee so chooses.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you.

I will now go to Mr. Hardie.

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

Ms. Reid, we heard that prior to the pandemic and the world market slowing down, tubbing accounted for about 10% of the catch. During the pandemic, you've noticed it has gone up to 20%, but it would seem reasonable to suspect that it's going to go back down again, because those international markets are much more lucrative than the domestic market.

Why do we need to do this when the number of infractions is low? We don't expect tubbing to increase in frequency once things get back to normal. Is it not possible for you to simply say, "You know what? Nice try. Not working. Let's just do an Etch A Sketch on this thing and go back."

Ms. Rebecca Reid: We actually have found a reasonable solution that addresses the concerns, and for me, being able to implement the regulation is an appropriate measure for us to take.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Ms. Reid.

Madam Gill, we're trying to keep this to within one minute for each segment.

[Translation]

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

I would like to turn to Mr. Davis and repeat the question to which I did not receive a satisfactory answer. I did not understand the answer anyway.

Was it fishers or their representatives who asked the department to make changes, yes or no?

[English]

Mr. Neil Davis: I'm not sure I understand the question, but industry raised the concern, and we then worked with it to resolve the issue.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: So it was indeed industry representatives who requested changes.

Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Madam Gill, and thank you, Mr. Davis.

We'll go to Mr. Johns for the final one-minute segment.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate getting the chance to ask this question.

We are talking about deep-freezing 10-pound containers, but they come in one-pound tubs. With regard to the three-tub recommendation you are putting forward for this season, if you had put that forward for future years, we probably wouldn't be studying this issue right now, because clearly that's an easy solution.

You cited that there were two violations on average a year. How many of those violations on size limits were frozen-at-sea prawns? Also, was the minister fully briefed and supportive of this decision moving forward, which has put everyone's livelihood up in the air?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Nicole can respond to this statistical question, but as far as the issue around interpretation of the regulation is concerned, certainly once industry flagged its concern, we did advise the minister. She is aware, and you are aware, that there is a news release responding to the outcome of the process that was arrived at.

• (1725)

Mr. Gord Johns: That's for this year, but not for future years.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: The intent is to continue to work with the industry for future years. We haven't precluded an outcome. We haven't said it's going to be this or that. We're going to work with industry on developing that solution.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Ms. Reid, and thank you, Mr. Johns. Thank you, everyone—

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, could I just get an answer to the question I asked about the violations?

On average, of the two violations a year, how many were frozen-at-sea prawns?

Ms. Nicole Gallant: Both of them were, and when they were inspected, 51% of the prawn in the frozen tubs in one of the violations was undersized.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you.

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

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Before we adjourn this section of the meeting, I want to ensure that the commitments made by the witnesses during this portion of the committee will be met. The witnesses suggested that they could provide answers if it were the committee's willingness to want them. I would like the witnesses to interpret that as a "yes". We don't ask questions as members of Parliament unless we actually want answers to them.

Mr. Chair, before this particular discussion is over with these witnesses, I want to say that it's been a long time since I've seen what appears to be such indifference to the questions that have been asked by members of Parliament and the deference that wasn't given to those questions. The attitude that we were just simply asking the wrong questions and that we needed to ask better questions seemed to be the response of the witnesses, rather than actually answering the questions that were asked.

I find this to be appalling behaviour in the presence of members of Parliament and I would hope that we don't see this again.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being a part of the meeting this evening. Thank you to each one.

We're going to take a brief suspension of the meeting. Don't go anywhere, those of you who are members. We're going to have the

next witnesses come online and do their sound checks right away, and then we will proceed into the next segment.

Thank you, everyone.

• (1725)

(Pause)

• (1730)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): I call the second part of the meeting to order.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for joining us this evening and I would like to take a few minutes, for the benefit of our next witnesses, to go over a few instructions.

When you are ready to speak, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

Interpretation will work very much as in a regular committee meeting. You have a choice at the bottom of your screen of either "Floor", "English" or "French". When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly.

I would now like to welcome our second panel of witnesses.

From Skipper Otto's Community Supported Fishery, we have Sonia Strobel, co-founder and chief executive officer.

From the Native Fishing Association, we have Andy Olson, executive director.

From the Prawn Industry Caucus, we have Ivan Askgaard, commercial fisherman.

We will now hear opening remarks, beginning with Ms. Strobel for five minutes or less, please.

Ms. Sonia Strobel (Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Skipper Otto Community Supported Fishery): Thank you so much for having me.

As you said, my name is Sonia Strobel. I'm the co-founder and CEO of Skipper Otto. We're Canada's first community-supported fishery and one of the first in the world. We're based on Coast Salish territory here in Vancouver, B.C.

I married into a fishing family 20 years ago. Honestly, I was horrified to witness the struggles of my father-in-law, Otto, and my husband Sean and other small-scale harvesters. They face risks and uncertainties that no one would tolerate in any other livelihood. At the end of the day, a lot of them just hope to break even. They're barely paying themselves minimum wage.

At the same time, Canadians can scarcely access domestic seafood. Canada exports 90% of its catch, and 80% of what Canadians can buy in restaurants and in retail shops is imported, often from shady sources that support environmental destruction and human rights abuses in unregulated international waters, yet demand for local producer-direct seafood continues to skyrocket.

