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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1640)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 34 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on April 28, 2021, the committee is meeting on the study of the state of the Pacific salmon.

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 to alert the chair.

Before speaking, please click on the microphone to unmute yourself. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself.

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

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for today. We have the Honourable Bernadette Jordan, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. With the minister, I believe we have a number of departmental officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Minister, I don't know if you want to actually recognize who's here with you. Then we'll start your opening remarks.

You can proceed when you're ready.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is great to be here with all of you again. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you all today.

First of all, I would like to acknowledge that I'm coming to you from Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kma'ki, the traditional unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

Joining me are several of my officials, including Timothy Sargent, the deputy minister of Fisheries and Oceans; Dr. Niall O'Dea, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic policy; Jean-Guy Forgeron, senior assistant deputy minister for fisheries and harbour management; Rebecca Reid, regional director general, Pacific region; Arran McPherson, assistant deputy minister, ecosystems and ocean science; Alexandra Dostal, assistant deputy minister of aquatic ecosystems; Hugo Pagé, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer; and Andy Smith, deputy commissioner, shipbuilding and material.

Given that this is my first appearance since budget 2021 was tabled in the House, I would like to talk about some of the investments that are specific to Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Today I will discuss the budget and focus on the key themes of conserving and protecting our marine resources and supporting coastal communities and economies. Over the next five years, DFO and the Coast Guard will receive significant investments that will allow the department to continue its important work in these areas.

I will also be happy to take your questions on the topic of Pacific salmon.

Our government knows that the health of our oceans is intrinsically linked to the health of our economy and the health of our people. One way we can conserve and protect our marine resources is by establishing a network of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures. MPAs are proven to be a way to help aquatic species, habitats and ecosystems recover from human-induced stresses such as overfishing, natural resource extraction and pollution.

When our government took office in 2015, less than 1% of our oceans were protected. Today that figure stands at almost 14%, with a goal of increasing this to 25% by 2025, working towards 30% by 2030. To help Canada meet its ambitious marine conservation targets, budget 2021 earmarked \$976.8 million over the next five years. This investment will be used to expand our network of MPAs on all three coasts by working closely with indigenous, provincial and territorial partners and local communities to better protect and manage vulnerable areas. Ultimately, this work will benefit the broader marine environment, coastal communities and local economies.

Budget 2021 also signals a strong federal response to address the serious decline of Pacific salmon on the west coast. Despite extensive conservation measures in recent years, climate change and threats caused by humans, including deteriorating habitat; contaminants; illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; changes in how land and water are used and international fishing pressures have negatively affected Pacific salmon at every stage of their life cycle.

Currently, 50 different Pacific salmon populations are being considered for listing under the Species at Risk Act or are pending assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. The reasons are numerous, complex and incredibly concerning. When unforeseen events such as the Big Bar landslide occur, the risks to vulnerable salmon stocks are magnified even further. Bold, sustained and coordinated action is needed to stabilize, protect and rebuild Pacific salmon for the communities that depend on sustainable fisheries and the ecosystems that support them.

Last April, as many of you know, our government announced a historic investment in Pacific salmon. This unprecedented \$647-million investment is the single most transformative investment the government has ever made towards saving salmon. It is aimed at stopping the declines now, while helping to rebuild populations over the longer term. Our government will be taking a collaborative approach that focuses on strengthening partnerships with provinces and territories, first nations, industries, organizations and others who are already doing so much to protect and conserve salmon.

We must bring key partners to the table and identify and prioritize actions to support healthy salmon. I know this investment comes on the heels of the committee's study on this important issue. I want to thank the members for their work on this file. I look forward to hearing your recommendations. I'm confident that this investment will provide a coordinated response to help the recovery of Pacific salmon to support the many communities, harvesters and businesses that rely on the health of these stocks.

Mr. Chair, budget 2021 will give my department the financial means it needs to meet our marine conservation targets, address declines of Pacific salmon and protect aquatic species at risk. It will also provide the Coast Guard with additional funding to prevent and mitigate environmental incidents on the water through an extension of the emergency towing vessels located on Canada's west coast.

Budget 2021 will also help coastal communities build back better and stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes investing significantly in small craft harbours.

• (1645)

In 2019, the commercial fishing industry had landings valued at almost \$3.7 billion and employed more than 45,000 workers. Even during the hardships of the past year, fish and seafood were among the largest single food commodities exported by Canada. Budget 2021 includes \$300 million to repair, renew and replace infrastructure at small craft harbours over the next two years. This will help shore up the future for the industry by providing safe, functional harbours while at the same time creating well-paid jobs for Canadians.

We are also strengthening our commitment to marine safety for indigenous coastal communities by ensuring that communities can get the boats and equipment they need to keep people safe in local waters.

Mr. Chair, these investments in coastal communities are a down payment on our future that will pay dividends in the months and years ahead for Canada while the world recovers from this global pandemic.

Whether we're talking about conserving and protecting our marine resources or supporting coastal communities and economies, all of this work is interconnected. Ultimately, budget 2021 is an investment in Canadian families and communities. These are investments that underscore how our nation's economic prosperity and the long-term health of our environment can and must go hand in hand.

As minister, I'm confident that the funding I outlined today will position Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard to deliver on key priorities that contribute to a stronger maritime economy, healthier oceans and more resilient coastal communities.

Now I'm pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, and again, thank you for your appearance here today and to the group of staff members you brought along with you.

Before I go to questions, I would like to welcome Mr. Trudel back to this committee. As well, I know Mr. Zimmer is filling in for somebody, and he's in the committee room, so I welcome Bob to this committee.

I'd also like to give a big welcome to a hero of mine to some degree, Mr. Simms, a fellow Newfoundland MP and someone who has cheered this committee and been a part of this committee for quite some time. It's good to have him back to fill in for one of the members today. I'm sure he'll be a great contributor to the debate as we go forward this evening.

I will now go to Mr. Bragdon for six minutes or less.

Go ahead, please, for your question.

• (1650)

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

Welcome, Minister. It's good to see you today.

My first question, Minister, is that no matter the issue, no matter what we study, what fisheries we look into and which coast the witnesses are coming from, we hear again and again that you and your department have completely neglected to consult with them properly before making industry-changing decisions. This creates tremendous instability at a time when we already have great uncertainty with COVID-19. This continued instability in their lives causes questions about their future livelihoods. It's hard to make future decisions about an area they are passionate about and have served and want to continue to make their living in.

Why do you and this department continue to insist on keeping those most affected by your decisions away from the decision-making table? We heard this whether from indigenous stakeholders or the commercial fishery stakeholders and whether it related to the prawn harvesters, east coast lobster fishers or fish farmers in B.C. There's been a tremendous echo from coast to coast regarding the lack of true consultation or being part of the process and the decision-making process and finding out only after the fact.

Minister, do you have any explanation for this?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to say that I would disagree with that assertion. We consult widely with a number of different stakeholders as we make decisions. We also make decisions based on science.

Over the past year I have met countless times with first nations communities, with the industry, with commercial harvesters, with stakeholder groups and with environmental organizations. Actually, probably one of the largest parts of my job is meeting with stakeholders and listening to their concerns and their comments. A lot of the policy we develop comes from those consultations.

I will also say that we do meet regularly with provincial and territorial partners with regard to fisheries management decisions. However, many of the decisions we have to make are based on the science regarding where the stocks are and what is happening within the sector.

For example, during COVID-19 we had some really tough decisions to make with regard to the opening of seasons—

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you—

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: —but we made sure we were able to do that, because we listened to the harvesters.

Thank you.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you, Minister.

We have a lot of questions we want to cover with you today.

For example, our prawn harvesters in B.C. have been quite negatively impacted by a recent interpretation of what was already an existing regulation. That change of interpretation meant unbelievable instability for those harvesters and a lot of questions. We heard overwhelming testimony related to that. They don't understand the basis for the decision or why it came about. We really couldn't find a whole lot of clarity regarding the rationale behind that decision.

One of the things that was always being said was that the interpretation meant that the product had to be readily available to be in-

spected. Well, if I were able to produce for you prawns so that you could check their size and number within two minutes or less, would you consider that “readily available”?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I would say that we have actually engaged with industry, which is why we were able to come up with a solution for this season. That is why we are continuing to engage with them to make sure that we find the right way forward for the prawn tubbing issue. You know, this is something I am committed to making sure that we have solved, and we are actively engaged in making sure that we do that.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Minister, who decided that we should reinterpret the regulation? Was it you or the department?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: This is actually a regulation that has been in place for many years. As I said, we recognized that it was a challenge for the harvesters this year. That is why we worked with them to find the solution. We are now continuing on with that engagement to find the long-term solution for the harvesters, because we know how important this industry is and we know how important this issue is, and we are committed to making sure it gets solved.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you, Minister, because they've been very clear that they need to make sure that certainty comes from the minister and comes from your department so that they can make long-term plans. The ambiguity is causing further uncertainty, and temporary measures won't suffice.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I would say—

Mr. Richard Bragdon: On to the other issue—

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I'm sorry. Can I answer that?

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Sure, quickly.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I would say that we are going to find a long-term solution in collaboration with the industry.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you.

As a result of your December 17 decision regarding the future of aquaculture in the Discovery Islands, more than seven million healthy juvenile Atlantic salmon have been euthanized and layoffs have started towards an ultimate loss of about 1,500 jobs. How does this align with the government's blue economy strategy that you have so fervently promoted?

Furthermore, did you consult with your provincial counterparts, which we heard testimony from here, in advance of this decision's being rolled out? Did you consult in advance with the first nations communities that were being directly affected by this decision so that they could have meaningful transition plans in place when this decision was enacted?

