



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 027

Thursday, June 9, 2022

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1105)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on February 1, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of science at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, of course, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021.

As per the directive of the Board of Internal Economy, wear a mask.... Okay, everybody knows that.

For those participating by video conference, when you are ready to speak, click on the icon to activate your mike, and please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. For interpretation, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. I'll remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses for today. We have with us Eda Roussel, fisheries adviser with the Association des crevettiers acadiens du Golfe. From the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association, we have Mr. Phil Morlock, director, government affairs. From the Maritime Fishermen's Union, we have Martin Mallet, executive director. From the Public Fishery Alliance, we have Dave Brown. From the South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition, we have Christopher Bos, president. From the Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia, we have Owen Bird, executive director, and Martin Paish, director, business development. Finally, from the Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, we have Jean Lanteigne, director general.

We'll start off with our witnesses for five minutes or less.

We'll go to Mr. Morlock first.

Mr. Phil Morlock (Director, Government Affairs, Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee in your review of this important topic. Hopefully, my 35 years of first-hand professional experience, with the evolution of DFO senior staff influence, changes to policy and dealing with multiple ministers from both sides of the aisle, will be of benefit to your process.

Fish and wildlife management is a scientific discipline with accepted professional standards, much like medicine, engineering or physics. One hundred and twenty-five years of leadership by people who fish and hunt in developing and funding successful science-based fish and wildlife conservation efforts proves the enormous value of the North American model of conservation. The model is comprised of seven basic components, and Canada has played an essential role in its creation.

The wealth of healthy and abundant fish and wildlife populations, habitat, parks and protected areas that we take for granted in Canada and the U.S. did not occur by accident. They exist today as a direct result of the successful application of the components of this model. No other continent in the world can claim anything close to this level of diversity of species or quality of habitat. Commonly shared coastal and inland waters and migration routes are but a few examples of why successful environmentally sustainable resource use management is common doctrine to both the United States and Canada. While some problems and challenges remain, the solutions are proven to be found within the applied principles of the North American model of conservation.

Although Canadian provincial and U.S. state and federal natural resource agencies continue to apply the components of this model in policy development and application, DFO no longer does. There was a time, in my experience, when DFO was a leader in fishery management in the world. Outstanding professionals like Tom Bird, Dr. Terry Grnes and Bill Otway brought a common-sense approach to collaborating with stakeholders and upholding all the tenets of the North American model.

Sadly, with Tom Bird's retirement, the DFO approach with policy and stakeholders changed for the worse. In fact, in my experience, the genesis of this erosion of credible science at DFO began with an end run on scientific peer review at the Canadian Wildlife Service 20 years ago. Prior to releasing any published official documents, the CWS policy was to conduct an editorial peer review by an independent group of nine well-respected academic and government science professionals. This prevented mistakes and maintained a high standard of scientific credibility at the agency and with the public, but in 2003, without going through the independent science peer review process, CWS released to the public a 40-page document claiming to be a science-based review of the toxic impacts of lead sinkers and jigs on wildlife in Canada. This followed years of lobbying by the World Wildlife Fund to ban lead content fishing tackle in Canada.

Dr. Dave Ankney of the University of Western Ontario, a member of the CWS editorial board, along with other experts, openly challenged this unprecedented compromise of scientific standard at a federal agency. Dr. Ankney said:

In my 30 years as a wildlife scientist, I've seen bad science and I've seen abuse of science, but never have I seen so much bad science and abuse of science in one document.... Those responsible for this disingenuous attempt to mislead Canadians should be fired either for their scientific incompetence or for their chicanery, or both.

Dr. Ankney reported that he asked the CWS director general to take action to correct this serious threat to agency credibility and professional standards. Dr. Ankney said his request was ignored, and subsequently the CWS director general had him removed from the editorial peer review panel.

Many of the conclusions and falsehoods in the document were widely challenged and discredited by other scientists, resource professionals and the fishing industry. It drew even more attention when the National Post featured the CWS publication in an article titled "Sinking science" during its "Junk Science Week" in 2005.

Subsequently, CWS senior bureaucrats moved into a series of senior positions at Fisheries and Oceans where, coincidentally, the trend to replace credible science with alternate agendas from foreign environmental groups and their wealthy benefactors continue to present day, at both agencies.

When DFO and Environment Canada moved away from applying the proven success of the North American model, the negative impacts on key sport and commercial fish populations increased exponentially on both coasts. No substantive solutions or positive results have occurred to reverse this trend. The damage to related regional and national economies has been ignored.

The collaboration, integrity and mutual respect that once defined the relationship with the recreational fishing community has been undermined by DFO collusion with foreign entities bent on ending recreational fishing from coast to coast to coast. Arbitrary public access closures by percentage targets with no basis in science or evidence of benefit have become official DFO policy.

• (1110)

Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you for that. That was almost right on your five-minute mark.

We'll now go to Ms. Roussel, for five minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eda Roussel (Fisheries Advisor, Association des crevetiers acadiens du Golfe): Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss science at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans as it pertains to shrimp fishing in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

My name is Eda Roussel. I am a fisheries advisor at the Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, FRAPP, and responsible for the shrimp file. I have been with the FRAPP for over 30 years. As a representative of Acadian shrimpers, I attend various peer assessments, as well as the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and estuary shrimp advisory committee.

Before I tackle the main issues related to your invitation, I think it is important to tell you who we are.

The Association des crevetiers acadiens du golfe is an association of mid-shore Acadian captain-owner shrimpers based on the Acadian Peninsula, hence its name. The ACAG is a member of the FRAPP.

Our shrimpers are mid-shore groundfish fishers who decided to diversify by specializing in shrimp fishing. Ships are 65 feet long and over and travel long distances to get to the fishing grounds. The fishers hold individual transferable quotas and are regulated by a number of management measures. The fishing season begins on April 1 and ends on December 31.

A research survey has been conducted since 1990 in the estuary and in the northern Gulf of St. Lawrence in August using a Department of Fisheries and Oceans vessel. That ecosystem survey aims to describe the biodiversity of the species in the gulf, as well as the physical and biological oceanographic conditions. What is important to note is that this research survey is a multi-species survey—in other words, it is not focused solely on shrimp. The survey is also mostly carried out randomly, with stations selected at random, and sometimes shrimp fishing grounds are not covered. Biomass indices are calculated using a geostatistical method. This survey helps describe shrimp distribution, estimated abundance—

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Roussel, the clerk has her hand up.

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tina Miller): Mrs. Roussel, the interpreters are asking you to slow down a bit.

Thank you.

Mrs. Eda Roussel: Okay.

The survey helps describe shrimp distribution, estimate stock abundance and understand the dynamics of the shrimp population.

In recent years, there has been a discrepancy between fishery indices and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans survey data.

In 2012, the Fisheries and Oceans Canada management, the science branch of the department and the shrimp fishing industry worked together to implement a precautionary approach. During the peer review for this year, the science branch determined that the precautionary approach did not take into account the current environmental conditions and that this risk must be integrated into the precautionary approach right now. We, industry people, read the science branch's document during that peer review, and we were already being asked to integrate it into the precautionary approach without having an opportunity to analyze it and present it to our members.

At a meeting of the shrimp advisory committee, the shrimp industry recommended to follow the current precautionary approach, except for the Sept-Îles area. According to the current approach, the total allowable catch in that area should be increased by 22.5%, but industry decided that the increase should be only 15% and supported the idea of reviewing the precautionary approach over the course of this year. However, the minister did not follow that industry recommendation and reduced the total allowable catch based on scenarios proposed by the science branch, after the branch presented its document during the peer review. That makes us wonder why a precautionary approach is being implemented when it is being dismissed out of hand.

The peer review process is one thing, but fishers' expertise and data are another. We think that fishers' data deserve to be taken into account as much as scientific data. Fishers are the eyes on the water. They are on the water from April 1, sometimes until November, and even December, while Department of Fisheries and Oceans surveys are carried out only over a 20-day period in August.

The trust among fishers, the science branch and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is clearly not the best right now. Fishers feel that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans management does not have enough trust in their data and their expertise. However, their goal is not to destroy the species, but to earn a living year after year. They know that resource must be protected for the sustainability of fishing. For the fisher, any decisions made by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on fisheries can impact their fishing business.

The Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat document says that technological developments in the fishing industry—including the use of seabed mapping, echo sounders and new trawls—enable fishers to be more productive than in the past. Our fishers say that this is false, as they have had the same trawls for more than

10 years and have been using sounders for nearly 30 years. So those technologies are not new for fishers.

Predation by redfish also has a significant impact on shrimp. Scientists from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans are telling us that redfish eat over 200,000 tonnes of shrimp, while they quantify shrimp biomass at 52,000 tonnes. Those data do not add up. How can redfish eat 200,000 tonnes of shrimp when shrimp biomass is only 52,000 tonnes? We think serious consultations must be held on the impact of predation by redfish on shrimp populations, as well as on the future and the importance of that fishery.