We started Skipper Otto to help take some of the uncertainty out of fishing and to address Canadian food insecurity. Our membership model provides frozen seafood directly from fishing families to consumers across Canada. We do lots of other things to de-risk fishing, but since this is what's core to the issue today, that's where I'll focus my remarks.

Freezing seafood allows harvesters to hold on to their product and find their own fair markets rather than being forced to sell to live buyers and export markets that won't set a price until long after they've taken the product. Monopolization and collusion are commonplace in this industry. Right now, we're two weeks into the spot prawn season. Folks selling into the live markets have already delivered the bulk of this year's catch, but they still haven't been told a price, let alone been paid a penny.

Not only is allowing the freezing of seafood like spot prawns, at sea a social justice issue; it's also critical to improving other issues like food security, tackling climate change and addressing seafood fraud. Our model allows members to enjoy sustainable seafood year-round anywhere in the country. It's shipped using low-carbon methods, and each piece of seafood shows exactly who caught it, when, where and how.

This committee has heard testimony from many harvesters about the impact of selling frozen-at-sea spot prawn tails domestically compared to selling to live markets. Last year, that meant that harvesters who tailed, tubbed and froze their prawns at sea sold them for 300% more than they received from selling them to the live buyer.

Skipper Otto supports 34 fishing families, like Joel Collier here, throughout the B.C. coast, as well as in two remote communities in Nunavut. These families provide a year's worth of seafood directly to over 7,000 families across the country. You heard from many of them through our petitions on this topic.

Our members are passionate about supporting Canadian fishing families. They do that by buying fishermen-direct frozen seafood. This spot prawn issue hits them personally, and they're not going to let it drop.

In Canada, shrimp and prawns are by far the most consumed species of seafood. Globally, some five billion pounds of shrimp and prawns are produced each year. Where does most of that come from?

The global shrimp and prawn trade is the most notorious for environmental destruction and human rights abuses. Most of the frozen shrimp you can get in Canadian grocery stores is in some way connected to human trafficking, slavery and deforestation of mangroves in southeast Asia. How wonderful, then, that we have this incredibly clean, well-managed, ethically harvested product as an alternative for consumers in Canada to displace some of that dirty product.

However, this reinterpretation of the regulation about spot prawn tubbing undoes all of that. It takes from fishing families one of the most profitable fisheries they have in an industry that's desperately difficult to make money in. Once again it puts the control and profits back into the hands of big foreign-owned export companies. It takes a sustainable, clean and ethical product out of the hands of Canadians and makes more space for slave-caught shrimp on Canadian shelves. For what? The DFO has not provided a single plausible reason for this decision. Of course, we all support strong conservation measures, but it has not been demonstrated that this is in any way a conservation issue.

Of course, we all want to put an end to IUU fishing and harvesting, but placing the burden of that on all harvesters is unjust and irrational. If a small group of harvesters and processors are violating regulations, then C and P—conservation and protection—already has the tools in place to focus the enforcement of the regulations without upending the entire industry. Their job is to enforce regulations made by arms-length lawmakers, not to reinvent the laws to make enforcement easier.

Please help me to tell our 7,000 member families across the country that this is solved. They are all eagerly awaiting the update on this issue, not just for this year but for the future as well.

● (1735)

In conclusion, I submit the following recommendations: one, that you give certainty to harvesters that tailing, tubbing and freezing prawns at sea will remain legal; and two, that you ensure that our local prawn harvest is protected for Canadian harvesters and consumers, not for the benefit of foreign corporations and investors.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Ms. Strobel. I appreciate that.

Now we're going to go to Mr. Olson for five minutes.

Mr. Andy Olson (Executive Director, Native Fishing Association): Good afternoon, committee members and Chair.

Thanks for having us to speak about this issue today. My name is Andrew Olson, and I am the executive director of the Native Fishing Association. We're an aboriginal financial institution based in West Vancouver that serves aboriginal indigenous fishers all over B.C. through loans, licences and other business assistance, as we can.

Previously, before I took my job at the Native Fishing Association, I worked for the Tseshaht First Nation in Port Alberni as a fisheries manager and fish biologist for 10 years. In that role, I served as a first nations representative on the prawn advisory board for many years and worked with the prawn advisory board and prawn advisory committee, which is what it was before it became the prawn advisory board. I participated in many of those discussions and much of that work, and I never heard of undersized prawns being an issue. This is an issue that to me points to some of the other concerns in the Pacific region, in that DFO is being manipulated and used by business, industry in particular.

When they talk about industry, they talk about the PPFA. They are not the industry. That is the commercial processor group of representatives, not the representatives of the independent commercial fishers, who are represented by the Prawn Industry Caucus. That's one thing we need to be clear about. When they're talking about industry, they're referring to the Pacific Prawn Fishermen's Association. Those are two different groups with different participants, and in many instances, that larger organization represents the processing companies that are taking live prawns and shipping them to Asia for a lucrative market.

This shift for fishers wasn't just into tailing and tubbing prawns. It's been a shift to live prawn sales at the dock, which has turned the market around for these guys. Their opportunity to fish... Even with a strong foreign market to ship the seafood to, the fishers were not getting the benefit of that strong foreign market price. The fishers haven't been making a high living off of that market and then having to shift to a lesser market domestically. The domestic market has proven to be able to bear the prices that are potentially higher than what the international market is providing to the fishers, so it's not just a temporary shift. I think it's a long-term shift.