• (1655)

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I will say that this was a very difficult decision to make. It was not one I took lightly. I recognized that it was a very challenging decision for many people. I will also say that the decision was made after there was consultation with the seven first nations in that area, recognizing that aquaculture is extremely important to British Columbia—well, to many coastal communities—and recognizing that there is a way forward with it. However, we want to make sure that it is also in keeping with the first nations territories that did not feel that this was a good fit for them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bragdon.

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

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

It's good to see you, minister and officials.

For the longest time, there's certainly been a strong feeling that having the DFO responsible for aquaculture runs in direct conflict to its obligation to employ the precautionary principle, because there has been so much evidence that suggests that aquaculture operations have been harmful, especially to some of our salmon runs. Have you made any progress on the long-standing recommendation from the Cohen commission to get responsibility for aquaculture away from the DFO?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: First of all, I would say that I have full confidence in the science that the DFO produces. There is a robust process in place when it comes to the peer-review process for aquaculture. All decisions that are made are based on the best available science, using the precautionary approach, and the aquaculture industry, while undergoing a transition on the west coast, is extremely important right across the country. It supports thousands of jobs.

The DFO has immense expertise. It makes sure that it is working in collaboration with the industry as well. I have also begun work on things like the an aquaculture act, which will provide clarity to the industry. My parliamentary secretary, Terry Beech, has been doing consultations with regard to the 2025 transition commitment. You know, we're going to continue to work with industry. We're going to continue to base our decisions on science, and I have full confidence in the department's science process.

Mr. Ken Hardie: With regard to the major investment in Pacific salmon that was included in budget 2021, to what extent will the DFO be responsible for basically managing the programs that this funding will be supporting?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I'm very proud of the fact that our government has made this historic investment of \$647 million in wild Pacific salmon, recognizing that this is the largest investment to help this species. However, we need to act in partnership and in collaboration with the Province of British Columbia, with Yukon, with first nations, with industry, with environmental organizations, with anglers. There are a number of groups that have great expertise in salmon. We need to bring it together, find the path forward and make a strategic investment where we do the strategic work. However, I think bringing it all together under one umbrella is going to be critical.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Explain, if you can, the role of the salmon centre of expertise. That was specifically noted in the budget as something you intend to create. What will its role be?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Of course, we have not rolled out the salmon strategy yet. We are hopefully going to be doing that in the coming weeks, at least the first phase, which will be a consultation process to find out what the best ways forward are.

The centre of expertise is looking at the many people who work on the ground with salmon, who know the populations and the challenges they're facing, and we need to bring all of that under one umbrella. We need to make sure that we're not all working at cross-purposes. Everybody has the same goal, and that is to protect, conserve and grow the salmon populations. What we need to make sure we're doing is that we're all doing it in the same direction.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have one final question, and I haven't seen the chair lean forward in his usual fashion to tell me I'm over.

In the last Parliament we brought forward a fairly major study on basically sharing the wealth that comes out of the water. Just recently here in this committee we've been looking at some of the changes of ownership on the east coast. Out on the west coast there's been a long-standing call to try to identify the beneficial ownership of things like licences and quota, because the suspicion over and above the suspicion of money laundering out there is that a lot of our common resource is actually being owned and operated offshore.

• (1700)

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: First of all, I want to thank the committee for the work they did on that study. I think it was an extremely important one to recognize the challenges being faced with regard to ownership on the west coast.

This year on the east coast we were able to enshrine owner-operator in legislation. It has taken many years for us to get to that point. We have started work on the west coast with regard to questions around foreign ownership and things like that, recognizing that DFO is currently reviewing the existing foreign ownership restrictions and gathering data. It does take time. I often say it's like unravelling a very tangled knot, but we are committed to doing that work. I believe that when we responded to the committee report, we indicated that this is something we are moving forward with right now.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have one last question, then. What is the state of our assessment of salmon stocks in British Columbia? Do we have up-to-date assessments of those stocks?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Salmon are in serious decline. I think we are seeing some populations as low as 90% down in some areas. We have almost 50 different types of salmon that are on the possible species at risk listing, so there is no time to waste in making sure that we find the right path forward.

I'm not sure, but if I could turn to my deputy, he may have more numbers with regard to what the salmon stock numbers are.

The Chair: We'll have to get that information either in print or as we go through this evening's questioning.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Trudel, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, welcome to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. It's a pleasure to speak with you today. In your opening remarks, you talked a lot about partnerships with industry. I feel that's important. As a resource, Atlantic salmon are generally doing well in Quebec. The Quebec model is quite exemplary in terms of how efficiently it's managed.

When the director general of the Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique appeared before the committee two weeks ago, she talked about working with communities and fishers as well as sharing expertise, which I feel is very important. It might also serve to inform how Pacific salmon are managed in British Columbia.

Do you and your department plan to work with experts and communities, particularly in Quebec, but also elsewhere in the world, to see what's being done to ensure the future of the species?

[*English*]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I will say that we recognize the job that Quebec has done with regard to salmon and their management of it, although we are seeing real declines in Atlantic salmon on the east coast as well and we know that more work needs to be done there. That's why we put in place an Atlantic salmon initiative in 2019 and 2020.

Of course, we are always open to learning from others, recognizing that the Province of Quebec has done a very good job with salmon. I have actually been in touch with Minister Lamontagne in Quebec with regard to a number of the projects that he has on his front, and he often talks about the salmon strategies there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you.

As we know, jobs in the Pacific salmon industry largely depend on protecting the resource. If it's not adequately protected, people are going to be negatively affected, and that will include a loss of income and jobs.

How do you plan to protect jobs, Pacific salmon stocks and the ecosystem at the same time? How do you reconcile those three things, which I believe are truly interdependent?

Do you have a plan to protect jobs, the resource and the ecosystem?

• (1705)

[*English*]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: We have now put \$647 million on the table to protect wild Pacific salmon, recognizing what a critical state they are in. The last thing I think we need right now is another

study. There have been multiple studies done with regard to salmon and how we best move forward. What we are doing now is putting money behind the initiatives that we know will work, including things like the B.C. SRIF program, in which we will be doubling the investment. That is a habitat restoration plan.

All of the things we put forward are actually going to support job creation as well, recognizing that this has to be an “all hands on deck” approach. The salmon are not in good shape and the stocks are in serious decline, but I'm very proud that we're putting money into making sure that we deal with this problem head-on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you.

I'd like to know how the consultations went before the budget was tabled. Several witnesses who appeared before us mentioned that the department didn't consult with them before announcing how much was going to be invested.

Why did the government decide to consult with the community after tabling the budget, and not beforehand?

[*English*]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: We had a number of conversations with a number of different organizations and groups, as well as the provinces, territories and first nations communities, around the importance of wild Pacific salmon, not only as a resource for commercial harvesters but for recreational purposes. These salmon drive an economy on the west coast, and they are also culturally significant to first nations communities. I would say that in pretty much every meeting I had with British Columbians, the state of the wild Pacific salmon stocks was the priority. We heard countless times, over and over again, that we needed to have a full-court press to make sure that we are doing everything we possibly could. That was one of the reasons we worked so hard to make sure that it was in the budget. I'm very proud that there is \$647 million to address the concerns we're seeing in those declining stocks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: If I may, I will just reiterate, people in the community expressed feelings about not being consulted before the budget was tabled. They wondered why they were consulted after the fact.

Do you have an answer for them?

[*English*]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I have met with countless stakeholders on the west coast, as well as with first nations. I have met continually with the Province of British Columbia on this issue. I have met with environmental organizations, with anglers and with industry. I would say that we have done an awful lot of consulting when it comes to what needed to be addressed in a wild Pacific salmon strategy.

I will also say that we have actually had very good feedback from pretty much everyone who is involved in preserving and conserving salmon. They're very happy to see that this money is coming to actually put some work into making sure that we do what we have to do.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

[English]

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

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Minister, since I last checked three years ago, your Liberal government and the Harper Conservatives have spent over \$19 million just in legal fees fighting the Nuu-chah-nulth people in court and denying their fishing rights. For the third time, on April 19, the higher court reaffirmed the rights of these nations to viable commercial fisheries.

Will your government and the Prime Minister finally back up your commitments to reconciliation and affirm that this government will not appeal the most recent ruling? We know you have to decide within the next couple of weeks. Will your government actually get on with the implementation of their rights so that their fishers can get back on the water and contribute to our coastal economy?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I would say that Canada has been working collaboratively with the five Nuu-chah-nulth nations to advance reconciliation in the areas of collaborative governance, increased fishing access and community-based fisheries. We signed an incremental agreement with the five nations in September 2019, and we continue to work closely with them on their comprehensive reconciliation agreement.

Of course, we want to make sure that we see first nations out on the water. We are currently, as you know, Mr. Johns, reviewing the court decision, and we'll have more to say on that—

• (1710)

Mr. Gord Johns: I appreciate that.

Minister, it takes a lot of documents to prepare an appeal. You would have a good idea now of whether you're going to take that ruling on and appeal it. I'm not asking this question because the Nuu-chah-nulth are satisfied with what's happening or not happening at the table. I'm asking you a question: Are you going to respect the courts instead of continuing to spend taxpayers' money fighting indigenous people in court?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: We are still reviewing the decision. We are looking at it. We will have more to say on it in the near future. Our government and my department have been working very diligently to make sure that we can get fishers out on the water.