Given the difficult situation that fleet is currently experiencing, it may be timely for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to contribute financially and enable shrimpers to carry out, in collaboration with the science branch, more in-depth research on shrimp and the impact of predation by redfish on shrimp. Research surveys specifically on shrimp could be carried out at a time other than August, in various fishing areas. It goes without saying that a commercial redfish fishery must open. Otherwise, if the data on shrimp consumption by that predator are accurate, will shrimp survive or will it suffer the same faith as cod?

The shrimp advisory committee has a mandate to advise the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans on management measures on the conservation and sustainable use of resources. That is the main avenue for consultations with industry. However, industry is completely unaware of the recommendations made to the minister or the measures suggested to them. There is a clear lack of transparency in this case.

Shrimp fishing is going through—

• (1115)

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Roussel, we've gone way over the five-minute mark, so we'll have to end it there. Hopefully, in questioning, anything you didn't get out will come out then.

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

Mr. Martin Mallet (Executive Director, Maritime Fishermen's Union): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for having us today on this very important study.

The Maritime Fishermen's Union represents over 1,300 multi-species inshore fishermen in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. They are independent owner-operators living and operating their small and medium-sized enterprises in rural coastal communities. They are real people living in real communities in which everybody thrives when the fisheries are healthy.

It is therefore in the vested interests of organizations like ours to work together with DFO, other stakeholders and indigenous groups towards building and sustaining healthy fisheries for our members and the communities that depend on them.

Therefore, any fisheries resource management decisions should always strongly consider what fishing organizations have to say about the science advice that is being provided to DFO management for review, as well as the socio-economic repercussions of these decisions. More importantly though, the proposed solutions to resource and management issues provided by fishing organizations need to be heard and strongly considered.

I have three recommendations for the committee today.

Here's number one: Use collaborative science. Many organizations believe and invest readily in furthering any science that can promote better management measures and long-term sustainability for our fisheries.

For us at the MFU, the creation of our own science branch, Homarus Inc., in 2002 has been a game-changer and a major source of collaborative science with DFO in the gulf region. On top of this, though, one very important and often forgotten benefit of such collaborative science processes is that they allow fishermen leaders within our membership to understand and buy into the science-backed management measures that are needed to improve our fisheries—for example, lobster and snow crab.

For DFO scientists, they enable them to get to know and discuss with fishermen their daily, yearly and even generational observations and insights with regard to ecosystem patterns experienced while fishing. On many occasions, science projects are then developed to test some of these patterns with success. On all occasions, it's been an opportunity for all parties to exchange, raise awareness on issues and develop trust in a common science process.

Where this formula has been used, we have seen success stories such as in the management of the lobster and snow crab fisheries in the southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence. However, with other resources such as herring and mackerel, we are currently facing challenges where this collaboration has not been established or is limited.

Recommendation number two is to adapt and properly fund DFO stock-assessment science to a changing ecosystem. In the past 20 years, fishermen have been witness to a rapidly changing ecosystem associated with climate change. This phenomenon is responsible in part for a multitude of significant changes in the ecology, distribution and biomass of several species in the southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence, as well as changing predation pressures.

As a result, it is becoming increasingly urgent for DFO to develop a holistic research strategy aimed at better understanding and predicting the impact of these changes and to adapt current DFO stock assessment protocols to changing fish ecology and distribution patterns.

Finally, the DFO science sector is well recognized as having extensive expertise in a wide range of fields, as stated to this committee by the DFO director general of the ecosystem science directorate, Dr. Bernard Vigneault. This expertise includes that in marine

environment and aquatic ecosystems, hydrography, oceanography, fisheries, aquaculture and biotechnology. However, socio-economic science expertise is sorely lacking and is needed more than ever to help us better plan and adapt to these changes that are affecting our fisheries and the coastal communities that depend on them.

Recommendation number three is to put in place ad hoc committees and science networks. Where there's a need for specific issues to be solved in the fisheries sector, ad hoc committees should be put in place to study the issue from all scientific angles—natural and socio-economic—conduct regional consultations with stakeholder and indigenous groups, while also exploring outside-the-box ideas. Such committees would need to have representation from industry leaders, academia, indigenous groups, and DFO science and management. That being the case, recommendations emanating from these committees would garner better buy-in from stakeholder groups and would be a precious advisory tool for the minister in situations where difficult decisions need to be made.

The now-defunct fisheries resource conservation council, the FRCC, should be strongly considered as a potential model moving forward. One of the purposes of the FRCC was to make important resource management recommendations based on sound scientific and stakeholder advice, which then made sense to everyone. As an example, our organization has used the 1995 FRCC report on lobster conservation to convince our own membership of the merits of many conservation measures that have since been applied very successfully.

- (1120)

Another example of a successful collaboration—and I'll be done with this—in our sector has been the Canadian Fisheries Research Network. This network fostered new fundamental natural and social fisheries-related research with the help of industry, indigenous groups, academia and DFO science and management. A look back at this model and its successes by this committee is also strongly recommended and a good idea, maybe, moving forward.

Thank you.

- (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mallet.

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

Mr. Dave Brown (Public Fishery Alliance): My name is Dave Brown. I've lived and fished in the marine and freshwater environment of B.C. since 1991. I have served as the chair of the Squamish to Lillooet sport fish advisory committee for over 20 years. In 2017, I received the National Recreational Fisheries Award, one of only five given out that year by the fisheries minister. I volunteer as a avid angler in the collection and sampling of DNA in the ocean, and I've aided Tenderfoot Creek fish hatchery with the collection of their brood stock.

Today I'm representing the Public Fishery Alliance, which is a broad-based, non-profit society consisting of almost one thousand Canadian anglers, angling organizations, angling-dependent businesses and volunteer salmon and habitat restoration groups.

Chinook salmon are the most important species to the public fishery in British Columbia, and anglers recognize the need for conservation when specific stocks are experiencing decline. Since Minister Wilkinson implemented the wide-ranging non-retention policy for chinook in 2019 through much of southern B.C. waters during the important April to August fishing season, our public salmon fishery has been all but gutted.

The sport fishing advisory board submitted a suite of very modest chinook retention proposals in 2020 that were designed in collaboration with DFO fisheries and stock assessment staff using the most recent data. These small areas represented vital opportunities for salmon anglers and avoided migrating stocks of concern while measures to protect declining Fraser chinook were in place. Even though a management framework model deemed the proposals as low- or no-risk in the spring of 2021, then fisheries minister Bernadette Jordan rejected them. Both the sport fishing advisory board and the angling community were devastated by her decision. At the time, no rationale was offered as to why the proposals were refused.

Anticipating an opportunity to amend the SFAB proposals to offer even greater protection to Fraser chinook in the hope that they would be approved for spring of 2022—

The Chair: Mr. Brown, can I ask you to pause for just a second? I have to talk to the committee. I have the timer paused, so you won't lose any time.

Mr. Dave Brown: Okay.

The Chair: The bells are ringing for a vote in the House of Commons. I don't know if people intend to go to the chamber to vote, if they're voting from their phones or how they're doing this, but in order for us to continue on, even to the 15-minute mark of the bells, we would have to get unanimous consent to do that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Agreed.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Chair, from our side, we're good with staying and continuing until the vote.

The Chair: Okay, we'll continue on with statements for as long as we can before the vote takes place.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Chair, would it be possible to go right up to votes, since we all have the app? We don't even need 15 minutes to get ready.

The Chair: If everybody intends to do it with the app, then we can go right up to the 30-minute countdown, because you won't be able to vote on the app until that point anyway. If everybody is in agreement—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: That works for us.

The Chair: —I guess that's what we'll do.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, everybody in the room has agreed to use the app to vote and stay.

The Chair: Okay, that's perfect.

Continue on, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Dave Brown: We were dismayed to learn that the DFO salmon team openly stated they would not discuss any proposals from the SFAB related to chinook retention in April and May of 2022.

It is a responsibility for DFO to work toward providing Canadian anglers sustainable fishing opportunities when they become available. Signing the 2010 recreational vision statement, DFO signalled its intent to work with the sport fishing advisory board in developing fisheries for the Canadian public. This apparently is not happening in the Pacific region.

Prime Minister Trudeau's mandate letter to the fisheries minister states that the minister should: "Work to support sustainable, stable, prosperous fisheries through the continued implementation of the modernized Fisheries Act", and as well "Advance consistent, sustainable and collaborative fisheries arrangements with Indigenous and non-Indigenous fish harvesters."

It seems there are once again biased personnel within the DFO Pacific region's senior fisheries management staff who continue to block public chinook fishing opportunities for no valid reason. The stated rationale for these decisions is often contentious. For that reason, we fear fisheries decisions are being manipulated by the Pacific region based on politics and not science.

When the Public Fishery Alliance learned DFO would not consider the amended chinook retention proposals in 2022, several PFA members approached local Liberal members of Parliament as a way of seeking help with this important issue. Subsequently, a meeting was arranged with senior policy adviser Neil Macisaa, who suggested two parts of the SFAB suite of the chinook retention proposals were potentially acceptable and nearly approved in 2021.

Among others, Patrick Weiler, Liberal MP from the West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country riding, was supportive of those proposals. It seems senior DFO Pacific region staff persuaded Minister Murray to reject them as well, and this time on the grounds of policy, not merit, citing they would not reopen the 2021-22 salmon integrated management plan. The reason for the denial of critically important, data-supported fishing opportunities makes no sense.