One of the things I heard in the earlier panel discussion was a lot about sustainability and size issues and those kinds of things. It's clear that the committee understands all of those things and is trying to understand what's at the root of this issue and how we can work to support fishers to make a living and to protect the resource—which I think we all think is important—so that they can keep fishing.

We know that the size of the prawns is more of a marketability issue than it is a conservation issue and that there is not a sustainability concern in harvesting undersized prawns, because they're all males. Knowing that, we start to look at what's behind all this stuff, and that's what concerns me the most. We've seen processes and even enforcement programs manipulated by large shareholder corporations again and again in the Pacific region, many of them foreign-owned. They use their levers and the people they have influence with to change policy and change the way that the fisheries are managed through enforcement action, causing things to essentially shift immediately.

They realized they were going to lose access to all these prawns because fishermen saw that they could sell the prawns domestically and make more money selling prawns to their neighbours and friends than selling prawns to a commercial fish plant that is going to pack them into a box and send them to China. All of a sudden, when fish companies started to see that they were going to lose ac-

cess to a product that was making them millions of dollars when they sent it overseas, they had to do something.

• (1740)

That's my concern. It's that this change points to that kind of thing and that kind of corruption in the Pacific region. We need to get to the bottom of this and we need to make sure that the fishermen have an opportunity to make a living. That's critically important.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Olson, we appreciate that.

Now we're going to go to our final witness testimony, which is from Mr. Askgaard for five minutes or less.

Mr. Ivan Askgaard (Commercial Fisherman, Prawn Industry Caucus): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and hello all committee members. I really appreciate being asked to speak today.

My name is Ivan Askgaard. I am a commercial fisherman. I have fished for 40 years for prawns. I own a prawn licence and operate a fishing vessel, and I also have a registered storage facility where we are licensed to freeze our prawn tails.

I served on the prawn sectoral committee in the eighties and the nineties, where we collaborated with DFO to implement larger mesh size, increase the minimum size, and implement many other measures to make the fishery more sustainable. I recall that the telson length measurement was established back then so that prawn tails frozen in seawater could become a viable product. I would have to say at this point that consultation back then was far more effective than what we're seeing today.

For years I was investing in technology to catch more fish. A number of years ago we hit a ceiling for what we could catch. We reached the conclusion that the way to survive was by adding value to the catch by improving its quality, its convenience for the consumer and its consistency. We have invested in Internet marketing, packaging, cold storage and distribution systems. I have to say that not all fishermen have reached the stage of advancement that we have. We're independent and we're forward-thinking.

I also have to say that we feel privileged to be able to harvest the common property fishery resource of Canadians. Canadians rely on us to provide them with food and access to something that they in fact own but trust us to harvest, and because licensed commercial fishermen rely on the goodwill of Canadians for access to the resource, we've made a point of making some of our catch available to the public over the last 30 or 40 years. It's not only tremendously satisfying; it's good business. There has come to be so little seafood available direct from the fishermen, even in our little coastal town of Powell River, that our customers routinely thank us profusely for making our product available to them. It's a strong market.

For the 2020 and 2021 prawn fishing seasons, the markets have endured another cyclical crash in the markets for frozen whole prawns for export to Japan and China, where 80% to 90% of our production is destined. The poor prices on this occasion have been blamed on COVID. An earlier witness mentioned extensive collusion in the industry among buyers, and I can reaffirm that fact. Fishermen received as little as \$3 a pound for their smallest-sized product last year. Their medium prawns sold into the frozen seafood market at \$3 a pound. That's less than the cost of production, I can tell you. This year looks to be the same. Fishermen are trying to make any kind of move they can to avoid financial ruin.

The market crash has promoted innovation by fishermen to adapt. We want to be able to have certainty and we want to be able to adapt. We're not looking for any kind of a financial handout, but we do want some certainty. We're trying to create higher-value markets by producing frozen prawn tails and selling directly to the public. I can say that this is a long-time practice and one that we have gone to when we've had poor markets in the past. When I first started fishing back in the eighties, there were people back then selling frozen prawn tails. That's how long this practice has gone on. It's not a recent practice.

This reinterpretation of the policy is not a conservation issue. It's solving a problem that doesn't exist. It's so unjust that my outrage is the reason I'm appearing here today. There have been no recent charges for fishermen for retaining undersized prawns. We've heard one of the earlier witnesses say that it was about two a year. I think there was some confusion there. There were two charges in 2019 to my knowledge, and there have been none in 2020 or 2021 for undersized prawns, although there have been many other charges laid in the fishery. I've spoken with a fisheries officer who says that retention of undersized prawn tails in tubs by commercial fishermen is the least of their concerns.

• (1745)

I can tell you from practical experience that identifying a fisherman who has retained undersized prawns is a relatively simple matter, all this talk of thawing tubs aside. The tried and true enforcement technique is for the rubber boat to arrive seemingly out of nowhere and an impromptu investigation occurs of the product that is retained on deck. Timed at the end of a haul of a string of traps, DFO can easily go through a large amount of product—about one-sixth or more of that vessel's daily catch—to get a clear assessment of what is being retained by the vessel.