Mr. Gord Johns: While we're talking about indigenous fishers, do you have a safety plan in place to protect Mi'kmaq fishers who are afraid right now? They've told me that they are afraid to go out to exercise their right to a moderate livelihood because your government has failed to protect them. Do you have a plan in place to protect them?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: You know, this is an issue that is extremely challenging. There is no question that it's complex. Nobody wants to see a repeat of what happened last year with first nations

on the east coast exercising their moderate livelihood right. We of course will have C and P officers on the water. We will also have the Coast Guard. We will also have RCMP officers who deployed to that area if needed. These measures are all put in place to protect all fishers and make sure that people are able to work safely.

Mr. Gord Johns: I don't think that's giving them the assurances that they need.

Minister, you were asked earlier about the public data registry that would show who owns the quota of fisheries on the west coast and sharing the benefits. Why has that information not been released? This has been a couple of years in the works. This is really important. We want to know who owns the quota, and we also want to know about foreign ownership. It's not just about quota. You're seeing how foreign owners are creeping in on the processing side. We heard that with Royal Greenland at the committee the other day.

What are you going to do to address the issue of foreign ownership of quota and processing in our country? It is a huge economic leakage, and it's having a huge impact on coastal communities.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: As I said earlier, this is not an easy thing to untangle. There are many different webs that you have to unwind to get to where ownership is. I'm going to turn to my deputy to see if he has anything to add, but I know that this is ongoing work within the department. It is something that we committed to doing after we received the committee report, but Deputy Sargent...

Mr. Gord Johns: I'll save it for your deputy, because we actually want to see results. I want to make sure that it is a priority of your government.

In the information provided by conservation and protection at committee, we heard from them that there's an average of two violations a year for the retention of undersized prawns, that the regulation of non-retention of undersized prawns is not a conservation measure, and that the two and a half minutes to thaw a tub of prawns can rationally be considered to make them "readily available" or "readily determined". Are you prepared to authorize the harvest community to continue to freeze their catches in the manner that they've been doing for the past 50 years, which has been demonstrated by precedent as well, as a previous DFO lead prawn manager explained, and has been approved by conservation and protection as being in accordance with their existing regulations?

Everybody's dumbfounded on why you haven't interceded, especially given the testimony that we heard at committee that there just wasn't justification.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: As I said earlier, we have actually put in place something for this year. We are continuing to work with the industry to determine whether or not that is something that can continue into the future. We will make sure that this is done hand in hand with the industry, but I will give you my commitment right now to making sure that we solve this issue.

Mr. Gord Johns: Minister, they need to hear from you soon, because your department is losing their confidence. They want to see that you're in charge of that department, because there was no good reason for that decision to be made, and it had such an impact on those fishers' lives. I'm hoping to see an announcement to correct things and redress the situation, and we're encouraging you to come out with one very soon.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: As I have said, Mr. Johns, the decision will be made in collaboration with the industry, but I am very much committed to solving this issue.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

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

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

I thank the minister for appearing at committee today. It's been a long time since you've appeared at this committee.

Minister, who is ultimately responsible for leading DFO?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: That would be me.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Are all of the fisheries decisions you make based on science?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Science would be the primary driver of the decisions that we make, but there are other considerations that are taken into account.

Mr. Mel Arnold: As much as I know you want us to be excited about the funding announced, the committee has heard repeatedly that the resources need to be paired with the right plans and actions to restore Pacific salmon. The state of Pacific salmon today shows your government's approach over the past five and a half years has failed to the point that the committee has been warned of impending collapses and extinctions. The salmonid enhancement program is chronically underfunded, and the strategic salmon health initiative is lapsing because resources have not been provided.

Why do you refuse to provide the resources needed for proven and essential work like these initiatives?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I would say that we have actually, as a government, done a great deal with regard to salmon enhancement. There is more that needs to be done, and I could not agree with you more that we need to do it in collaboration with the organizations that work on the ground in these really important areas. We are committed to doing that.

That's one reason that the salmon strategy we will be putting forward will be done in collaboration with the province, the territory, with first nations, with environmental organizations, with industry and with anglers.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It's interesting that you say you'll be working with all of these groups, because in 2018, your government worked with the B.C. government, first nations, academics, industry and others in developing a science advisory report that followed the emergency assessment of Fraser steelhead. I have three questions on this.

First, are you aware that DFO unilaterally diluted the conclusions of the emergency assessment and issued a science advisory report with conclusions that were not scientifically defensible?

As well, what actions have you taken to ensure that this assault on intergovernmental co-operation and scientific process is investigated and prevented in the future?

Finally, how can Canadians trust you and your department to make impartial, science-based decisions when your officials discarded the science in order to protect the status quo, rather than protecting fish on the brink of extinction?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Our government has made extremely difficult decisions when it comes to fisheries management. We've also based our decisions on science. I will stand firmly behind our process with regard to the peer-reviewed science that we used to make our decisions. Management decisions are often very difficult because they, of course, impact livelihoods—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Those management decisions disregarded the science that was provided, the professional science, and your department discarded it in order to make another decision.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I would say, sir, that because of previous cuts that we have seen from the previous government, DFO science was challenged. We have been working very hard to make sure that we are able to invest in science again. We are making sure that we have the right tools in place to make these very difficult decisions.

I will say that this government is committed to making sure that we take that very seriously and that we make sure those decisions are based on peer-reviewed science within the department.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Again, I will say that your department manipulated the science and provided a report that diluted the science that was there.

I want to move on.

Minister, the Adams River, in my riding of North Okanagan—Shuswap, was once known as the richest 300 acres in the world because of the sockeye and other salmon that used to spawn and hatch there.

For years we've seen continuing salmon declines, and your status quo management is not working. Your actions and inactions in this year alone have hurt British Columbians and the families and communities they support. Your Discovery Islands decision was announced with no plan for the hundreds of workers it will affect. By your sudden regulatory reinterpretation, 600 B.C. prawn harvesters had their livelihoods put on notice, along with 9,000 British Columbians who depend on a public fishery for their workforce and employment, because you have again rejected the proposal for mark-selective fisheries. Juvenile wild Pacific salmon continue to be obliterated by pinnipeds, yet you refuse to accept proposals for their management.

Despite a mandate from your Prime Minister, you've also failed to make—

- (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. I'm sorry, but you're out of time.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Madam Minister, thank you for being with us.

Caraget Bay, Chaleur Bay and the Gulf of St. Lawrence are right in front of me. As you know, the waterways in that region are used by fishers of lobster, crab, herring and several other species.

I'd like to say thank you, because this year, as a result of your action and all of our discussions, Coast Guard ships, hovercraft, were able to provide icebreaker service. In my constituency, contracts have been signed with third parties, such as Ocean Group and ECO Technologies, and that has allowed crab fishers, even lobster fishers, to start the season earlier, which made it possible to limit interaction with Atlantic right whales. That has paid off. In fact, the quota has been almost fully met.

There are still challenges. Some areas are closed right now, which is causing problems.

Madam Minister, thank you again. I'd like you to remind those who are watching or listening, and even people in my community, why we're protecting right whales. A lot of markets are at stake and not protecting them could have significant consequences.

I'd like you to talk about that for us, Madam Minister.

[*English*]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I would first like to thank the harvesters in your area who every day... I know it can be challenging when we have to shut down an area because of a whale sighting, but we've been working hand in hand with industry to make sure that there is the least disruption possible when it comes to making sure we are protecting the North Atlantic right whale.

Our government has been committed to making sure we do everything we possibly can. There are very few of these creatures left. I think there are fewer than 100 at this point.

It's important for us to make sure we do it for a number of reasons, not only because it's the right thing to do, because we share the oceans with these whales, but also because it impacts our ability to sell our products overseas. Other countries want us to have good measures in place to protect these creatures.

Our government has made sure there is money available to help harvesters with regard to some of the measures that we've had to put in place, including the Atlantic fisheries fund, which has been able to test things like easy-breaking rope and ways to track. We've also put in place the ghost gear fund, which was extremely popular when we launched it two years ago. It was then an \$8-million project to clean up ghost gear. In the budget this year, it was increased with another \$10 million to make sure we are dealing with ghost gear.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Madam Minister.

I would just like to share with committee members how our fishers have evolved and are aware they need to protect these whales.

In closed areas, some fishers are now using ropeless traps and an electronic device that brings the traps to the surface. This was made possible thanks to investments that you and your department made. I thank you for that.

On that note, people are wondering if they can count on you and rest assured that, next year, funds and services like the Coast Guard and other third parties can help make sure that the fishing season starts as early as possible, as it did this year. We've seen the impact it has had. Factory employees were able to work, fishers were able to almost fully meet their quota and the entire community is better off.

Can we count on you and your department to ensure we get these services next year?

[*English*]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: You can count on us to make sure we're continuing to work with the industry to find out what works for it. We want to continue to have the conversations to see where the challenges are so that we can address them. We recognize how difficult this can be, but we are there to make sure that we're not only protecting the North Atlantic right whales but also that we're able to support the harvesters in this initiative.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you. I don't know if I have any time left, but I will ask you a quick question.

Could you tell us about the major investment, of \$300 million, for small craft harbours that is really needed in coastal communities?

I'd like you to say a few words about that before my time is up.

• (1725)

[English]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: We were extremely pleased to see \$300 million in the budget, recognizing that our small craft harbours actually drive our rural local economies and coastal communities. They are not in good shape. They need a lot of work, basically, because of things like climate change.