As a consequence of the crushing south coast management actions in place since 2019, and the loss of the April and May 2022 fishing opportunities, the PFA has lost all confidence in senior Pacific region leadership.

The second issue I raise with you today is the failure of DFO to mark all hatchery chinook in the Pacific region. Right now, only 10% of chinook are marked. The public pays for the production of hatchery fish, yet because these fish are largely unmarked, the public is denied access to them. The public deserves access to the fish they are paying to produce. DFO spent over \$1 million purchasing marking trailers. With these marking trailers, up to 60,000 coho or chinook can be marked per day, compared with doing just 10,000 manually.

By marking all hatchery chinook it would allow for selective harvest of chinook by first nations, recreational fishers and commercial fishers who could identify and release wild chinook and harvest hatchery chinook. This would allow for much-needed data to be collected with the heads of these salmon that were turned in through the salmon head recovery program.

Failure to mark hatchery chinook will significantly reduce or prevent selective fisheries and be detrimental to wild stock. Even hatchery managers will be unable to tell the difference between wild and hatchery chinook during brood capture. What would be the incentive to use selective fishing techniques if sport, first nation and commercial cannot tell the difference between hatchery and wild fish?

The Fraser and Skeena rivers are being severely impacted by non-selective fishing by gillnet fisheries, where nets are used to catch all types of salmon and steelhead, leading to mortalities of these stocks of concern. The government must move to remove gillnets and use selective fishing technologies, such as fish traps, which can be used to catch salmon without injuring or killing the ones you want to release.

We have seen the near extinction of Chilcotin and Thompson steelhead because of gillnets, and are witnessing the same impacts on the Skeena River. There needs to be urgent action to save these populations, remove gillnets and address the pinnipeds that feed on out-migrating smolts and returning adults. The British Columbia—

• (1130)

The Chair: Mr. Brown, we're going to have to end it there. We've gone way over.

Mr. Dave Brown: Okay.

The Chair: Hopefully in the questioning part, you'll be able to get the rest of your statement out, or any thoughts.

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

Mr. Christopher J. Bos (President, South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition): Thank you.

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the standing committee.

I have lived in Victoria, B.C., for the past 22 years, with closeness to the ocean and excellent angling opportunities being significant factors in my motivation to live there.

I am the Victoria committee chair for the sport fishing advisory board and have held positions at all levels in the process during my 19 years of involvement. I am also the past-president of the Victoria Fish and Game Protective Association and served as fisheries com-

mittee chair for the B.C. Wildlife Federation. In addition, I am currently a director of the Public Fishery Alliance. Today I appear before you as the president of South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition.

I bring forward two significant concerns.

The first is the lack of sufficient support for the strategic salmon enhancement in the Pacific region. For the past six years, the South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition has served as the administrator and coordinating organization for an important and successful citizen-driven, volunteer-operated and community-based chinook enhancement initiative in Sooke, B.C.

Since its inception, the program has raised and released 3.5 million healthy chinook smolts into the Sooke Basin—all with private money. The purpose of the project is to increase the abundance of returning large adult chinook salmon to provide additional preferred prey for the endangered southern resident killer whales at key pre-winter feeding time. Added benefits include increased natural spawners in the Sooke River; first nations' food, social and ceremonial chinook harvest opportunities; as well as great angling for chinook between July and early September in the Juan de Fuca Strait each year. The Sooke chinook enhancement initiative is eminently scalable and can easily be successful in other locations.

This is especially disappointing as historic pen programs were operated at the same sites. Additionally, several first nations and local stakeholders were strongly supportive and wish to collaborate on these potential programs being restarted. In essence, the department has not allowed other projects like Sooke to continue.

Strategic enhancement and habitat restoration are good examples of how to give endangered stocks a chance. By introducing mark-selective fisheries, the public fishery can survive while endangered stocks recover. Micromanaging the public salmon fishery alone is basically optics and does not constitute a recovery plan. The salmon enhancement program in B.C. is held in high esteem by Canadians and has served its purpose very well over the past 40 years. It is well past time that SEP be given sufficient funds to update and improve to a world-class operation again.

DFO funding should also be provided for volunteer groups and associations that seek to enhance salmon populations where fisheries will benefit all Canadians, such as the Sooke chinook enhancement initiative. To address the crippling challenges posed by the declining Fraser stream-type chinook salmon, a new hatchery should be built on the upper Fraser, too.

The government has also bought and paid for two highly specialized automated mobile fish marking systems. As Canadian taxpayers' money supports the department's hatchery system in B.C., it would make far more sense that all hatchery fish be marked to afford fishing opportunity for Canadians who pay for them.

The second concern I bring to you today is the lack of access to viable chinook salmon harvest opportunities. Chinook salmon are, without doubt, the most important species to saltwater anglers in B.C. The vast majority fish in the ocean to catch salmon and take it home for the family table. Therefore, catch-and-release angling for chinook simply does not work.

This year, there is a significant abundance of chinook salmon in the waters around south Vancouver Island—perhaps the most seen by anglers in decades. Currently there are plentiful hatchery-marked chinook, mostly of U.S. origin, available, but anglers cannot keep any at all as they can only practice catch and release at this time.

Earlier this year, DFO fisheries managers would not entertain chinook fishing proposals from April and May. Also, two extremely low-risk, SFAB-supported chinook retention proposals were turned down by the minister.

● (1135)

Since April 2019, when Fisheries Minister Wilkinson implemented non-retention chinook salmon regulations for four key months of the year, participation in the fishery has collapsed. While on the face of it this helps struggling Fraser chinook stocks, this also harms many fisheries support businesses. Excessive fishing restrictions used as a lone recovery strategy have rarely ever worked.

Regrettably, the chinook regulation regime in 2019 closed an existing well-managed hybrid mark-selective fishery originally implemented in 2008, which ironically still meets and exceeds the baseline criteria for a DFO-approved mark-selective fishery to proceed, but there is not one.

The avid anglers program, which is the epitome of good science, is all but not working around south Vancouver Island because these anglers, not being able to keep a fish, are not going fishing.

The Chair: Mr. Bos, we're going to have to end it there. We've gone way over time.

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

Mr. Martin Paish (Director, Business Development, Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia): Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee.

Previously, Owen and I attempted to share our allotted time, but today we've opted to leave the opening statement to one of us—me, in this case. However, we are both prepared to answer questions, based on our different areas of expertise.

The SFI is a non-profit association that represents the interests of the 250,000 licensed tidal waters anglers in B.C., and the thousands of businesses and communities that support them. The sector produces \$1.1 billion in annual sales and supports 9,000 jobs, which exist mainly in small coastal and riverside communities. The sport fishery is the single largest economic driver among all B.C. fisheries, although anglers harvest only 15% of the annual B.C. halibut catch and a similarly small portion of the salmon catch.

British Columbia is unique in Canada in having a vibrant marine recreational fishery that has existed for over 100 years. It's an integral part of the province's coastal economy and cultural traditions. Because of this, having participants in tidal waters recreational fisheries serve as citizen scientists to generate data—which informs the management of sustainable fisheries—is a concept fully supported by the angling community.

In collaboration with DFO science and stock assessment staff, the SFI plays an active role in supporting citizen science by assisting in the coordination of catch monitoring, as well as data collection initiatives like the avid anglers program, and guide and lodge logbook programs. Further, the SFI has created a mobile app, FishingBC, which is standing by to allow anglers and guides to submit catch in real time. We are also exploring the feasibility of video monitoring of guided boats.

Volunteer-driven citizen science fishery sampling is a key component for DFO to assess recreational fishery impacts and adjust fisheries to improve sustainability. As an example of the significance of these contributions, 50% of the biological samples collected since 2014—over 42,000 in eight years—were collected by anglers. Given the quality and quantity of the information gathered, and the versatility of the data collection approach, bio samples—which include DNA, scale and otolith samples—must surely represent the future of modern stock assessment in B.C.

Since 2019, in times and areas where chinook non-retention was initiated by DFO, almost 100% of the released fish samples came from volunteer anglers. In periods and areas where DFO doesn't have a budget for monitors on the docks, citizen science volunteers are relied upon for sampling. Without these volunteer efforts, DFO would have no basis for measuring fishery impacts or understanding the migration behaviour of salmon in these areas and times. As fisheries move toward mark-selective fisheries, the use of volunteers for the sampling of released wild chinook will be an increasingly important element in helping to determine the sustainability of the approach and in assessing conservation benefits.

To give you a sense of participation, consider that over 600 volunteers have been actively sampling in southern B.C. recreational fisheries for more than 15 years. Many of these volunteers are also involved in stewardship and enhancement initiatives. These individuals are part of an army of volunteers, all along the coast and rivers, who generously give their time and contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to stewardship activities by fundraising for fishing tournaments and events.

In recognition of the importance of these programs, DFO should ensure that appropriate levels of funding and support are provided to the volunteers, and that the data they generate is used to the best extent possible, in order to inform decisions related to sustainable fisheries. The current level of support and recognition for this work is limited, relative to the benefit DFO receives from the program. It does not reflect the hundreds of thousands of dollars DFO saves annually by using volunteers.