Any amount—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Askgaard. I'm sorry; our time is complete.

If you have more you'd like to add, feel free to send that in to us as well. Some of it will maybe come out in the time of questioning, but our time has lapsed on that. I'm sorry.

We appreciate hearing from each of you.

Now we are going to our question-and-answer period, and I'm going to ask Mr. Calkins to go first.

You now have six minutes or less for questions.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today.

I have you all on my screen. Can you raise your hands if you heard the department officials in the hour just before you came on? Raise your hand if you were able to hear them. Okay.

My question first, then, is for all of you. We'll start in the order in which you presented before, so it will be Ms. Strobel, Mr. Olson and then Mr. Askgaard.

Do you believe anything that the department officials said was an accurate and fair reflection of the relationship you've had with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans with regard to the whole issue surrounding prawn tubbing?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: No. I don't believe that is a fair assessment. I don't feel that we have been consulted at all. I feel that the DFO consults with the large industry association, which Mr. Olson referred to as representing the large-scale, largely export companies, but they have not consulted with us in any way.

Their characterization of having consulted early on is strictly false. I have all the dates of when this information was released. On March 3, the Pacific Prawn Fishermen's Association first notified us. On March 12, we initiated a petition; on March 26, we initiated a House of Commons petition. At that point, they still hadn't said that prawn tailing at sea would be legal this year. They were still saying it would be illegal this year and that they would take a stance of educate, inform and not enforce, or something to that effect.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you.

Mr. Olson, what is your response? Did the department fairly and accurately reflect the nature of the conversations in relationship with what's actually happening on the water?

• (1750)

Mr. Andy Olson: No. In my experience, in the discussion that they had, they did not.

They talked about their interaction with industry. As I mentioned earlier, the industry they are referring to is a large association that generally is controlled by processors that send fish overseas and not the commercial fishermen.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Askgaard, would you comment?

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: I don't believe that DFO's characterization of the consultation process was accurate. My understanding is that the consultations were industry-driven. We asked to meet with them several times, and at first the answer from DFO was that there was no need to meet. Finally they did accede to meet with the PPFA, their chosen representative group.

There was much I didn't agree with that DFO said, which I'm sure will come out as we go forward here.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay.

My next question for you, then—and I think it was you, Mr. Olson, who brought this up—is that I want you to tell me if you agree with the following statement or not: “The use of size limits is ineffective in ensuring conservation of spot prawns.”

Do you agree or disagree with that sentence?

Mr. Andy Olson: I agree.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Ms. Strobel, what is your comment?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Yes, absolutely. I agree.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Askgard...?

Mr. Ivan Askgard: I agree.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Would you say that the minimum size limit for prawns has been put in place over the years more for economic reasons than for conservation and ensuring the survival and integrity of the population of spot prawns?

Would you agree or disagree with that statement?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Yes, I agree.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Olson...?

Mr. Andy Olson: I agree.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Askgard...?

Mr. Ivan Askgard: It's mostly for economic reasons, yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Then does it make sense to any of you that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is changing its policies when it comes to enforcement with regard to the tubbing of spot prawns based on need for conservation? Does that argument from the department hold water?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Absolutely not.

Mr. Andy Olson: No.

Mr. Ivan Askgard: It seems like an argument that they brought up after the fact when they had to try to explain their actions.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: The department has basically said that it was through consultations with the industry. It was, I believe, Mr. Davis who said that it was during a conversation that they had with industry representatives—which I'm assuming weren't you—that the industry indicated they were going to increase the amount of tubbing that they were going to do as a rationale. My interpretation of this was that when the industry is honest with its intentions with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans then turns that into an opportunity to change its regulatory approach to make life more difficult for fishermen.

Would you agree with my assessment?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: I would agree with that. I have heard many fishermen ask me why I would stick my neck out and do things like write a petition and go to the House of Commons as a witness. Why would I do that? They said I was only going to get a smackdown from the DFO and that it was only going to come back around and hurt us if I did that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Do you have any indications, Ms. Strobel? I mean, that is a powerful statement. That might be a sentiment that's felt.... Is there anybody you can point to who would be interested in saying that they feel that they've been blacklisted by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: I will ask—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Ms. Strobel, you have about 10 seconds.

Ms. Sonia Strobel: I'll ask anyone if they would be willing to stick their neck out, as it were.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

Now we'll go to Mr. Hardie for six minutes or less.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Chair.

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

Let's continue on. Does anybody want to answer Ms. Strobel's question? Do you feel that you would be blacklisted by coming forward as you have?

Mr. Andy Olson: There's always potential for that, especially in the Pacific region. That's one of the concerns that I think is important to bring out here.

The Pacific region seems to operate on its own, *in absentia* of this national mandate to support fishermen and to support individual harvesters. They've taken a step onto this path of needing to support the commercial fish processing companies, and many of those are, as you know, owned by foreign companies that are shareholders, and they do not have any interest in driving money into the Canadian economy or the fishermen's pockets. Their interest is driving the money somewhere else.

• (1755)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Somebody said that somebody who's fishing for a processor is getting \$3 a pound. What are you getting when you sell directly?