The budget has not been significant enough for them over the last number of years. Our government has actually put in close to \$1 billion on small craft harbours over the last five years. This \$300 million is going to be an added benefit to our coastal communities that rely on those harbours.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

We will now go to Mr. Trudel for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, I'd like to backtrack a little. Earlier I mentioned the director general of the Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique, Myriam Bergeron. As part of this study, the Fédération shared some exciting solutions with us for improving Pacific salmon management in British Columbia. Ms. Bergeron told us about river-by-river management, with which you are no doubt familiar and which we practice in Quebec, and it works well. In fact, British Columbia could use us as a model.

Have you or your department considered a model like Quebec's for managing Pacific salmon stocks?

[English]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: We take into account a number of different initiatives when we are talking about managing our resources in all our rivers and in our ocean space.

With regard to the wild Pacific salmon, there are a number of people who do really great work in B.C. and do everything they can to protect and conserve the salmon.

I am not aware of whether there is a river-to-river system in place in British Columbia. I could perhaps turn to my deputy to see if he can answer that question.

Mr. Timothy Sargent (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chair, certainly Quebec's program works very well for them. We do manage river by river in a number of other regions, including Newfoundland. In British Columbia, for sockeye, for instance, there are over 400 different conservation units, and then we have conservation units for the other four salmon species as well.

We certainly do look at each specific species and subspecies. They are associated with different river systems and different

branches of the river system, so you really do indeed have to take a fairly micro approach when you're looking at salmon.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you.

I'm going to talk to you about Quebec again. As you may have gathered, I love Quebec. Earlier, you mentioned the 2019-2021 wild Atlantic salmon conservation implementation plan, which began in 2019 and includes 18 actions.

An update to the plan was in the works for 2020. Where are you on that?

[English]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: The plan for Atlantic salmon is currently under review. We are going to be updating that shortly.

Deputy, I'm not sure if you have any updates on where we are with that right now. I know there has been work done on it, but I'm not really sure if there's anything else.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Mr. Chair, I can add that yes, the wild Atlantic salmon conservation implementation plan does expire at the end of this year, so we are right now in the process of talking to all the different stakeholders, indigenous peoples and others, about what a renewal would look like.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Minister, the PRV paper published on May 26 shines an unfavourable light once again on the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' refusal to heed the science on the risk of salmon farming to wild salmon.

When science reporting on the risk from salmon farming is published, invariably the department and industry downplay it. However, it seems implausible that scientists at UBC, the University of Toronto, SFU and the Pacific Salmon Foundation, for example, can be wrong every time.

How will you evaluate the implications that a virus has been imported accidentally by the Atlantic salmon farming industry and is spreading serious health impacts on some species of wild salmon? Who will you turn to, and will you be designating PRV as a disease agent so that it is captured under fisheries regulations?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you for the question.

A number of people have reached out to me directly with regard to PRV and the concerns they've seen. We welcome any new research that can help us identify and understand the potential risks of the PRV virus and associated strains. We do continue to support research on the number of factors that impact the health of our wild salmon.

All our science is peer reviewed. We will look at what has been put forward and make sure that we have the right path going forward.

• (1730)

Mr. Gord Johns: Minister, that hasn't happened. Aquaculture has been given an entire division in the department under its own regional director. It's focused entirely on the industry. While management of wild salmon may be implicit, don't you think it's time, given the extreme state of wild salmon in many salmon runs, that there's better independent oversight and advice?

The department and Canada's elected officials need someone outside of the bureaucracy and political system to provide overarching, unbiased, science- and evidence-based decision-making on what is working and what isn't working and what the priorities are.

Do you not agree with that?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I would say that our science is peer-reviewed, Mr. Johns. That is one of the reasons it is held to a very high standard.

With regard to the independence of the public service, they don't do this for political reasons. This is their job, and they take this science very seriously. I stand behind them in the extremely important work that they do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

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

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

Minister, many communities, businesses and families along Canada's west coast depend on access to chinook salmon for their livelihood, food security, family traditions and businesses.

I've asked you before about mark-selective fisheries. They are a precautionary and sustainable way to provide critical access to these chinook salmon while minimizing or virtually eliminating any of the impacts on the wild stocks of concern. The department has been aware of mark-selective fisheries proposals now for over eight years, and we simply can't get a definitive answer one way or the other.

Minister, I'd like to think that you're in charge of the department. I'd like to think that you've seen the reasonableness of mark-selective fisheries proposals from advisory boards. Virtually everybody says that it's okay to go ahead with these things.

Are you going to instruct your department to proceed with mark-selective fisheries so that we can have this effective conservation tool and actually achieve a balance between conservation and socio-economic objectives?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you for the question, Mr. Calkins.

As I have said to you before, I am not averse to a mark-selective fishery. I do believe it needs to be done in a measured fashion. We cannot have something happening that may impact the wild stocks.

We have opened up mark-selective fisheries in a small scale in some areas as a test—as a pilot program—to see what can work. We have to recognize that the potential of increased fishing effort and increased mortalities from hooking and releasing are all things that have to be taken into consideration and are a real concern. We also need to make sure that—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: With all due respect, I'm an angler. I'm a sport fisherman. I'm a recreational fisherman—

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I'm aware.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I know that there is always going to be some mortality, even in a catch-and-release fishery, but that doesn't prevent catch-and-release fisheries from existing.

I also know from being an angler on the west coast that as soon as you catch your quota or your limit on a particular species, you generally move on, especially if you're chartering somebody to take you fishing. When you catch your one coho, you move on to the next fish. Allowing people to actually keep the first marked chinook salmon that they catch means they will move on to other species. I don't see how that would be more damaging than having a catch-and-release fishery that encourages the catch and release of chinook salmon all day long.

With all due respect, I just don't know if the department really understands the mind of a recreational fisherman.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I recognize how challenging this has been for the rec fishery, not only because of COVID but also because of the management measures we had to take. That is one of the reasons that this investment we have put in the budget is going to be so significant for making sure that we can do everything we have to do to see how we go forward with a mark-selective fishery.

I look forward to working with the anglers and the sport fishers to find out what that can look like for them, recognizing, though, that stocks are in serious decline. We have to be very careful with what we're allowing to happen in areas where there are challenges to those fish.

• (1735)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I think we should be careful. Not all stocks are in decline. I'll agree, and everybody at this table would agree, that certain stocks are in decline, but certain stocks are also very healthy and very vibrant. Certain stocks are actually just created, through hatchery programs and so on, for the purpose of putting fish into the ocean to be caught.

I'm an Albertan, Minister, one of many Albertans who count on going to the west coast to catch fish, and we know, based on talking to those who offer charters and so on, that they know we're not going to pay for airfare or drive to the west coast unless we have some type of certainty and predictability that we can keep one or maybe two chinook salmon. That is the prized fish that's out there. We know that there are many chinook salmon that are produced by hatcheries in Washington and other areas, and there's every indication, as there was last year when there were great opportunities to catch and retain chinook salmon, that this year there's going to be a good return of chinooks, not in the stocks of concern but in other areas.

What kind of certainty and predictability is there that we are going to have the same kind of summer catch retention that we had last year? The sooner the department decides, or you decide, to announce that, the sooner people will book trips to the west coast and provide some economic certainty for those who rely on chinook salmon fisheries for a livelihood. Sooner rather than later, can you give us any clarity on what's going to happen?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: That decision will be coming soon, Mr. Calkins. We are also developing a framework on whether chinook mark-selective fisheries and mass marking can be applied as a management tool. DFO is consulting on the chinook mark-selective fishery proposals from the recreational sector, and we are planning to proceed on a pilot basis in 2021, this year, so there are steps being taken.

As I have said many times, I am not averse to a mark-selective fishery. It just needs to be done within the right time frame and in the right way, and while recognizing that there are stocks of concern that we do need to be very careful about. Making sure that we have the right information, making sure that we have the right data, and making sure that we are addressing these concerns that we're hearing from people are all parts of the process.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

We'll now come back to the east coast. Mr. Morrissey, you have five minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

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

I'll begin by thanking and congratulating the minister for ensuring that DFO got a significant budget increase in this budget. That is no simple feat and, Minister, I want to acknowledge your work on that.

Minister, the lobster and crab fishery has been very beneficial for commercial and first nation fishers in Atlantic Canada, and I have always focused on policies that protect the value and future of these important fisheries. My concern today, and my question to you,

stems from testimony that was given in the fisheries committee and directly from fishers about the growing practice of unrecorded sales for cash in the lobster and crab fisheries. These sales are used to influence who gets the product. This practice will hurt the industry, as it has a destabilizing effect on the fishery.

What enforcement measures are in place and what steps is your department taking to identify this practice, document it, prosecute where necessary and eliminate it, Madam Minister?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you for the question, Mr. Morrissey.

One of the things that we all hear about is the unreported sales of fish. This is a challenge. Of course, as you know, DFO regulates the fishery, but once it hits the wharf, it becomes provincial jurisdiction with regard to processing and to who's buying it.

I will say that we are working collaboratively with the province on this issue. Also, of course, RCMP officers have a number of different tools that they use to address the concerns and do investigative work. We do not direct them. They are independent.

I think it's also important to note that I will be meeting with my eastern fisheries ministers very shortly, in the coming weeks, and this will be a topic of discussion, because it is a concern. When people are selling outside of the boundaries of the law, it impacts all of us. It impacts the price; it impacts the data we have, and it impacts our exports, so we want to make sure that this is done in an above board fashion.

• (1740)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Minister.

I want to go back and ask you to elaborate. You referenced MPAs in your opening statement, which I'm reading here. In your comments, you listed all the partners you were going to work with, but I did not see commercial fishers in your statement. I take it that was an oversight, and I simply want to reference that, because in the last election, the Conservative candidate here in Atlantic Canada used a lot of false information about the government using MPAs to close lobster fisheries and crab fisheries in certain areas.