There should be an understanding that DFO is making fishery-related decisions based on the best science available, or a concise rationale should be supplied when decisions reflect something else. Citizen science volunteers are typically well versed in fishery management issues, know when their work is ignored and should be provided a complete explanation as to why a decision does not reflect science, when this occurs. The recent and highly precautionary chinook retention proposals put forward by the SFAB perfectly exemplify this issue. These data-driven proposals were carefully designed to avoid stocks of concern and passed DFO's evaluation process as posing minimal risk, yet without any formal, written explanation from DFO, many of these proposals were not implemented.

Finally, while it's a social science rather than a resource science, economics should play a larger role in DFO decision-making than it currently does. Recreational fishery management decisions that will result in socio-economic impacts should include thorough impact assessments to fully understand their social, cultural and blue economy implications.

To do that, current and region-specific data is needed but does not exist. Statistics cited earlier are from 2016. Unfortunately, these are the most current ones available. Due to significant and recent changes to the recreational fisheries and, therefore, to the economy and social fabric of small coastal communities that depend on this activity, regular evaluation of socio-economic values should occur.

• (1140)

At a minimum, the national recreational fishing survey—previously on a five-year cycle—or some form of similar DFO-led program should resume at once.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these remarks. We look forward to further questions.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

To finish off with opening statements, we'll go to Mr. Lanteigne.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Lanteigne (Director General, Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels): Good morning.

I have been the director general of the Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, FRAPP, for 15 years. Several of you have heard me testify before this committee on a number of occasions.

Fisheries are definitely an area where the concept of sustainable development takes on its full significance. Of course, we will talk about sustainable fishing. In that context, marine science plays a crucial role, and it is easy to understand why.

I don't want to overwhelm you with numbers and statistics, but to illustrate the situation properly, I will provide you with the following information. According to data from Fisheries and Oceans Canada collected by the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters, from 2009 to 2019, the value of seafood products exported by the four Atlantic Canadian provinces went from \$2.8 billion to \$5.3 billion, for a phenomenal increase of 87% in constant dollars. That is one of the highest increases among all of the country's economic activities, if not the highest.

I had the pleasure to listen to the testimony of other people who testified before you. While I agree on most of the elements raised, I would say, using a very common expression, that the fishing industry is all over the map. I will list a few files currently on the table: habitat, endangered species, marine protected areas, right whales, review of the precautionary approach, blue economy strategy. Those issues are addressed in such disorderly fashion that the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. Moreover, climate change must be added to this, as well as market requirements, traceability requirements, and the list goes on. What are we to do in this context? If I understand correctly, that is the question your committee is asking. Let's have a closer look at it.

The one and only scientific survey done with a trawler in the gulf takes place in the summer. According to that survey, redfish accounts for nearly 90% of all species in trawler hauls. That very important factor should sound the alarm bells across the department. In reality, very little is being done about it. A bit of work is being done by the Maurice-Lamontagne Institute to try to learn more about redfish diet and a few other elements, but that's all. However, using that factor among others, the department reduced shrimp quotas in the gulf while not providing any support or compensation measures for that industry.

It is clear to us that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans must immediately set up work teams to measure the impact of the arrival of such a large redfish biomass in the gulf.

We also feel that this survey is not enough. More must be done and, more importantly, during every season and not only in the summer. That brings up the aspect of cost arising from that the work. Our response is that the model must be rethought by going off the beaten path.

In 2018, the Association des capitaines-propriétaires de la Gaspésie and the FRAPP presented to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans the concept of fishermen-observers who, in collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, would be allowed to gather all kinds of data and information on species in the gulf. Having not been considered in collaboration with fisher associations, that idea did not get the attention of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Yet we feel that this concept is even more important today than it was in 2018.

Here is what our associations at the FRAPP are telling us.

First, we must act quickly, as fisheries are at risk, including shrimp fisheries.

We also need more transparency from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Decisions made behind closed doors with major impacts on our communities no longer make sense in 2022.

In addition, stock assessment processes must be more in-depth and be based on more information.

Advisory committees' mandates must also be reviewed and improved, so that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans would be accountable to those committees for its decisions.

Moreover, all the fishing sector and industry stakeholders must be mobilized by holding major conferences in the Atlantic and in the Pacific, by dividing sectors in two parts: coastal fisheries on one side and mid-shore and offshore fisheries on the other. The conferences should become the Canadian forum of the fisheries and marine resources sector, and they should be held ad hoc, at a yet-to-be-defined frequency, either every two years or every three years.

It should also be mandatory to consider socioeconomic factors in decisions made by the department, and not only when it suits some.

Finally, in 2010, the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters managed to get funding under a program of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada. That helped create the Canadian Fisheries Research Network, which operated for five years. The network brought together university researchers, industry stakeholders, as well as Department of Fisheries and Oceans authorities. Unfortunately, once the funding ran out, that wonderful project bringing together those three important sectors had to cease operations. We recommend that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans work with the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters to bring back that model by incorporating the entire socioeconomic aspect as requested by many of us.

• (1145)

Thank you very much for listening to me.

I know that my comments will raise many questions. It will be our pleasure to answer them.

• (1150)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lanteigne.

We have time, I think, for one round of six-minute questions before the actual vote is to take place.

All I will say is that, when the vote is ready and people get it done, if you're on Zoom, give me a thumbs-up that you've done it. Also, if you're in the House, perhaps somebody can let me know that everybody has voted, because we will need unanimous consent to start up the FOPO study.

Mr. Arnold, we'll go over to you for six minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses. I wish we had more time, but with seven of you squeezed into one meeting, it's quite tight.

I'll start first with Mr. Paish and Mr. Mallet, if I could. Does DFO provide your organizations with info on what science the department is going to be undertaking and the eventual purpose of that science?

Mr. Mallet, you're first.

Mr. Martin Mallet: Typically, our relationship with the DFO science region of the gulf has been good, so we do have a good general update or feel for where the science is going year after year, but it's a relationship that depends on the science team and the actual species that are being studied. In terms of our relationship on lobster, it has been excellent, for instance, but in terms of some of our pelagic species, it has been more of a challenge. We're working on it as we speak.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Paish.

Mr. Martin Paish: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

My response would be similar to Mr. Mallet's, in that it really is dependent upon species and how current the issue is that we're dealing with.

DFO does have the ability to work collaboratively with us in terms of data collection in particular, as we talked about earlier, but some of the more stock-specific science... I would use southern resident killer whales as a great example. That is an opportunity where there isn't sufficient science there to make the appropriate decisions and, therefore, some of the decisions that are made are not particularly science driven. I would use the recent closure at the mouth of the Fraser River as a very perfect example of that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Are you able to suggest where those science gaps need to be filled? Are those suggestions followed up on or do they hit a brick wall?

Mr. Martin Paish: We're currently trying to do that on our visit to Ottawa on this particular trip, including the specific example that I raised with you.

The answer is, yes, we are able to communicate with DFO in terms of what we feel are priorities for research, and the answer is that not particularly often does the advice we offer get acted upon.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Because you're on the west coast—and possibly Mr. Brown and Mr. Bos may be able to add a bit as well—how would you describe the interaction with interior first nations and interior stakeholders that also have an interest in salmon and steelhead, which must first survive the marine and coastal risks that they see?

Go ahead, Owen.

Mr. Owen Bird (Executive Director, Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia): Thanks, Mr. Arnold.

I would suggest that it's quite variable depending on the particular issue and the discussion at hand and on the first nation. It's a challenge in consistency of communication, and certainly if it's coordinated with DFO it's even more challenging, because there are limited opportunities for first nations and the sport fishing communities sector to meet together as coordinated by DFO.

It's challenging, and I can't give you a consistent answer about how that goes.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay.

Mr. Brown, would you have some comments on this? How is the sharing of information—the coordination between organizations on the coast and inland—facilitated and does DFO have a positive or negative effect on that?

Mr. Dave Brown: I don't feel that DFO does incentivize or create opportunities to collaborate or communicate on these issues. I want to emphasize that the biggest thing I think that all groups would like to see is the removal of gillnets from the Fraser River, which have severe impacts on both salmon and steelhead migrating back to the upper Fraser, especially for steelhead in the Thompson and Chilcotin watersheds.

A move to incentivize all fishers who want to capture fish in river would be to have fish traps. There is that technology out there, but it's not moving quickly enough. I think that's the biggest thing that needs to happen.

• (1155)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I'll go back to Mr. Paish and Mr. Bird.

You mentioned that the data on the value of recreational fisheries is outdated. That was regularly updated, I take it, in the past. Is that something that DFO—or possibly finance—really needs to look at, to see how much of an impact it has had on coastal communities and businesses in those communities?

Mr. Martin Paish: Thank you very much for that question.

It's our strong belief that, due to the economic power of our fishery and its incredibly positive impacts—particularly in smaller coastal communities—current accurate, useable, cultural impact and social impact statements should be part of the decision-making process as it relates to fisheries management decisions.