Mr. Andy Olson: Fishermen selling their live prawns directly to the retail customers are selling at anywhere between \$10 and \$25 a pound.

Mr. Ken Hardie: The inference that we have—in fact, it's more than an inference—is that the processors don't like the idea of fishers selling directly to the public because that takes away some of the product that they would otherwise be able to buy cheaply and sell at a dear price. Now you're nodding. Okay, everybody can nod. That's good. We'll just note for the record, if this is audio only, that people are nodding.

Are there fishers who are, if you like, in indentured service to the processors and cannot sell directly to the public?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Absolutely.

Mr. Andy Olson: Absolutely. That's one of the problems with some of the leasing structures and issues with the licences in the Pacific region, in that fishers are essentially employees of the fish company that gives them the money to go fishing. They're then beholden, and they have to sell the fish to them for whatever price they are willing to pay. They have no recourse, and in many instances they don't get paid until months down the line.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Go ahead, Mr. Askgaard.

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: Another aspect is that many of the licences are held by fishing companies, so that gives them a very strong position to wield influence and also set the price that those fishermen will take. Often the business model is that the fisherman owns the boat and the processor owns the licence.

I just wanted to come back to a question you had that I didn't get a chance to respond to. You wondered whether a fisherman could receive retribution from DFO in the case that they raise their heads, which is a serious accusation.

Well, I can tell you personally that one of the leaders of fisheries organizations was boarded recently in a way that was very aggressive. It was not in a way that he'd ever been boarded in 40 years. They jumped aboard his boat without asking. They went down into his hold to see whether he had any prawn tails there, and it wasn't very friendly at all—so that type of thing can occur on the ground.

Thank you for listening to me.

Mr. Ken Hardie: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): You have about two minutes and 10 seconds.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Oh, lovely.

In past studies we've looked at the tie-in between the owner-operator of a boat and the ownership of a licence.

Mr. Askgaard, you seem to be in the privileged position of having a licence and a boat, and so you're the model, as it would appear, on the east coast.

On the west coast, looking to Ms. Strobel and Mr. Olson, do you think it's the absence of owner-operator provisions that has allowed the current situation to develop the way it has?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Andy Olson: Yes. I think that plays a significant part in the challenges.

Fishing companies are the ones calling people to lease licences. It's often not fishermen. The goal is to control as much access to product as possible. Their interest is not in supporting fishermen.

Ms. Sonia Strobel: To answer that, at Skipper Otto we're often looking for more fishermen as we're growing, but they're often very cautious to talk with us or to work with us because if they are perceived to be selling some of their catch to us....

We don't own the licences. It's a very tough situation. They may not get ice. One of the ice-processing plants will refuse to ice their boat if they find out that they are trying to sell independently.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We've heard that when the processors ship product, some of it is in tubs, frozen. Is that true?

• (1800)

Mr. Andy Olson: Yes.

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Yes.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Is there any inspection of those tubs by DFO that you're aware of?

Mr. Andy Olson: No, because they become a CFIA problem after that.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We'll have to check with the CFIA to see what kinds of inspections they do.

Let's say that the tubs, as they're currently constituted....

Ms. Strobel, I appreciate your holding that tub up. It seemed to be fairly thick. There could be a couple of layers of prawns in there that might make it difficult to see very clearly what size they are. I can see the bottom layer, but the top one is obscured by the label.

Is it possible to redesign the tubs in such a way that just by picking it up, they can see exactly what's in it? That would blow this whole readily acceptable argument out of the water, so to speak.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

Give just a five-second answer, Ms. Strobel.

Ms. Sonia Strobel: What I have here is a one-pound tub. There are also smaller, half-pound tubs that are thinner. You can see almost every prawn in them, and it does take about two minutes to thaw one of these.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Ms. Strobel. Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

We'll now move to Madam Gill for six minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses, Ms. Strobel, Mr. Askgaard and Mr. Olson.

I must say that, although I am not surprised, I am still concerned by everything that has been said so far. You heard the representatives of the Fisheries and Oceans Department tell us, in summary, that fishers' representatives and not industry representatives asked that meetings be held, which is very different. That is what we were told and what I have understood, but I will look into this a bit further.

They also told us that no changes have been made. It's as if we were being told that, as elected members, we are carrying out a study that is absolutely useless and that nothing has ever happened.

My primary concern is for you. If we cannot get accurate information from the department as elected members, I don't even want to think about how you feel. I sympathize fully with you in this case. We will see if lies have been told or not.

By the way, I commend Ms. Strobel's courage, as she talked about the petition.

Moreover, the entire issue of territory is also a concern for me. I will talk to you about Quebec, but the same thing is happening in Canada. Territory is often considered to consist of only soil, rocks and trees, but the sea is also part of it.

You also talked about food sovereignty and land occupancy.

You brought up many issues that are extremely important to my mind. You raised a tremendous number of issues and I feel that the time set aside for this study should be extended. We should actually continue to work on this study.

I also commend the courage of Mr. Olson and Mr. Askgaard, who said two words that can frighten people: collusion and corruption. Of course, that also worries me as an elected member. Finally, I am concerned by all the losses suffered by industry.