Madam Minister, could you correct the record on that matter and verify that any move in MPAs will involve collaboration with commercial fishers, and that it is not the intention to close down any lobster fishing areas or crab fishing areas?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Absolutely. I did not pick that up in my speech. I do apologize.

I was part of this committee when we did the year-long study that Mr. Arnold put forward on marine protected areas. We know that the best ones are built from the ground up. They are built in collaboration with all stakeholders, with indigenous peoples, with communities, with fishers. That's how they succeed.

Of course the intent of an MPA is not to close a fishery; the intent of an MPA is to make sure it's sustainable for the long term and make sure there's fishing for generations to come.

Are there areas where there is closure? Absolutely. This is not the case here, though. This is not what we are talking about. We are not talking about closing down industry.

I'm going to give some kudos here because I recognize that the Conservative Party, when they had their recent annual meeting, actually approved the 25% by 2025 goal for MPAs. I think that was a good step in the right direction for the Conservatives.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Minister.

The work of the Coast Guard is essential on both coasts. I'm pleased to see in the budget that there's going to be a renewed emphasis on, and significant investments in, the Coast Guard. In the time remaining, could you elaborate on what those investments will do and how it will grow our Coast Guard's capability and capacity?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Absolutely.

This is something I'm extremely pleased about, because the Coast Guard does such critical work in our coastal communities. We rely on it heavily for the safety of our mariners, as well as for science, for research, for making sure areas are clear. We have actually put forward a plan to basically rebuild a number of the ships in the Coast Guard and to replace the older ones. We have some that will be, by the time they're replaced, 60 years old, which is older than I am. We're going to be making sure that our smaller boats are new and are put into areas that need them. New icebreakers are extremely important to the north.

We're making sure that the Coast Guard has the tools it needs to do the very important job that it's doing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

Minister, I'll remind you there's nothing wrong with being over 60.

We'll now go to the committee room and to Mr. Zimmer for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the minister for attending today.

My questions will be around what my colleague Mr. Calkins has already referred to, that's the selective fishery in B.C.

I have to read you recommendation 30 of the Cohen commission. It says the following: "The Department of Fisheries and Oceans should designate an individual to coordinate scientific, educational, and management efforts in relation to selective fishing practices".

Minister, has this been done?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I'm going to have to turn to my department, because I will admit that I am not aware of that.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: In turn, I'll turn to our regional director general for the Pacific, Rebecca Reid.

Ms. Rebecca Reid (Regional Director General, Pacific Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We do have a selective fishing policy that we apply for salmon.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'm asking actually about the person who's been applied, the designated individual. I just want to know if that's been done and who it is.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: The policy is implemented by all fishery managers—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'm actually asking about the one. It says "designate an individual to coordinate scientific, educational, and management efforts", so who is that person?

• (1745)

Ms. Rebecca Reid: We have a regional director of science and a regional director for fisheries management who work together on those two aspects.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Maybe I can get those names specifically so that we know who to go to after this.

I'll go back to the minister.

With regard to a selective fishery in B.C., the B.C. government has been very supportive of this idea, as you know. I have a document that was written to the B.C. salmon management team at DFO. This is from the letter:

We look forward to further discussion regarding salmon enhancement. We encourage increased chinook mass-marking to enable better management and identification of hatchery chinook production. This can lead to efficiencies in chinook production, and better management of harvest, which can lead to increased prey availability for SRKW and certainly for harvesters.

It goes on:

B.C. encourages DFO to be flexible in its management approaches to not only conserve and protect stocks of concern but also facilitate limited and 'safe' harvest opportunities on abundant stocks where locally supportable. We are hopeful that all options, including mark-selective fisheries, are being considered by DFO to ensure conservation and socioeconomic objectives can be achieved.

Minister, we have 25 MPs who are asking for a selective fishery in B.C. We have a B.C. government that is asking for a selective fishery. We have a public fishery that's asking for a selective fishery.

When?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you for the question, Mr. Zimmer.

As I have said to Mr. Calkins, I'm not averse to a mark-selective fishery. I do believe that—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I heard your answer, Minister, but I guess I'm asking for the next part of that answer, which is "When?"

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Would you let me finish, please?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'm asking for when, Minister. When?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: We currently have a pilot program in place. We will continue to work to find the best way forward, recognizing that the wild Pacific salmon are in dire straits in some areas—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: We know.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: —and we need to make sure that anything we do does not impact the conservation of those fish.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Minister, that's the great part about a selective fishery. You can selectively catch certain fish and selectively not catch certain fish, using fishing methods.

I've done many videos—I'm sure you've seen some of them—that explain what a selective fishery is and how it works. We're just asking for it to be implemented.

You said that you're doing a test fishery this summer. You're doing tests, and then what? Is it a test fishery, and then there's another five years of a pause, or are we actually going to move into a selective fishery that can be used B.C.-wide?

What's your end goal? If 2021 is the test selective fishery, what's the next step?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: My end goal is to make sure that we have wild Pacific salmon. That is my end goal.

We have a stock that is in serious decline. We need to do everything possible, and we are making sure that we do that. A mark-selective fishery is a possibility, no question, but we need to make sure that before anything moves ahead, we do what we have to do to conserve the stock that we have.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: That's the great part about a selective fishery: It allows us to do both.

You use the word “collaboration” a lot, and that, by definition, is “the action of working with someone to produce something”.

You use that word a lot. You use word salads a lot, Minister.

The public fishery has been more than willing to do a demonstration and to show you that it works, but they don't feel collaborated with. They feel that you've taken their data and simply ignored it. You've ignored conversations at tables that they've been at for months.

When are you going to actually establish the selective fishery that's been asked for? I know you're going to repeat your answer, but my hope is that you'll give us a date, an expected date: “This is my best, Mr. Zimmer. The test date is 2021. Maybe in 2022 we can see a 50% selective fishery, and maybe in three or four years, we can see a 100% selective fishery.”

Minister, we need answers now.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I met with the sport fishing advisory board, and—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: And you ignored their advice.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Can I finish answering the question?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Zimmer, but your time is up.

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

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for joining us today.

Minister, today's discussion has been mostly around the budget and Pacific salmon, but I would be remiss if I didn't quickly follow up on our reports on the implementation of a moderate livelihood.

A main focus was bringing groups together. We heard of the need to bring scientists, indigenous fishermen and commercial fishermen who are non-indigenous together in a room and really hear from the indigenous leaders and our knowledge-keepers, as well as commercial fishermen and researchers, in a dialogue on the issues.

I'm wondering if you could update us on whether we have made progress on that front.

● (1750)

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Battiste.

I also want to thank the committee for the report and the recommendations. It was a very good report, and I look forward to being able to provide you with a response in the near future.

One thing we heard loud and clear throughout a lot of this, and through your report, was that we needed increased communication between the department—me—commercial harvesters and the first nations. We have set up tables to make sure that happens.

We have made progress on having information available to harvesters with regard to first nations' rights and what they mean and what it looks like. We have seen a great uptake from the commercial sector with regard to the information sessions we have put out and the workshops we put in place, but we know there's more work to do.

This has been a long-standing issue, as you well know. It's not one that we will solve overnight, but we are committed to making sure that we are listening. We are doing everything we possibly can to make sure that the concerns we have heard are addressed.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you, Minister.

I also want to say thank you for the small craft harbours funding. I know that's going to mean a lot to our communities in the Atlantic.

This funding, I understand, is part of our broader blue economy strategy, which I know is currently soliciting feedback from the same stakeholders we discussed earlier: indigenous peoples, commercial fishermen, environmental groups.

Could you speak a bit about the importance of the consultation to the strategy as a whole?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: The blue economy strategy is a priority in my mandate letter, recognizing that Canada, with three oceans and the longest coastline in the world, has the potential for significant growth in the ocean sector. We can look at countries that are other ocean nations, like Norway, where 37% of their GDP is driven by the ocean sector. In Canada, it's 1.6%. We know there's a lot of potential and that we could do a lot more.

To your point with regard to the small craft harbours, making sure that our coastal communities have the infrastructure they need in order to drive their economy is critical. That's why that investment in the budget is so significant and so important.

I will also say that the consultation process that we've undertaken for the blue economy strategy has been significant, and it's extremely important, because we need to make sure that any investments we make are done strategically. We need to make sure that we have the right path forward with regard to the environment and the economy, making sure that our blue economy strategy is sustainable and making sure that this is there for the long term. It's not just a quick fix and it's not just a one-year plan as we come out of COVID; this is going to drive our rural coastal communities' economies for the next 15 to 20 years.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you, Minister.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: He's saying one minute.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay. Thank you, Minister. I didn't quite get that.

Minister, one of the things that we heard during the moderate livelihood study—and I know you've heard it from the Mi'kmaq communities—was about *netukulimk* and ensuring that conservation is practised for generations to come. I wonder if you could speak a bit about what you've heard from the Mi'kmaq communities on the need for conservation and what you have learned about this concept that we've heard so much about in this study.

I know that I didn't give you a lot of time to answer, but could you?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I would say that the first nations communities are stewards of the ocean. They're stewards of the environment. Conservation is a priority for them. I think that's one of the things that we all have in common. Everybody wants to see the species that we rely on available for generations to come; nobody wants to fish something into extinction. That's one of the reasons conservation will always be the underpinning reason for any decision we make.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Battiste.

We'll now go to Mr. Trudel for two and half minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, many of the witnesses we heard from during the study expressed how urgent it is that we act to save Pacific salmon. I believe some of my colleagues have spoken about that today as well.

However, when I look at the budget, we see that the funding is broken down as follows: \$35 million will be invested in 2021-2022, while \$158 million is projected for 2022-2023.