We've been asking for this for many years. It's our current understanding that this is sort of a shared responsibility between the provinces and the federal government. We believe that the federal government manages fisheries in British Columbia, tidal water fish-

eries. Therefore, making informed decisions that include cultural and socio-economic impacts is an important part of that process.

Not enough work is being done, Mr. Arnold. More needs to be done, and it needs to be updated.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you very much.

That's my time, Chair.

The Chair: That's your time. Thank you very much, Mr. Arnold.

We'll take a quick recess now for people to go vote, and we'll start up again as soon as everyone lets me know in some manner that they've already submitted their vote. Once we get everybody, we'll start up again.

We're recessed.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: Has everybody on both sides voted?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Cormier for six minutes or less please.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses for joining us.

I will first turn to Mr. Lanteigne and Ms. Roussel. I have so many questions to ask, but I have only 10 minutes.

Mr. Lanteigne and Ms. Roussel, we often have an opportunity to talk. I want to discuss shrimp with you today. As you know, this year is difficult, just like recent years have been.

Mr. Lanteigne, I will start with you. I will put a question to you that I have put to a number of witnesses since the beginning of this study. It concerns figures the department provided this year concerning the quantity of shrimp redfish eat. This year, redfish supposedly ate 221,000 tonnes of shrimp in the gulf, while shrimp biomass is approximately 54,000 tonnes.

What is your interpretation of those numbers, Mr. Lanteigne?

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: Like everyone, we see that things aren't working from a numbers standpoint. That tells us we have a real problem that needs fixing. I talked about it in my opening statement. We don't have enough analyses or data to know exactly where things stand.

What is certain, though, is the huge quantity of redfish in the Gulf. We even think we're seeing new year classes, especially in the Esquiman Channel, in Newfoundland and Labrador.

More data is imperative. Doing a single scientific survey in August doesn't cut it.

• (1210)

Mr. Serge Cormier: Some of your fishers are participating in the exploratory fishery for redfish, and I think they catch their quota every time they go out.

If it's 221,000 tonnes this year, we can probably expect that to rise to nearly 300,000 tonnes next year, assuming there's a 30% increase. What should we do, Mr. Lanteigne? Taking steps to protect shrimp stocks is well and good, but if redfish keep eating the shrimp, we won't have a healthy biomass.

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: That's exactly right. The department needs to open the redfish fishery as soon as possible, but the answer we get from the department is that redfish aren't the right size for commercial fishing nets.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Yes, but other steps could be taken.

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: That's right. The department needs to open the fishery and examine the options. I realize that making fishmeal may not be desirable, but surely, it's possible to do something with redfish. The commercial fishery needs to open as soon as possible. That's the first step.

Furthermore, we need to have the ability to figure out exactly what the distribution of redfish in the Gulf is, and the analysis work needs to continue. Fisheries and Oceans Canada tells us that the closer redfish get to adulthood, the less they eat shrimp. We don't have that information yet, but that's the type of scientific analysis we absolutely need.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Very good.

I noticed that, yesterday or the day before, Quebec fishers decided to stay in port because of the price the Quebec agricultural marketing board was paying.

Did your fishers in the region make a decision? Are they going to go out anyways, or will they think twice about incurring expenses—which, as you know, can be enormous—and run the risk of not being able to at least break even?

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: In order to protect market access, producers in our region asked fishers to make an extra effort. Fishers agreed to go out approximately three times to see whether they could cover the costs of those trips. If not, they will likely stay in port. I can tell you that they didn't do well on the first trips. No one had a profitable trip, so it doesn't bode well.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I'm jumping around a bit here. I have so many questions.

Can you tell us quickly why you disagreed with the precautionary approach that was taken this year and the resulting quota decisions?

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: We already have a precautionary approach. What Fisheries and Oceans Canada did this year was ignore that approach. The department basically scrapped the approach and said that it was going to do something different. It doesn't make sense. Either we have rules or we don't.

It's not a good sign when the police don't follow their own rules. That was more or less what happened with the department this year. They bring us into a process and force us to make decisions, but

when it's time to abide by those decisions, the department does something else. That doesn't work.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I would say your comments probably reflect what we are all thinking. We know we have to protect the resources and keep them healthy for future generations.

Do you ever feel that the department makes quota or fishery management decisions without really taking into account the repercussions they could have on communities? Would you say that the way things are currently done does not adequately take into account the repercussions on communities?

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: I think it's safe to say that, most of the time, the department is reactive, rather than proactive. Back in 2011, when fishers started reporting sightings of small red fish—which we used to refer to as peanuts because they were just three centimetres long—it should have immediately raised a red flag at the department. It should have realized that a phenomenon was emerging and that it needed to analyze the situation right away. That didn't happen, though. The department lets things drag on until its back is against the wall; then it starts asking what it can do. Very often, it ends up closing the fishery because that's all it can do when things get to that point. That's no solution.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I saw that—

[*English*]

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Cormier.

We now go to Monsieur Desilets, who I believe is sitting in for Madame Desbiens today, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm new to the committee, so I'm constantly learning. What I'm hearing is not only surprising, but also unsettling.

My first question is for Mr. Lanteigne.

Do you think the Department of Fisheries and Oceans does enough to consult your organization, harvester organizations and collaborative science networks so that it can make sensible decisions?

• (1215)

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: I don't think we have bad communication with the department. We talk to people there, we can discuss issues with them, but after that, the door closes—and what goes on behind that door, we have no idea. We usually have to be insistent. We have to keep knocking on the door. It's really tough to know what comes of our discussions with department officials.

In 2017 or 2018, we set up a joint working group on shrimp, and we had excellent meetings with department officials, but nothing more. It's like talking to someone, who then tells you that they're going to go home and mull it all over, and get back to you with an answer. There's a clear lack of transparency, and it makes no sense, especially since communities are visibly impacted. Thousands of workers are affected, and the impending possible collapse of the shrimp fishery is a perfect example of that lack of transparency.

Mr. Luc Desilets: In a nutshell, Mr. Lanteigne, the department listens to what you have to say, but doesn't hear you.

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: You hit the nail on the head.

Mr. Luc Desilets: All right. Thank you.

I have a question for Mr. Mallet.

What do you think of the department's ability to conduct socio-economic analysis? Wouldn't the department do well to seek out the expertise of economic and social science researchers to take into account the socio-economic profiles of the various regions and, above all, small communities?

Mr. Martin Mallet: It is crucial that the department start making significant investments to that end, because—as I said in my opening statement—our fisheries are facing a growing number of risk factors, on the west coast and east coast alike. The ecosystem changes we are seeing are going to have repercussions in the next 10 to 15 years. Just look at what is happening today with redfish and shrimp. The interaction between the species is affecting an entire fleet as we speak.

If we had a department with strong economic science capacity, it could come up with possible solutions years ahead of time, in co-operation with organizations like ours and Mr. Lanteigne's. We are here to work with the department, not to be at odds with the department. We want to be partners.

Mr. Luc Desilets: In the past, the department has worked well with fishers, specifically regarding the management of lobster and crab stocks in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Problems have, however, been flagged in the herring and mackerel fisheries. Has any co-operation been established? If so, why isn't it working? Where do you think the problems lie?

Mr. Martin Mallet: I did indeed refer to the management of the lobster and snow crab fisheries as success stories, because we were able to establish a model after decades of work and co-operation. I think that same model could apply to herring, mackerel and other species. In the case of both of those fisheries, some very tough decisions are being made or, at least, have been made by the minister's office in the past six months.

If the department was more receptive to what those of us in the industry recommended, we wouldn't have the current moratorium on spring herring and mackerel.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Mallet.

That's it for me, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron, for six minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses who are here, and thanks for all the information you've shared.

I have many questions. I'm going to get right to them.

My first question is for Mr. Bird and Mr. Paish, who are here today from the Sport Fishing Institute of B.C.

Welcome. Through the chair, in our previous conversations there were discussions around the successes of salmon rehabilitation along the Cowichan River. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit more about what you feel led to this success and what we could learn from this particular example.

• (1220)

Mr. Martin Paish: Thank you very much for that question, Ms. Barron. It's very current.

The Cowichan River could be used as an example and a template for salmon recovery in British Columbia, in that it's an area in which several levels of government—municipal, provincial and federal—along with first nations brought the community together in response to a stock that had literally collapsed. In that time period, through a variety of different initiatives—tweaking the hatchery system, dealing with habitat and, most importantly, dealing with water flows, which, I would remind this committee, are among the most significant habitat components that salmon need—we were able to take a stock that in 2009 was at around 500 animals and bring it up to three times the escapement goal, over 18,000 for the last four years.

It is a great example. Thank you for asking the question. I would suggest that it could be considered a template for the PSSI as a means to effectively bring communities and governments together to recover a threatened salmon population.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Paish.

I know others have also pointed to the success that has occurred along the Cowichan, including Greg Taylor from Watershed Watch. I just want to acknowledge that this is something that is coming up and being brought to my attention over and over.

I have another question. Mr. Arnold asked about this, but I want to see if you could expand a little bit around how the lack of opportunity for Chinook in southern B.C. is impacting the fishery, citizen science and socio-economic benefits to small coastal communities.