What is more, the vertical integration of fishing is a concern for me, as I have heard the same thing about the processing industry in this committee.

I will let you conclude, as I have talked a lot. Usually, I time myself, but I did not do it this time. So I will let you expand on the issue and on Ms. Strobel's recommendations on legality, among other things. I would like to hear your recommendations and thoughts on what the committee should do, as it represents Canadians, and not industry.

[English]

Ms. Sonia Strobel: I really appreciate the opportunity to be heard here. I have told many of our members that I have renewed faith in the democratic process of our country because of what's been going on here in this committee, so I want to thank you all for listening. I think it's the first time that I have felt so heard in my life and in our work here.

I do think that it's important that we are talking about the ownership of licences and quotas on this coast. It is very different from what happens on the east coast. Because of the structure of ownership, we see the dismantling of our coastal communities. We see the wealth being siphoned away from coastal communities, from harvesters and from adjacent shoreside businesses. I think the spot prawn issue has brought attention to that issue.

I agree that this committee.... I would appreciate its further looking into that issue with regard to Canada's blue economy strategy. We have to think very carefully about who benefits from our blue economy and whether they're in line with our values as Canadians with regard to who we wish to support with those dollars.

Mr. Andy Olson: I think I would echo Sonia's words about giving fishers an opportunity to have a fair playing field so that they have an opportunity to fish and make a living so that they're supported and feel like they are supported the same way that industry is—"industry" being the large fish-processing companies that have

been making the lion's share of the profits from the seafood. It would be nice to be able to know that fishermen are going to get that same support through these types of processes.

I feel the same way as Sonia. Having participated in DFO processes for 10 years, I think this feels like it's something that hopefully will start to make some change that will be positive for fishers and for the communities that we work with and represent.

• (1805)

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: I'd like to address that question too.

When I started fishing, it was all owner-operators, and we saw the changes in management as quotas were instituted in the fisheries. It's really created a lot of problems with licence leasing and distortions of the market. I'm 65 and I have a fishing licence. It's time for me to turn it over to a young person, but it's too valuable for that person to afford, because it can be leased out.

I just would like to say that, yes, this is an issue that I'd like to see your committee pursue. It's a very important one.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Madame Gill. There are about 20 seconds left, or are you good?

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I will take full advantage of my remaining time and ask the following questions.

Is the situation related to licences easy for Mr. Askgaard?

Is it easier for other people?

Could certain individuals be supported by industry to obtain licences?

[English]

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: No, it's almost impossible for a young person to buy a licence.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Can they be obtained through a fisher?

[English]

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: Yes, for a fisherman. They're leasing licences. In one case, I know a guy who owns eight boats, and he leases—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): You go ahead. You have five seconds to finish up there, Mr. Askgaard.

Thank you.

Mr. Ivan Askgard: There's at least one guy who owns eight boats, and he gets a number of licences that he leases from first nations individuals. He puts those licences on a number of boats, and then he gets other people to fish them, so this one fellow has eight licences and doesn't own any of them. They were bought for first nations by the federal government, and then he wields that in that way. He also owns a part of a processing company.

There are some real distortions from the way fisheries used to operate, and they could probably operate better.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Askgard.

Thank you, Madame Gill. I appreciate that.

Now we will go to Mr. Johns.

I just have a note here. If time will allow it in the next round, I will allow a one-minute question for each party represented here to get one more question in for everyone before we wrap up.

Mr. Johns, you have six minutes or less. Thank you.

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

I want to thank the witnesses. I feel terrible about the injustice that you're enduring right now and the impact it's having on your families.

Ms. Strobel, you talked about the fact that there's not one plausible reason for the government to do what it's doing to you, for the DFO to be taking this action. We heard earlier, at the previous part of this committee, from the DFO officials that they had no science that could back up any conservation concerns. They didn't even have data on how many tubs.... They decided it was, potentially, a 10% to 20% increase in tubbing, and their backup was that they had two violations a year, on average, for the whole coast.

Can you put that into perspective, Ms. Strobel, with regard to the scale? How many prawns or how many trips would that be per vessel out there? Can you give us a glimpse of how these two violations a year affect the sector and of the impact they're having on conservation?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Johns.

We're talking about thousands of trips. We're talking about thousands and thousands of trips over the course of the season, so two violations are so infinitesimally small that it's not even statistically really relevant, compared to....

Mr. Morrissey used the phrase "the proverbial sledgehammer to kill a fly". It makes no sense at all, especially compared to all of the actual conservation issues that are out there.

There are species we need to be protecting. We're talking about Fraser River sockeye salmon and things like that. Why on earth would we put this much attention and energy, with all the things we'd like to be spending our time doing, into talking about two violations for undersized prawns? Undersized prawns already have been illustrated not to be a conservation issue. It makes no sense at all.

• (1810)

Mr. Gord Johns: The government is citing that they've worked with industry and they've come up with the interim solution that three tubs can be thawed. That's my understanding. If there's an undersized prawn, then they can go further into the vessel and start inspecting. My understanding is this proposal was brought to government by industry in February, and it was flatly rejected.

Can you share a bit of the insight on how that consultation process is going?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Yes, that's correct.