Since the situation is urgent, why not invest more now?

• (1755)

[*English*]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you for the question, Mr. Trudel.

I will say that “urgency” is absolutely the way that we have to frame this. We have to make sure that wild Pacific salmon survive. This is a unique opportunity and a time for us to make sure that we do everything we possibly can.

The budget announcement is significant because it is a historic amount of money to be put forward, but we have to make sure that we're doing it strategically. We have to make sure that we are doing it in collaboration with other stakeholders, with the indigenous communities.

To that point, one of the main things that we will be doing as we move forward is working in collaboration with those organizations to find out what the priorities are and make sure that we find where the strategic investments have to go, where the policies are that need to change and where the regulations are that possibly need to change. These are all parts of the process, and we are working very hard to make sure that we get those things right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: I understand, but it's still pretty mind-boggling.

In subsequent budget years, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025, the amounts are all above \$100 million, whereas for this year, despite the fact that solutions exist, it is a meagre \$35 million.

This year's investment seems a little ridiculous to me.

[*English*]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: We already have programs that we are funding this year, programs like the B.C. SRIF program and the habitat restoration program on the British Columbia coast. Those are all programs that are already ongoing and that we've put the investments in, so it's not like there's no money there now and this is just a small amount. There's already money available that we're working with from previous years.

To your point, there is an ongoing ability for us to invest in making sure that we're doing the right things, because there is money here now, but this is an additional amount that we've been given.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Minister, further to my previous question around governance, the current system is clearly not working. The department doesn't have a system to assess the status of a population, the status of the habitat, set a management target, and then manage for the outcomes you want under an integrated approach using the available management levers of habitat, hatcheries and harvest.

The department has had decades to do this and has never done it. It was laid out fairly nicely in the wild salmon policy, which was written over 15 years ago, but never fully activated. Cohen said that someone should be put in charge to integrate all things for salmon, but the department has never done that.

If you pour \$647 million into a system that isn't working and that has never activated an effective management framework, I'm worried that we'll lose the opportunity to get better results. This is why a new governance framework is needed and necessary, one that includes the department, the province and first nations. Otherwise, we're just going to end up spending more money on a system that lacks a management framework, lacks a reporting system and lacks accountability for results.

We know that what's best for salmon needs to be a priority and what's good for users must come second. Will you speak about a new model?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you Mr. Johns. I would like to thank you for your advocacy. You and I have had a number of good discussions over the last few years with regard to this issue, and I appreciate your comments.

The new centre of expertise is going to be something that will bring people together so that we aren't working at cross-purposes. This is one of the challenges we have seen when we have so many different groups trying to do the same thing. It's really important to make sure we come together and find the right path forward by working in collaboration.

I know that people say, "Oh, you say that all the time", as Mr. Zimmer did, but the reality is that we have to do this with first nations, the province and environmental groups. A centre of expertise is going to give us that ability to work with the best people on the ground who are doing this work now.

Your point is very well taken. That is actually the goal I have. It is to make sure we are working with everyone to make sure we find the best way to conserve and protect these species.

• (1800)

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

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

Minister, former premier Stephen McNeil basically accused you—the minister—and the government of bungling the moderate livelihood file.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I believe Mr. Bragdon is frozen.

The Chair: The minister thought you were frozen, so we were getting worried.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: I'm not frozen, nor am I a frozen prawn.

Minister, former premier Stephen McNeil from Nova Scotia, your home province, accused you, the minister, as well as the government. He was saying, quite frankly, that he was very dissatisfied with the handling of the situation in southwestern Nova Scotia. He said:

We are in a position where (all parties) are not sitting at a table to find what is a workable solution...This is only getting more entrenched.

Then we come over here to the west coast, and we're hearing from the west coast provincial government that it was not properly consulted on the decision leading to the closure of the Discovery Islands open-net pens. The provincial government was not at the table during that discussion. It was blindsided by the announcement and it also felt that it was excluded in that process.

We've heard from industry stakeholders that they've been trying to reach out to you personally, and to your department, to get answers and information. They have felt excluded and they've had no response.

Minister, why are you not meeting with those most affected by these decisions, whose livelihoods in these coastal communities are at stake because of these decisions that you're undertaking? Why not consult with them?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I have been constantly consulting with industry, first nations, environmental organizations, and communities that have been impacted. I have numerous meetings. My departmental officials also meet with them on a regular basis. My staff meet with people on a regular basis, so with regard to...

I want to approach the moderate livelihood issue specifically, because you did bring that up first with regard to the premier's comments. Quite frankly, his comments with regard to having everybody at the table were inappropriate. These are nation-to-nation negotiations. This is something that we do with first nations at the negotiating table. The industry was well aware of what was going on. We met with the industry on a regular basis. I met with industry—

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Minister—

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Mr. Bragdon, could I finish my—

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Minister, you know we have only a certain amount of time.

Whether it was the former premier of Nova Scotia or the current provincial government in B.C., it's a common thread. Whether it was industry stakeholders or indigenous leaders on the east and west coasts that we heard from, they all felt that they were not properly consulted or in the loop. Major decisions that affect the livelihood of British Columbians, Atlantic Canadians and Canadians from coast to coast whose livelihoods depend upon these very fisheries are being made, and they're left out of the process. They feel that they're not being heard and they're not part of it. They're frustrated, Minister, and we're hearing this. It isn't us who are saying this; it's the stakeholders who are saying it. It is the people whose livelihoods are being affected who are saying this.

Minister, they want to know that they have your ear, that you're hearing their concerns and that you will enact policies that are going to be responsible towards their future and the future of their families.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Bragdon.

I will continue to say that I meet with industry regularly. I meet with my provincial counterparts regularly. I meet with first nations on a regular basis. I—

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Minister, before the Discovery Islands decision, did you meet with the provincial minister of fisheries, your counterpart, prior to that decision and talk to them about that decision, yes or no?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Yes.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Oh, you did.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I had many meetings with Minister Popham. I have had meetings with...

I will continue to have those discussions.

• (1805)

Mr. Richard Bragdon: This is breaking news here. It seemed that they were unaware of the timing of this announcement and were unaware that this announcement was going to take place. Did you lay out transition plans, as was recommended by the department? It was recommended that transition plans be made for the sector that was going to be most affected, the B.C. farmers and the aquaculture sector.

How can we say we're for a blue economy, but we don't even allow transition plans or a transition period for them to navigate these types of decisions?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: My decision on the Discovery Islands was, as I have said many times, not an easy one to make. It was made after there were consultations with the seven first nations in that area, recognizing that this was not a good fit in their territory. This is what I heard from them during the consultation process that I went through with them.

I will say that I have met with the Province of British Columbia. My parliamentary secretary has an ongoing relationship with the Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Aquaculture in British Columbia. I have met with Premier Horgan. I have met with a number of stakeholders on both the west and east coasts, and my departmental officials have continually been meeting as well.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Minister, did you meet with the industry? They have requested a meeting several times.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Bragdon, your time has gone a little bit over. I allowed for your frozen time to be added in there, and you weren't punished for that.

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

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

Just reporting out, Minister Jordan, I've heard from my old friend Alex Morton on the west coast. She's done a review of the sea lice situation and young salmon going past the farms that are now not operating. There is a reduction of about 90% in the infestation there.

I have to say that on the one hand we hear, "Well, you've got to act", and then "Well, no; you'd better wait until you talk to this one, that one and the other one." We were dealing with an urgent situation, and you took, I think, very brave and very immediate action, and it was clearly necessary, given the kind of damage that was being done there. That's my commentary.

Here's the question: On the centre of excellence, who is it going to report to?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Are you asking about the new centre of expertise for the salmon, the salmon strategy?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: That will be run out of DFO, but it will be done in co-operation with the stakeholders working in this industry on the ground.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have to say that there is suspicion on the coast that sometimes DFO isn't very forthcoming at passing information along to the minister. We certainly had suggestions in the salmon study earlier that certain information had not reached you, that it had been suppressed. That's a claim that was made. I am not asking you to confirm or not. I am just putting that on the table.

Can somebody—

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Can I also mention that there is also going to be an arm's-length advisory board at the centre of expertise as well? It will be made up of individuals both inside and outside of DFO.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I think it will be necessary to maintain very close contact with that board. I know you have an excellent parliamentary secretary who would love to be able to take that on. I would love for him to take that on.

I had asked this, but you didn't get a chance to answer—nobody did. What is the state of our salmon stock assessments? Do we have up-to-date assessments on all of our runs in B.C.?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I am going to turn to my department on that one.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: Rebecca, perhaps you can take that one on.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: Thanks very much.

We have over 9,000 individual stocks in B.C. and the Yukon. We don't have stock assessment information for all of them. We do have a very comprehensive collection of stock assessments for the main runs. That information is used in evaluating fisheries every year.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you for that.

Minister, you mentioned that there's going to be an aquaculture act. What are thinking about in terms of pulling that act together? What are the essential elements going to be in that act?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: The work on the aquaculture act is already well under way. Of course, recognizing that aquaculture is governed differently on the west coast from the way it is governed on the east coast, we have to do this in collaboration with partners.

I think the whole focus of the act has to provide clarity to the industry. We recognize how important the aquaculture sector is. We know how important it is to jobs and to providing a food source. It's an extremely important industry. It is very different in Newfoundland and Labrador from what it is in British Columbia and in Prince Edward Island.

The aquaculture act will give us an ability to provide clarity to the industry with regard to sustainability and regulation and just make sure that everything is there, because aquaculture is not covered under the Fisheries Act as well as it should be.