Mr. Owen Bird: Thanks, Ms. Barron. I will respond to that.

Yes, absolutely, it has profound trickle-down affects on the activity itself and on displacing effort. The season is compressed in these particular areas in a large chunk of the southern coast of British Columbia, so the season is compressed. That has an effect on the stocks that are captured. It has an effect on the avid angler programs. That's the citizen science providing samples. It displaces that effort, in some cases perhaps permanently, to other parts of the coast. In this time when there is certainly an opportunity to come back from some of the impacts of COVID and restricted access, displacing that effort to other parts of the coast is quite damaging.

It needs to be said that opportunity is limited at best and further reduced, so where there is science that indicates that fisheries can take place on stocks not of concern and that those can be avoided, those need to be taken advantage of. There are examples Martin referred to in his opening statement, as did Dave Brown and Chris Bos, all being familiar with the southern B.C. coast fisheries, showing that science indicates that a fishery can take place, yet we are in a position in which it is not being permitted to take place. The opportunities and those impacts are considerable.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you very much. That's helpful.

I'm going to continue down the table here and maybe I'll get to some who are virtual in the next round.

I have one minute. I'm going to talk quickly.

Mr. Mallet from the Maritime Fishermen's Union, I appreciate your emphasis on collaborative science and how trust is being built while that's happening. One major concern of ours around stock assessments is the lack of completed stock assessments. Groups like Oceana have identified that close to one-third of stock assessments aren't being completed at the moment.

I'm wondering if you could talk a bit more about how this lack of data collection impacts your work. If you run out of time, could you follow up with something written?

• (1225)

Mr. Martin Mallet: Thank you for the question.

I'll use the example of the spring herring fishery, where we knew from what we had in terms of science that the stock was in a difficult situation for a few years. Our fishermen were seeing some of the negative signs on the water. In the last two, three or four years, our fishermen were starting to see some positive signs at the very micro and sometimes regional level. This knowledge was not and is not taken into consideration with the current science.

On top of that, by going to a straight moratorium of the fishery, now we've lost that fisherman platform that we had on the water. They are no longer there. We've lost a good chunk of the actual fisheries-dependent science. We're even worse than we were in terms of the science that we had. We've been struggling in the past few weeks now to put some kind of scrap protocol together with DFO to get something going.

That's an example of where we've really hit a wall in terms of the science. Hopefully, we can turn that around.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of our witnesses. It's really a good group today. You're providing us information on DFO's disregarding of science and how bad it's gotten.

My first question is for Phil Morlock.

DFO once had a good relationship with the angling community, where data was collected and science-based decisions were made and shared for the benefit of all. We heard from you in your state-

ment how bad it is. With your 35 years of experience, can you speak to how well it used to work?

Mr. Phil Morlock: Yes, it was an excellent relationship. There was literally a recreational fisheries division at DFO. There was a chief appointed in that area. Bill Otway was an ombudsman between Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the recreational fishing community. He was extremely competent in that role. We worked co-operatively with scientific initiatives on both coasts and inland waters.

I would say that, in my career, the one individual who stood out the most and was respected on the North American continent in multiple roles in DFO was Tom Bird.

The relationship was always cordial. It was always professional, but it was also very cognizant of things like the importance of economy. The recreational fishing industry, according to Stats Canada is an \$8.6-billion economy annually. If you asked Canadians if they fish, over eight million would answer "yes". That was confirmed the last time in 2012 by the federal survey of the importance of nature to Canadians.

I've seen it decline dramatically in that period, to the point where there was literally no relationship any longer with the fishing industry. I represent the industry and have for its entirety, since CSIA was created. In the past decade or more I cannot think of one single example where DFO has done something positive for the eight million Canadian recreational fishers.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thanks, Mr. Morlock.

Quickly, how does the American NOAA process compare with the process at DFO?

Mr. Phil Morlock: It's dramatically different. The eight coastal committees that deal with ocean coastal management of fisheries include stakeholder input and meet frequently. It's a combination of government, NGOs, scientists and so on. Nothing like that exists in Canada.

For instance, in the 30-by-30 initiative to set aside 30% of areas as "protected", the Biden administration is very engaged, with over 40 fishing and hunting conservation organizations in the U.S. In Canada, it's all behind closed doors. We have no idea what's going on.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you, Mr. Morlock.

I'll go now to Dave Brown. The Public Fishery Alliance was formed out of a need to get basically the attention of the DFO minister. The minister promised to work with the angling community and this committee. In Parliament, you might have watched the debate last week. I asked if she was going to work with groups like the PFA to have an opening on Howe Sound and she assured me that she was going to look into it, yet at the same time, I understand from your notes that DFO senior staff in the Pacific region wouldn't even look at it.

Has the minister worked with you, as she promised she would? Please explain.

• (1230)

Mr. Dave Brown: What I'd like to say is that the minister's staff at the lower level have been very engaging. They have provided us with a lot of opportunity for input, looking at data and coming up with the Howe Sound sport fishing advisory proposal that there was a 99% plus chance you would not encounter a stock of concern and there would be a great opportunity, but in our area, the Vancouver area is closed right now for chinook salmon, the most important salmon, from April 1 until August 31, essentially.

Even some of the minister's own staff met with us and said the proposals were sound and data driven and supported. They have continually rejected them now, despite numerous revisions, and have come back to us with reasons for some of the closures, where we're not given an opportunity to input. It's to the point this year where the opportunity, with the proposal we had, would have been for April and May. They wouldn't even look at it. We worked hard to try to get it, but it's not happening. We're getting shut down.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thanks.

This is my last question, Dave. What does DFO need to do to regain the trust of the angling community?

Mr. Dave Brown: I think they need to create opportunities, specifically for chinook salmon, where there are data-driven proposals. They need to look at the sport fish advisory board's proposals and look at them on a level where they're taken seriously and not dismissed for what appear to be either senior Pacific region staff biases or else political decisions at the ministerial level.

I think confidence right now in the senior department decision-makers and the minister to do this is severely lacking. Looking at some of these proposals and adopting them in the upcoming IFMP would go a long way toward doing this.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zimmer.

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

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

Through you, my questions will all be to Mr. Mallet. Five minutes is short.

We've heard pretty extensive testimony given about the disconnect between DFO science and the fisher in terms of the input of the information coming from the fisher, whether it's commercial fishers or indigenous fishers. We heard evidence from the PEIFA last week about one area that I want to focus on. Is the modelling

used by DFO not a transparent process? There's a question around the modelling being used. In fact, it was that same modelling that was pointed to as one of the reasons for the disconnect between the department and the cod fishery of Newfoundland that led to its collapse.

Could you comment on the modelling? How does DFO use the modelling of the science and the information they get? How could it be improved?

Mr. Martin Mallet: As I think I mentioned in my introduction, there was a successful committee put together a good time ago now, the FRCC, where after the cod collapse—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you expand on the FRCC? I didn't know that you commented on it.

Mr. Martin Mallet: I will a little bit. The fisheries resource conservation council, after the cod moratorium, had a mandate to bring together DFO science but also outside of DFO science—so academia and international experts on fisheries science—and also representatives from the industry. It became a transparent process, or at least the process strived to be 100% transparent. The recommendations that came out from these committee meetings and reports were out for everyone to look at.

Right now we have the CSAS process, which is every year looking at the science that's being done on all of these species. They are supposed to be improving the science as we go forward, but we're seeing some examples where for many years we've said—our organization and some of the others that presented here—that there needs to be some of the science adapted to the climate change things that we're seeing on the water. For instance, with mackerel and herring we're seeing some changes in the distribution and the timing of the fish when they're around the coast.

Every year DFO science, in some instances, they rent their boats and go out and do the science every week, the same week every year. If you miss the timing of the fish by a few days or a few weeks, that's going to impact the quality of your science.

• (1235)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: When did the FRCC cease to function?

Mr. Martin Mallet: I think it was in the early 2010s if I remember correctly, so 2012 or maybe before that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It was disbanded in 2010 or 2012? Was it a model that worked very well?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Like I mentioned, in our case for the MFU, we've used the report on lobster and the report on herring as well, to push some of the changes that were suggested to our own fishermen.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Since that period there has been no formal structure that was similar to the FRCC?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Not that I know of.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Again, Martin, I want to thank you for your recommendations, because this committee is interested in hearing them. We can dwell on the past, but I'm more interested in what has to be done and what changes have to be put in place to ensure that the knowledge of the fisher, whether it's on the east coast or west coast, is incorporated into the actual data that goes to the minister for key decisions. Could you give me your opinion on that? What would be the best structure?

Also, there was testimony given here where fisher groups had made recommendations over the years to improve conservation, especially on mackerel and herring, but it was ignored by the department. One was increasing the net mesh size to allow more to stay in the water, which would be simple conservation, but it was not accepted by the department. Is that correct?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Absolutely. We've been giving, in some cases, recommendations that are the same in some areas for over 20 years, for instance with mackerel, which would have had a significant impact.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Why was it discounted by the department?

Mr. Martin Mallet: That's a good question. In our case, we've been asking for more selective gear to be used with herring and with mackerel, for instance. In terms of the science and recommendations that get to the minister's office, we do not see the recommendations. If there's any lobbying or any political—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: If there are any gaps or misses, you don't have a chance to opine on those?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Morrissey. Your time has gone over.