The consultation process, again, was with the Pacific Prawn Fishermen's Association, and the issue was only brought to the attention of the rest of us in the industry on March 3, when they realized it wasn't going to go away. When we asked them why we didn't know about this sooner, they said that in February, when it first came up, they thought it was so ludicrous that it couldn't possibly actually materialize and that it was based on nothing. It just didn't make any sense. They had obtained a legal opinion to say that this didn't make any sense. They truly thought it would disappear.

At that time, all DFO's responses to PPFA—because they wouldn't speak to any of the rest of us and only spoke with PPFA—were that they were standing by their assertion that tubbing prawns and freezing them at sea was illegal, effective immediately, and they stood by that until this most recent statement by the minister, which only conceded that they would put into place some measures to allow it to happen this year, with no commitment for future years. Of course, this is cold comfort for fishing families who have, as you know, leased or bought licences for so much money. It's not possible to build a business around one year's confidence.

There was really no consultation, or certainly not with those of us on the ground.

Mr. Gord Johns: If the interim measures for this year, let's call it, were in place for the future, everybody would be fine. That is my understanding.

Ms. Sonia Strobel: That would be fine, and what I don't understand is why measuring the three tubs is okay for one year, but why that's not okay—

Mr. Gord Johns: Totally.

On the PPFA, you talked about the legal brief that said it wasn't an issue. If the PPFA, the union, the Prawn Industry Caucus and all the prawn tubbers didn't raise it, who did raise it, if they said industry raised it? Was it the exporters?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: I found it very strange when I heard the witness say that this was at the request of fishermen or the industry. I've seen absolutely no evidence of that. In fact, all we've been told was that it was actually C and P officers who brought it up in a conversation around traceability and labels on prawn tubs. It was not brought up by industry or fishermen.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Askgaard, you talked about the DFO onboarding the vessel of a 40-year fisher.

Can you talk about the government saying that their efforts are to inform and educate, and how that's going? We hear about people being blacklisted and targeted. Do you think the fishers in the prawn sector are feeling that right now?

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: I can't testify for most fishermen, but when you do raise your head, as I am here now, yes, there may be some repercussions.

What was the other part of your question, Mr. Johns?

Mr. Gord Johns: I think that's it. We're all seeing this.

My last question is to Mr. Olson.

First, I want to thank you for the work you've done with the Tse-shaht and Nuchatlaht people. I bought prawns last night from Tse-shaht.

You talked about the industry and making sure there's adequate consultation. Now the prawn advisory board only has the PPFA, and it doesn't have the Prawn Industry Caucus. That's my understanding. Can you talk about the impact of not having indigenous fishers and other fishers on the advisory board so that there's a full consultation process in place?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): You have time for a quick answer, Mr. Olson.

Mr. Andy Olson: Yes. I think even in this species-specific fishing industry, about 50% control of the licences is held by first nations at this point. Their licences are used for boats on PPFA, so fishers are not fully represented. Fishers are not represented fully by the PPFA. It's more of an industry-based and processor-based group, not a harvester-based organization.

• (1815)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Johns, and thank you, Mr. Olson.

I know we're getting short on time, but is everyone okay for a lightning round here, with one quick final question from each party represented? If you can keep it to 45 seconds to a maximum of a minute, it would be helpful.

Thank you, witnesses, for hanging in. We're going to do the lightning round now.

I'll start with you, Mr. Mazier, for one minute, and preferably less.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses today.

This has been great testimony. It's nice to hear that you feel you're being heard.

I'm still really taken aback by how you feel from the repercussions of what you're doing in standing up for yourselves. I can't get over that, and in Canada, of all places.

Do you believe that DFO and the minister should completely reverse this regulatory reinterpretation and return to the interpretation that was used for the past 50 years? That question is for every one of you.

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Yes, absolutely. That seems to be the most logical solution.

Mr. Andy Olson: Yes.

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: Yes.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Do I still have time—?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Mazier. Good job. I appreciate that.

We'll go on to Mr. Hardie for one lightning-round question.

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

Per Mr. Johns' comments, it wasn't the government that did this; it was the DFO. I think you can sense from the government representatives here that we're just as aghast as everybody else, and have been all along. The rogues do this to us from time to time.

Does anybody have any information about what the DFO would have you do next year when it's time for the prawn fishing season, if you can't tub? Has there been any discussion, any way forward, laid out by them so far?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: No. There's been nothing whatsoever.

Mr. Andy Olson: No.

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: No.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Hardie. That was very good. Everyone is doing well.

Now, Madam Gill, you have one lightning-round question.

[*Translation*]

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

Last time they testified, Fisheries and Oceans representatives told us that no change had been made because the fishing is illegal.

I would like to hear from Ms. Strobel, Mr. Olson and Mr. Askgaard briefly on this.

[English]

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Madam Gill, I was as surprised as you were with this comment about no change. There is clearly change. If there was no change, we wouldn't be here having this conversation.

Mr. Andy Olson: I agree. I think that if there had been no change, everything would have been fine. The fishing would have proceeded as usual, and more people would probably have an opportunity to get prawns in Canada rather than having them sent somewhere else.

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: This was a big change and big news in the industry, and it caused a lot of concern. We were caught flat-footed and were shocked by this change in interpretation of the existing regulation.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Askgaard. Thank you, Madam Gill.