• (1810)

Mr. Ken Hardie: One thing that's come up quite often in our past studies, particularly on the west coast, has been the missed opportunity to engage indigenous people in on-the-ground guardian programs, etc., to keep on eye on things, report on things and even help with enforcement.

Do you see that as a key element, particularly as the strategy goes forward with this quite hefty investment in Pacific salmon?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: With regard to the guardians program, I've been doing consultation under the blue economy strategy. I think I have probably done somewhere in the vicinity of 35 round tables. It comes up on a regular basis at almost every one of them about how important that program is, so I can see that being part of the path forward with regard to the blue economy.

We have also made some significant investments in indigenous communities with regard to the Coast Guard Auxiliary by providing boats for indigenous communities. I think there has been collaboration on the west coast with indigenous communities and the Coast Guard.

I think the guardians program is an amazing program that we really need to do more with—absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

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

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

Madam Minister, before I was cut off there—rightly so, I guess, by the chair, and right on time—I was speaking about the continuing salmon declines we've seen in my riding in the Adams River and how your actions and inactions have hurt British Columbians with the Discovery Island decision and the spot prawn decision, or

reinterpretation. I was speaking about the public fishers who have been let down without an opportunity for a mark-selective fishery, the failure of your department to address pinnipeds in the Salish Sea and the Pacific—and the Atlantic, as far as that goes—as well as the failure to follow through on the mandate from your Prime Minister to provide funding for preventing aquatic invasive species in B.C.

How can you make these decisions that you've made without a scientific background to base these decisions on?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I'm sorry. I'm not sure I understand the question.

Mr. Mel Arnold: You've made these decisions without providing any reasoning to the people who are affected by them.

The spot prawn harvesters are still trying to understand why the decision was made. The public fishers haven't seen any answers as to the reasons. There doesn't seem to be any reason behind any of your decisions.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: First of all, I'm going to say that I'm extremely proud of our government and the decisions that we have made with regard to investments in making sure that we are doing everything we possibly can to protect the wild Pacific salmon. You talked about that.

We've also invested, in budget 2018, I believe, \$43 million for aquatic invasive species. Is there more to be done? Absolutely.

With regard to the B.C. shrimp program, we have made significant investments in habitat restoration. With regard to science—

Mr. Mel Arnold: If there was more to be done on the aquatic invasive species, why was there nothing in the massive budget of 2021 for invasive species in B.C.?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: We are continuing to make sure that we are working to deal with aquatic invasive species. Of course, there is ongoing funding for things like the Asian carp and sea lampreys, and of course we know there have been challenges this year with regard to the quagga mussels. We are continuing to work in collaboration and to get the science to make sure that we make the right decisions with regard to these species.

It is a challenging—

Mr. Mel Arnold: There's nothing in budget 2020-21 for that.

I need to get another question in here if I can.

If you've based these decisions on science and sound reasoning, as you say you have, and you're proud of your department, why have you not shared those reasons with the people whose lives are most directly impacted?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I would say that we actually have absolutely communicated to stakeholder groups and first nations on decisions. The management decisions are often very tough, because it does mean that we have to sometimes cut quotas and sometimes cut total allowable catch, depending on where you are. These are tough, Mr. Arnold. There's no question.

• (1815)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Those reasons haven't been made clear to the stakeholders. As I mentioned, the spot prawn harvesters have no idea why the decision to reverse the interpretation was made. Public fishers haven't received a satisfactory answer to their questions. Many of them haven't received a response.

Why?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: As I have said, with regard to the spot prawn specifically, I am 100% committed to getting this issue solved for the long term. We were able to work with the industry to have a plan in place for this year, but we will be making sure that there is a plan in place as we go forward. That has to be done in consultation with the industry.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Minister.

The Cohen commission was initiated in response to severe declines in Pacific salmon stocks, and the strategic salmon health initiative, or SSHI, was established in 2013, soon after the Cohen report was calling for more information. Since 2013, SSHI work has examined and reported on very important science.

Why are you shutting down the SSHI program after having only completed two of the four phases of the investigation?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I am actually going to turn to my deputy minister for this one, please.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I think, Rebecca, that's in your world as well.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: The SSHI was organized through a series of phases. We have completed phase two of the program. Phase three, which requires the establishment of a wet lab, a facility, is not funded at this point, so the work under way right now is writing up the papers and doing that type of activity while funding is sought for that next step.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you very much.

Madam Minister, I'm always amazed to hear the Conservatives talk about science when we know the cutbacks they made to science when they were in government. They even muzzled scientists. So we'll move on to another topic, if you don't mind.

I'm going to talk about prawns. You know that prawners are waiting to go out to sea in certain areas. Year after year, it's not always easy for them, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United Kingdom, where the prawns are mainly sold, the markets are almost non-existent, as you know. Have people in your department had any conversations with prawn industry representatives?

Some fishers in my area seem to be saying that they are being forgotten. I don't think we're forgetting about them. It's more on the market side that things are difficult. Is anything being done to find new markets in our country or elsewhere in the world, not just the United Kingdom?

[*English*]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Cormier, for the question.

I will say that COVID-19 has impacted our fish and seafood processors and our harvesters in an extremely difficult way. We have seen a decline in our export markets.

One of the things we did last year, when we realized relatively early on in the pandemic that the fish and seafood industry was going to be impacted—it was one of the first to be affected—was to put in place the Canadian seafood stabilization fund. The fund allowed processors to pivot from a fresh market product to one they could store longer. We recognized that they didn't have that ability. The fund also allowed them to do value-added and to look for new markets.

In addition, we changed the fund that was actually put in place to promote seafood in other countries so that we could promote it in Canada. We are seeing an increase in the amount of seafood being consumed in Canada. I will say that it was Canadians who stepped up to help our seafood producers and our fishers last year. I think that was extremely significant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Madam Minister.

As you said, we have programs and funding to help us try to find new markets.

Madam Minister, we had the chance to discuss another topic that really concerns me. It's the sale of fishing licences in New Brunswick or in other Atlantic provinces, and even lobster licences, which we're seeing more and more in our regions. A crab licence is currently worth between \$12 million and \$15 million.

In the past two or three years, in my area and in New Brunswick alone, we've seen fishing licences go to Quebec, Prince Edward Island or elsewhere.

One challenge we face is the residence criterion. As you know, it's only six months for New Brunswick, compared to two years for Quebec, for example.

I want to take the time to understand this properly.

As I understand it, Madam Minister, we want to work with people in the associations and, if they ask us to change the residence criterion, we're willing to listen to them to ensure that fishing licences remain within our communities and within our province. Is that correct?

• (1820)

[English]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: With regard to the regulations around licensing, there are, as you mentioned, different criteria in different provinces for the residents. In New Brunswick, it is six months. Those regulations are actually developed in collaboration with industry. If industry wants to see them changed, these are conversations we would be happy to have. However, it has to be done at a table.... When we are looking at regulations, if this is something the industry feels strongly about, I am sure we would be happy to have this conversation.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: My Conservative colleague and friend, Mr. Bragdon, spoke earlier about former premiers and other provincial governments.

Has the New Brunswick government contacted your department to request a change to this residence policy so the fishing licences can remain in New Brunswick?

Do you know if the New Brunswick Conservative government has put in the request?

[English]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I am not aware of any request to me directly. I'm going to turn to my department to see if any requests have come through my deputy.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: No, we're not aware of any requests at this time, although we are aware of the overall issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: That's fine. Thank you, Madam Minister, for those clarifications.

I know that working with the associations is how we will resolve this situation. As you know, the loss of fishing licences is hurting our factory employees and our communities.

Thank you for listening to me on this.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

We will now go to Mr. Trudel for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I told you earlier about Ms. Bergeron from the Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique. When she came to testify, Ms. Bergeron shared with us another concern, which was listing the Atlantic salmon species as endangered. This could affect the recreational fishing economy in Quebec.

Madam Minister, do you know how the assessment is going at this time?

We're hearing that the resource is in good condition in Quebec, as it is well managed, and we don't need to list the species as endangered. However, does the department agree?

[English]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Consultations are ongoing with regard to the Species at Risk Act and whether Atlantic salmon should be listed. I'm not sure where they sit right now.

Deputy, do you have more recent information?

Mr. Timothy Sargent: I don't have a lot to add to that, Mr. Chair. We finished our check-in on this recently. We're reviewing and developing the listing advice now

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: We also heard witnesses talk about the lack of scientific resources to properly make decisions on a smaller scale.

Should the department establish—let's get innovative—a research chair for Pacific salmon, for example, to ensure that British Columbia has enough resources and scientists to make good resource conservation decisions? Is that a possibility?

[English]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Our government has invested heavily in renewing science after it was cut under the previous Conservative government. I think we have hired more than 140 scientists at DFO directly since 2015. We are going to continue to work to get the best science available to make these decisions, because we know that is how we have to do it.

I will say that in British Columbia, and actually on this call, we have some of the best scientists around in terms of having the best possible science to make these decisions when it comes to fisheries management.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Minister, thank you for appearing today at committee. I appreciate your being here.

Minister, you supported my motion M-151 in 2018 to combat plastic pollution. Within that motion is combatting industrial use of plastics. We know how important the shellfish industry is to our economy, but in terms of future sustainability, the amount of plastics used in the industry is growing right now. Now it's our understanding that there are geoduck applications coming forward in the form of PVC tubes. These tubes break down, releasing toxins and microplastic particles that can permanently contaminate waters where shellfish are grown, where our food supply is coming from and where herring and salmon are spawned and reared.