We'll now go to Monsieur Desilets for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Lanteigne.

Mr. Lanteigne, were you aware that senior officials at Fisheries and Oceans Canada apparently used their discretion to make decisions about science reports? Basically, they did not address what the scientists were calling for, bypassing those recommendations and taking a different approach.

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: Thank you for your question.

We have actual proof of that. In 2018, if I'm not mistaken, we challenged the quota allocation, but the department ultimately decided otherwise. When we subsequently questioned the approach and the reason behind the decision, the department backtracked and gave us what we had been asking for.

Someone somewhere had tilted the playing field on the sly. Nothing about it was transparent, and it's that lack of transparency the department is widely criticized for.

Mr. Luc Desilets: What I gather, then, is that the department does not always follow the advice of scientists. Is that true?

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: That is indeed true.

Department staff who work on the science always say that they have done their jobs; they tell their managers what the science says, and management makes the decisions. Sometimes, staff are uncomfortable with those decisions, so it's clear that there really is disagreement when there shouldn't be.

• (1240)

Mr. Luc Desilets: What's the solution, in your view?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets. There are only three seconds left, so there's not enough time for a question or an answer.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I want to ask some of my fellow coastal B.C. witnesses here today about the Pacific salmon strategy initiative. We know that this initiative came into place about a year ago and that there's been minimal use of funds to date.

Everybody has spoken about the importance of working alongside local communities, first nations and those who are on the water. I'm wondering if any of the witnesses could confirm if they've had any consultation with DFO and what that's looked like.

Perhaps I could start with Mr. Bos.

Mr. Christopher J. Bos: As for my involvement in the sport fishing advisory board, we've had a presentation to the board. I'm sure that can be confirmed by Martin Paish, who's the chair of the board. Very little has been done on a local consultation basis with the angling community. Although we sit here with a very positive outlook for this, not much has been forthcoming as to how it will be rolled out.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Mr. Brown, could you answer the same question?

Mr. Dave Brown: I sort of agree with what Chris said. There's been a little bit of information through the SFAB, but not much has been rolled out at all.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Mr. Bird or Mr. Paish, could you respond as well, please?

Mr. Martin Paish: I agree exactly with the sentiments that Mr. Brown and Mr. Bos provided.

Through the Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia, we have had more consultation on the PSSI than the SFAB has, but the challenge we have is that it's still extremely high level. We're not getting down to the details. We were promised that 2022 would be a year of consultation and bringing stakeholder communities into the PSSI development.

We have consistently asked the PSSI that we be allowed to help bake the cake rather than just pick the flavour of the icing. It's June; it's 2022. We're still feeling like we're picking the flavour of the icing.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Again, I forgot to set my timer, but I'm going to keep going until I get cut off here.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Oh dear.

I wanted to ask a little bit... Perhaps I can ask Mr. Bird and Mr. Paish, because they're right next to me, to provide in written form what their experiences have been around having staff on the ground from DFO to work with. Have they noticed that they've been accessible and available through their work?

The Chair: We'll have to allow that to be a written submission, Ms. Barron, on this, unless we get another slot along the way. That's all your time.

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

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Mallet.

This marks the 30-year anniversary of the closure of the northern cod fishery. That was supposed to be a three-to-five year closure. Now the mackerel fishery has been closed. The decision is quite contentious among harvesters, and the science is under question.

How long has your organization, the MFU, been lobbying DFO for harvesters to be involved in collaborative science?

Mr. Martin Mallet: We've been asking for collaborative science since the foundation of our organization back in 1977. In many cases, we've had success, as I mentioned earlier, with lobster and snow crab. In other instances, it is lacking and it is, I think, the basis of why we have some issues today.

Mr. Clifford Small: In terms of mackerel, can you please give the committee some examples of where harvesters could collaborate and add to science?

Mr. Martin Mallet: In the case of mackerel and any of the species of interest that we fish, we have thousands of boats on the water every year for fishing mackerel or fishing lobster or fishing whatever species. It is a very cheap platform for DFO to use, if they want to, to go out there and gather some more information and data.

• (1245)

Mr. Clifford Small: I've had fisherman say to me, personally, that they could be fitted out with special sonar and sounder equipment so that they could become involved in live acoustic surveys being submitted anytime the boat leaves the wharf.

Mr. Martin Mallet: Absolutely. We've made some progress at that level. I would say that in the last two or three years, in terms of the sonar equipment, we've had some boats set up to start looking at the spring herring stock, for instance.

But it's almost 20 years too late.

Mr. Clifford Small: Is DFO science keeping pace with the changing environment in terms of where and when the at-sea surveys are being completed for mackerel?

Mr. Martin Mallet: There's a lot of goodwill within the science community in some departments within DFO. There is an acknowledgement that the changes we're seeing in the marine ecosystem right now are very important and moving really fast.

The bureaucracy behind changing the way we do science and the funding that's needed to specifically look at fishery science are lacking. There needs to be more flexibility in terms of the timing for when some of these surveys are done, and extra science needs to be done to try to measure how to change the science protocols for stock assessment so that they can adapt to the changes in the behaviour of fish.

Right now, we're doing science with a human calendar or schedule, whereas we should be following the schedule of the fish.

Mr. Clifford Small: That's fair.

Do you think that ENGO groups, such as Oceana, are gaining more seats at the decision-making table at the expense of harvester input?

Mr. Martin Mallet: I can testify that, over the past 10 years, I've seen more and more ENGOs being represented around the advisory tables in most if not all of our fisheries.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you think that these ENGOs are impacting decision-making on things such as closing the mackerel and herring fisheries, and specifically, are they influencing the creation of the new stock assessment models?

Mr. Martin Mallet: They are having some input within these meetings. We know that they are meeting privately with the minister and her office as well. What's being discussed there, we do not know.

However, when you look at some of these ENGOs and where they're from, they're funded from international sources in some parts. Some are more local ENGOs. We have some good collaboration with some, but in other cases, I do not believe they have the health of our small, rural communities in their best interests.

Mr. Clifford Small: Absolutely.

Monsieur Lanteigne, you talked about the positive meetings that you've had and consultations in terms of advisories and the setting of quotas. You went out of the meeting with a certain feeling, but the decision that was made was completely different from the direction that you were left with when leaving the meeting.

Who do you think could have altered the direction of that decision-making after those meetings and before quotas were set?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Chair, we're not hearing the answer.

The Chair: I'm not either.

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: I'm sorry. That's my fault.

The Chair: Could we have a short answer, please?

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: Mr. Small, you just named one of the options with ENGOs around the tables—playing games when we definitely don't know exactly where they're heading. You have more and more of them around. We don't know how implicated they are with the department, but that's definitely an option that we would highly suspect.

There are some other management issues that we don't know about. It's very strange for us when we are hit with those, because we don't necessarily expect that to happen and, all of a sudden, there's a ministerial change there. It's very hard to know what has happened. That's why we're saying there has to be more and more transparency around those advisory tables.

If you look at my notes, I even placed that in there. Most of them don't even have minutes. What was discussed the year before? There are not even the topics of the day. It changes all of the time. The head of those guys is also changing all of the time.

• (1250)

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut it off there. We've gone over time.

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

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate all of the witnesses' testimony. It is indeed hard to know where to begin, but I'm going to start on the west coast. If time allows, I'll move to the other side.

Mr. Bos, like Mr. Morrissey, I'm thinking of what the themes are for thinking forward. I'm hearing about adaptation to current challenges, the need for more transparency, the need for more connection and partnership with both industry and recreational fishers, and the need to integrate social science.

I am also interested in these examples of where things have really worked well. Mr. Bos, you mentioned the Sooke chinook enhancement initiative. I wonder if you can talk more about how we can elevate and use that example.

What are the steps to see how we can use that excellent example of collaboration and success in other areas? Also, reflecting on Ms. Barron's comments on being involved in the Pacific salmon strategy, how can we be involved to make that ultimately a success?

Mr. Christopher J. Bos: Thank you very much indeed for the question, Mr. Hanley.

My initial response to that is that I feel there is a great opportunity at the individual level to reach out between the communities—indigenous and the different communities of business, angling and tourism—and work together to build a friendship and then work together to develop programs that work.

The difficulty with the current intergovernmental discussions between indigenous people and the rest of the community is the different tiers. We see that with salmon planning that the integrated

harvest planning committee no longer has much involvement with the first nations because they are sitting separately with government to discuss. I feel this person-to-person friendship needs to be built up.

As Mr. Paish mentioned in his point regarding the PSSI, I really feel that we need to be part of building the cake—not be the icing on the cake.

One positive that we see is that there are round tables where everybody, including first nations, sit at the table and have discussions on harvest or environmental. There are round tables in the lower Fraser area and some are emerging on the west coast of Vancouver Island. These are very positive steps forward. That's the basis on which I make my answer. It has helped us to work hand in hand with the local first nations for our Sooke project. We've had remarkable success with that.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you very much.

In view of time, I want to go to Monsieur Lanteigne.