Now, for our last lightning-round question, we have Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I have a question for all of you.

What we've heard in the last two hours, along with the lack of information from the department, is deeply disturbing.

Now, I mean no disrespect to Mr. Hardie, because I have huge respect for him, but I guess my question is to the witnesses.

Do you believe the minister should get a free pass, given the testimony we just heard, on not intervening immediately and backtracking tomorrow and calling off her officials, so that in future you can count on this government, and all governments, to have your back? Basically the question is this: What exactly needs to happen, outside of thawing the tubs if they need to inspect?

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Go ahead.

Mr. Andy Olson: I think that has to happen for the fishers to understand that they are supported. Processing companies and shareholding foreign-owned corporations that hold licences and control the industry and make the lion's share can't continue.

We can't have this continue the way it is. It has to change, and unless we can start seeing something happening.... Fishers are exhausted.

Ms. Sonia Strobel: I think that unless fishers see the backing from the minister... Unfortunately, a lot of fishers lump it all together. DFO to them is government; it's the whole thing. I think it's really important that a distinction is made here.

There is power for the minister to rein in these actions of the DFO. That's actually where the power lies, and so we need to see that action taken to have confidence.

• (1820)

Mr. Andy Olson: In Pacific regions.

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: We need certainty. We own packaging supplies and we have markets; we need certainty on fisheries as soon as possible.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you.

Thank you to each of the witnesses. Thank you for your valuable testimony, and thank you to each of the committee members for

working with this rookie chair here this evening. Everyone's been so helpful, and I appreciate that.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here this evening. We have a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of, so the witnesses are free to leave and be on about their afternoon or evening. We again thank you for being a part of our Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Mr. Andy Olson: Thank you.

Ms. Sonia Strobel: Thank you so much for having us.

Mr. Ivan Askgaard: Thank you so much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you.

To the rest of the committee here, there's a quick housekeeping matter. The chair has asked that we make sure we take care of this. It is in regard to our study budget, which was sent around to everybody yesterday. We need approval on that budget. I believe it's around \$1,250. It covers the costs associated with the current study.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I move that we accept the budget as presented, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Okay. Are all in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

I think we have unanimous approval, so that's great.

I see Mr. Arnold has his hand up. Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

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

Prior to the completion of the salmon study and prior to the constituency break, we discussed having the minister appear—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Just a second, Mr. Arnold. Just make sure the boom is closed. There's a lot of background noise and I think it's hard for our interpreters, so try again.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay, and I will speak more slowly. I had to log on here in the lobby.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): It's hard for people to hear, yes, for sure.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I'm in a quieter area now. Is this better, Mr. Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Yes, we can hear you okay. I'll check with interpretation and I think everything is okay.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: No, Mr. Chair, the interpreter is signalling to me that the sound quality is not good enough for interpretation.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Okay.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I don't think Mel has the actual microphone selected on his computer from his headset. He's probably got the laptop—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Do you want to check your settings there? You may have just a different setting.

Mr. Arnold, if you're okay, I could go to Mr. Calkins, if you like.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Let's try this now. Is that better? Yes, I'm seeing nodding heads. I apologize.

When we were getting near the end of the Pacific salmon study, and prior to the constituency week, I believe we discussed having the minister appear. It was agreed by the committee that it wasn't possible to have her appear before the constituency week and still be able to get a draft out and complete the study before the end of the session, so we delayed having the minister appear.

I believe we all agreed that we would have the minister appear after the constituency week. I don't see that in the calendar that has been circulated. Can the clerk clarify that the minister has been invited, and when she would be appearing?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): I see Mr. Beech has his hand up, but I guess the clerk can clarify.

Is that correct, Mr. Beech, or do you want to add a comment here?

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): My understanding is that the minister is booked for Wednesday, June 2, but maybe the clerk can confirm.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): I'm getting thumbs up, so we have confirmation for Wednesday, June 2.

Thank you, Mr. Arnold, for the question, and thank you, Mr. Beech, for the clarification.

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

I know that it's not my job to tell people who they are or what they are or what they can do, but Mr. Hardie indicated that there were government members at the committee here today when he was laying the blame squarely at the feet of DFO. I just want to remind colleagues that there is actually nobody here from the executive branch at all appearing before the committee, and that not even the parliamentary secretary is a member of the executive.

I know what it's like to be a government caucus MP, but I think we should be careful, and these are just my feelings and sentiments. I didn't want to reprimand Mr. Hardie in front of witnesses, but I think we just need to be careful about who we are and how we identify ourselves and be accurate in how we portray ourselves in front of witnesses. We are simply members of Parliament, whether we're a member of the government caucus or not a member of the government caucus, and we shouldn't be portraying ourselves as executive members or members of government.

I think Mr. Johns was completely bang on when he said that the minister, somebody who could make the executive decision, would be more than appropriate to take action. I wish we had the executive powers of government sometimes as a committee, and then we would get some of these things done.

If somebody on the government side of the table were to prepare to move the appropriate motion, you would have my full support.

• (1825)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Richard Bragdon): Thank you, Mr. Calkins. I see no further hands raised.

I want to thank everyone for being a part of tonight's meeting. Thank you for your patience with the rookie chair. I appreciate all of your kindness throughout this meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>