What are you going to do to ensure that PVC and other types of plastic chemicals aren't being given industrial use in our oceans?

• (1825)

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

I agree with you that we have to take the use of plastics seriously. As I said, I supported your motion. We know how important it is to get plastics out of our oceans. It's something I am committed to working with all of you to do.

I think I would like to have a further conversation with you about this, if that's possible—

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: —at a later time. I think it is something we do have to make sure we're addressing, because the fishery has to be sustainable for the long term. We need to make sure we're not only conserving and protecting but also growing things to abundance. In order to do that, we have to make sure we have the best practices in place.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Minister.

One area of the motion that the government hasn't really taken action on is the industrial use of plastics.

Minister, going back to the emerging science I talked about around *Tenacibaculum* and the PRV sea lice that has been science journal peer reviewed, and acting in accordance with the precautionary principle to safeguard B.C.'s critically low salmon runs, what are you going to do in terms of...? Keeping in mind, obviously, that the precautionary principle is to be implemented in the absence of conclusive science and that there is no fish farm policy to guide this—so it's really at your level of decision-making—how will the department implement the inclusion of first nations in the external advisory committee mentioned in the budget for salmon restoration?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I think indigenous knowledge is going to be critical as we go forward. As I said earlier to MP Battiste, first nations are the stewards of the land and of the water. They are the ones who are committed to conservation. We all have to be.

Having said that, I think they will play a significant role in our centre of expertise in making sure we have the proper consultation, because indigenous knowledge is going to be a driving part of this salmon strategy.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns. We'll now go to Mr. Calkins for five minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Chair, I'm going to give my time to Mr. Zimmer from British Columbia.

The Chair: Mr. Zimmer, you have five minutes or less. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you, Mr. Calkins, Mr. Chair and Minister.

Going back to the sport fishing advisory board and the questions I was posing to you before I ran out of time, this is from the B.C. government, once again:

We also encourage DFO to implement some of the specific fishery proposals that have been put forward that balance conservation with harvest opportunities, where possible, including those Mark Selective Fishing opportunities recommended by the Sport Fishing Advisory Board.

I'm going to read a document from the SFAB. This is their warning and advice to the ministry:

In order to sustain both wild Chinook stocks of concern and the recreational (and potentially other) fisheries it is critically important that DFO make the policy decision as soon as possible to implement mass marking (MM) of hatchery origin Chinook in BC to enable widespread mark-selective fishery (MSF) management when non-selective management poses too high a risk to stocks of concern.

Minister, when are you going to implement a selective fishery in B.C.?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Zimmer.

As I have said, we have put a pilot program in place with regard to a mark-selective fishery. There needs to be more work done, absolutely, when it comes to making sure that they are not going to impact the stocks of concern. We are working on that now. We have put in place areas where there can be a mark-selective fishery, and I—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Minister, you talk about a framework. You've talked about a framework for different things before, but in fairness, you haven't stated a framework for implementing a selective fishery in B.C. It's a big thing. It's going to take some work to do. That's what the Department of Fisheries and Oceans should be working on as we speak, based on Cohen commission recommendations and other advice.

Let me just read another quote from the SFAB.

The SFAB cannot overstate the urgency of the situation and the critical need to implement Chinook mass-marking as soon as possible. The recreational fishery infrastructure simply cannot survive widespread Chinook non-retention from April into July, and perhaps longer, around much of the inner south coast on an annual basis. We know from biosampling programs (Avid Anglers and other catch sampling opportunities) that significant numbers of hatchery origin Chinook are present in the Salish Sea during this time, we simply need a way for anglers to identify them in order to sustain both the fishery and unenhanced Chinook stocks of concern.

Minister, we need a better answer than just doing a test this summer. When are you going to implement a full-on selective fishery in B.C.?

• (1830)

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: We need to have the data on a mark-selective fishery. That's why there is a pilot program. Your colleagues have talked about science, and we need to make decisions based on data. That's what we're doing right now. The decision on a mark-selective fishery will happen once we have the proper data that shows it does not impact the stocks of concern.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: With respect, Minister, there's data that has been already provided to you from the SFAB and many others. We have examples in the states of Washington and Oregon that have already gone through this process, and they're functional today.

I have one more quote from the SFAB.

It should be noted that because of sufficiently high mark rates the opportunity exists now to implement MSF management for Chinook at certain times. As a generalization these potential opportunities occur around the south end of Vancouver Island and into the lower Strait of Georgia in the winter to late May period, enabled by the presence of significant numbers of US (and therefore adipose fin-clipped) hatchery origin Chinook.

Minister, you have the data. Why don't you just do it?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: As I have said, there are stocks of concern that we have to be aware of. Conservation always has to be our priority. Right now, a mark-selective fishery does not allow for fishing in an area where there are stocks of concern.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: That's why it's called a selective fishery, Minister. You can selectively not catch the stocks of concern.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I'm well aware of why it's called a selective fishery, Mr. Zimmer.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Pardon me?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: I said I'm well aware of why it's called a mark-selective fishery.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: With all the data that's been presented to you by the experts you call on to give you advice... They've even offered that this can be done now. This can be established right now, and yet we hear stalling after stalling after stalling examples from the department about establishing a selective fishery. Even the ability to have machines that mark fish has been turned down, we've understood.

Minister, there have been many opportunities for you to get to an easy "yes" answer on this issue. There's a lot of evidence, a lot of data. A lot of B.C. fishing families are frankly relying upon a good decision based on data, based on science that you yourself have solicited, and you're just simply not listening to it because you want to still prevent it from happening, for some reason.

I just need a clear answer. If you're not going to listen to the data provided, what is it going to take?

The Chair: Actually, Mr. Zimmer, you've gone way over time, so the time for an answer is well past.

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

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

Did you want to fill in any final comments on the last line of questioning, Minister Jordan?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: As I've said many times, Mr. Hardie, the mark-selective fishery is not something I am opposed to. I think

it's actually a good idea. We just need to make sure that I have the right science and data, that it's backed up, to make sure there is not a challenge within the areas of concern. I will continue to say that.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Now can we talk a little bit about hatcheries? They have come up quite often. In fact, during our discussions on the Big Bar slide and the work that's going on there, we did venture into that issue.

Where are we headed in terms of perhaps getting a hatchery strategy in place?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: With regard to the salmon strategy, some of the money, of course, is for conservation-based hatcheries. We are actually looking at a number of ways... We know that hatcheries play an important role in the conservation and protection of wild Pacific salmon, so I think that hatcheries are going to be part of the bigger picture as we go forward with the salmon strategy.

• (1835)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes, I think we're definitely going to need to be very close to community hatcheries and have a lot of consultation with indigenous groups, because they have some very clear ideas on this one.

I think Mr. Morrissey has some questions as well, so I'll turn the remaining time over to him.

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

Madam Minister, in my riding and the ridings of a number of my colleagues in P.E.I., harbours are facing challenges with dredging. It seems to be growing worse each year. Some of it is driven by climate change.

Could you speak to that issue and the increase in the budget for small craft harbours in being able to address what is a dangerous problem and a growing problem at quite a few ports here in Prince Edward Island?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

I'm well aware of the challenges that are being faced with regard to shifting sands in Prince Edward Island and some harbours that are being negatively impacted, particularly the Malpeque and Savage harbours. I believe those are two of the worst ones.

Of course, the \$300 million that's in the budget this year for small craft harbours will help with those problems, recognizing that a number of small craft harbours need work, whether it's dredging or infrastructure. This is an ongoing issue for rural coastal communities. We know how important they are to our rural economies, but, sadly, they have been left to fall into disrepair over a number of years.

Our government has actually put \$787 million in the last five years into small craft harbours, and this is a significant investment. I know there's a lot of work to be done and I was very happy to see that \$300 million. As the members of this committee whom I've worked with before will know, this has been something that I've been talking about for a long time.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thanks. Yes, there are quite a few.

Minister, one of the programs you fought for last year was the fisher benefit, which was extremely important. However, I believe that 40% of the funds were held for this year, and the department was supposed to begin the application process a while back. It's my understanding that it's still not available.

Could you update this committee on the status of that program and when fishers will be able to apply for the final payment?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: The fish harvester benefit and grant was an extremely important program to help the fishers—captains and share crews specifically—get through COVID-19. Some of them were able to make some pretty difficult decisions about whether or not they were going to fish, because that funding was available to them.

As you said, 60% was released last year, with the other 40% being released once they were finished with the season. I will say that the program was actually extended on the other end, so we had to push it a bit this year as well. From where it was supposed to end—I can't remember exactly the dates of it last year—it was extended by about five or six weeks to allow more people to take advantage of it, so it got extended again this year.

I would like to turn to my department, though, and see if they have any update on timelines for when it can be applied for again.

Mr. Timothy Sargent: We're looking at June 28. That's our plan.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Chair, what's my time? It looks like it's over.

The Chair: Your time is up.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I simply want to thank the minister for her clear responses to the questions that I had for her today. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

As we said, your time is up, and actually the committee time is up as well.

I'll close off by thanking the minister once again for being here today and making herself available, with her officials, for the full two hours.

You've always been obliging to come to committee any time we've asked—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I have a point of order.

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Yes, Chair, it's Bob Zimmer here in the room, with just a quick one.

I have a follow-up for Ms. Reid on the names requested. I would ask that she provide them to the committee. I asked her early on, and she was going to provide them. I just wanted to remind her so that it will happen.

Thank you.

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

I wish everybody a good evening and thank everybody for their participation today. Thank you to our analysts, our clerk and our interpreters for making this another successful FOPO committee meeting. We'll see you next week.

The meeting is adjourned.

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