You spoke very well at the outset about the multiple challenges that we face and that DFO faces.

I wonder whether you think that DFO as an organization has fundamentally changed over the years or whether it's just a matter of keeping up and adjusting a strategic approach to compete with today's multiple challenges?

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: Those are excellent questions.

I would say that it did change. There are so many staff changing at the department. From one phone call to the other, you don't have a clue who you are talking to. I'll give you quite a good example of that.

An advisory committee has been put in place for the return of the redfish fishery. I think we have had three or four of those meetings and every time it is a new head. Somebody is there. Who is this person? What's his background? What does he or she think? It's always like that, so you have to restart the story all the time to try to find out exactly what that person thinks and what she has on her mind because some of them do have very high influence in decisions.

I think there is not a straight policy somewhere that has been built so that we can build and construct around that. It keeps changing all the time and from one day to another, we don't know where we're going.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

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

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions will be for Mr. Bos.

You have worked on countless projects to bring back viable salmon habitat and increase salmon abundance on Vancouver Island. The Sooke River has benefited from your enhancement efforts to increase the natural spawning population. You have worked cooperatively with first nations, local businesses and the angling community to make positive change for our salmon populations, yet we hear that rather than DFO assisting your efforts, we have seen senior management seemingly only get in the way.

How does DFO actually assist you in your organization's efforts to help increase salmon populations?

Mr. Christopher J. Bos: There are two parts to the answer to your question.

The first part is that I have an extremely good working relationship with the ground-level staff who work on permitting, who work on production of the fish in the hatchery and the coordination of deliveries, etc.

The project referred to is all paid for privately and we do pay the department for the work they are doing, but the level of help and support is great there.

The second part of my answer is the fact that there are opportunities far beyond the one pilot project in the Sooke Basin, and we have already identified one where we have first nations and all stakeholders willing to work together and with funding potentially in-house. We seem to have hit a roadblock with the department not wanting to work forward with it, and trying to divide the collaboration of first nations and stakeholders together and implying that they won't move forward with the project.

It seems strange to me that we have a successful project in one location, which is imminently scalable and can move to other sites, and it's not supported by the department. It doesn't make any sense to me.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I don't know if I heard you correctly, Mr. Bos. We have actually seen an increase in DFO's budget over the last six years by 42.3%.

Does DFO actually fund your work?

Mr. Christopher J. Bos: The project in Sooke is 100% funded by private money. We actually pay the department for services related to delivery, raising of fish, covering of electrical costs and covering office staff to ensure that the project meets its demands.

We would like to see an opportunity to go further with things like the marking of the fish, further coded wire tags and increasing the number of fish, and we're actually being stymied with those opportunities too.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: That leads into my next question. How could they better help in the future? You have alluded to that, but maybe explain a little bit more.

Mr. Christopher J. Bos: The beautiful thing about the Sooke project is that it's like a blank canvas. It has great opportunity. It's proving itself to be suitable for strategic enhancement, where you get a higher rate of survival. Rather than simply releasing fish into a river, you get a much better return on your investment by raising them and penning them for a short period of time at the estuary.

That is what we would like to do in greater numbers in the Sooke Basin, but also we would like to see opportunities to scale that in other locations that have already been identified, often locations where historical projects like this were in place but were closed down by the department for no apparent reason.

It seems strange that you have a successful project going on in one place and it's not being looked at in other places. There appears to be a policy change or a bias against the project in the management of the department.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you.

We see DFO use the excuse that the salmon fishery needs to be closed to feed southern resident killer whales as a tool to close key fishing areas. Is this true?

• (1300)

Mr. Christopher J. Bos: I have a fairly good understanding of this because we were closed from a part of the Juan de Fuca Strait for two years as an appeasement to people who wanted to see large areas closed to fishing during the time when the southern resident killer whales were there. Recent studies have shown that there's virtually no foraging activity at all in that, so the department has now reversed course and opened it up again.

It seems that there isn't science to support some of the actions, but there's incredible pressure to close areas. I personally believe that the recreational fishing community has virtually no impact whatsoever on the health and well-being of the southern resident killer whales.

I cite an example. Between the 1970s and the 1990s the department's own figures show that the fishing community, the public fishery for salmon, was at its peak and the largest effort was taking place, and at the same time during that 20 years the population of the southern resident killer whales went from 70 animals to 98, I believe. That is an indication. If you have more activity on the water from recreational fishing and a growth over that same 20-year period of southern resident killer whales, it shows that the recreational fishery isn't really the cause of the current decline.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Is there a viable option?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zimmer. Your time is over.

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

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just for the record, Mr. Small was saying earlier that DFO listens too much to NGOs, like Oceana, for example.

Oceana called for a shutdown of the capelin fishery this year, and DFO didn't listen to the advice, so we went on with what was still a capelin fishery. I just wanted to put that on the record. Of course, as I said at the beginning, I think we also have to take into account the impact that it's going to have on communities when we shut down a fishery.

My question will be for Mr. Mallet now, speaking of fisheries borders.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for being here, Mr. Mallet. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to speak regularly about issues facing the fisheries in our regions. The closure of the spring herring fishery and the mackerel fishery is going to affect fishers in our regions who rely solely on those fisheries. As Mr. Morrissey said earlier, fisheries have been shut down in the past, the cod fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador, for example.

I think the department should set up a relief program for fishers affected by the closure of the spring herring and mackerel fisheries. What do you think?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Thank you for that excellent question, Mr. Cormier.

There should definitely be a relief program to support the industry, something that would help harvester organizations restructure certain fisheries and, above all, provide financial assistance to fishers who depend on pelagic fisheries. Another option is a licence buyback program for fishers who are ready to retire. That way, those who remain could take advantage of more profitability.

That said, we saw this winter's decision on the mackerel and herring fisheries, and the department seems to have no concrete plan for what comes next. The mackerel decision, in particular, came as a surprise to everyone. The Atlantic Mackerel Advisory Committee issued recommendations, proposing seven quota options. Which one did the department choose? The worst one, a full moratorium that also extends to the bait fishery. That means every fishery whose harvest depends on bait, including lobster and snow crab, is affected. We are worried because the bait we are going to need next year isn't being caught now.

• (1305)

Mr. Serge Cormier: Before we talk about bait, I have two things to say.

When the department officials were here, when we began this study, I asked them whether they had any scientists on the water monitoring the situation immediately following the closure of the mackerel fishery. They said yes. I think that answer is open to interpretation.

Did you see department scientists out on the water conducting scientific surveys as soon as the fishery closed, when the herring were there, as you said earlier?

Mr. Martin Mallet: No. It was actually fishers who were out on the water at that time, so the opportunity to collect that data was lost. At the MFU, we managed to set up a small-scale program at the last minute so that a handful of fishers could go out fishing and collect a little bit of data, but it was too little too late. I want to reiterate the fact that you can't impose a moratorium and completely shut down a fishery without having a plan or a meaningful discussion with industry leaders like us. It wreaks havoc on the industry and really casts doubt on the survival of many small coastal businesses.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I know your organization does a lot of research on artificial bait, among other things. The practice of catching a resource just to use it as bait raises questions in people's

minds. There is, however, a species that could be used as bait, Asian carp, but there is significant resistance to the idea. The committee has talked about that a lot, and so have you. Can you tell us about the barriers you run into when it comes to the use of Asian carp as bait? If not Asian carp, why not redbait, as Mr. Lanteigne suggested earlier, given how plentiful it is in the Gulf?

Describe for us, if you would, the barriers you face when you try to get the necessary approvals for using Asian carp as bait in our waters?

Mr. Martin Mallet: One of the things mentioned is—

[*English*]

The Chair: Maybe we could get an answer sent into the committee by email.

We've gone way over, Mr. Cormier, so I—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: I'd like a written answer, please.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

I'll have to move on now to clew up with Monsieur Desilets and Ms. Barron.

Monsieur Desilets, go ahead for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

It's me, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas. I'm filling in for Mr. Desilets.

Good afternoon to my fellow members and the witnesses who are with us today.

My first questions are for Mr. Lanteigne.

Mr. Lanteigne, one of my fellow members asked you about the regular staff turnover at the department and certain members of the leadership who obviously have significant sway over the department's decision-making.

I'd like you to comment on the policy on scientific integrity, which goes back to 2019. Under the policy, department researchers and scientists have the right to speak about or express themselves on science and their research. What's more, they are encouraged to do so without approval or pre-approval and without being designated as an official spokesperson.

Can you comment on your experience with department scientists and their ability to discuss their research?

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: That's an excellent question.

Yes, we have noticed some changes in that regard. The scientists are much more open with us and share much more now than they used to. It's a great initiative, the scientists are being more transparent.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Mr. Lanteigne.

Do you think it would be a good idea to always have external experts involved in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' scientific process?

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: Yes, it would be.

Peer involvement is good. We're not against the idea. However, we're not being consulted at all. I think it would be advisable to give the industry an opportunity to provide input on the peers we'd like to see at the table when matters have a direct influence on DFO decisions.

We support peer consultations; they need to take place. That's why we recommend having observers on board; I think others have asked for the same thing. We also recommend having a parallel research network with universities, industry, and the department. I think that would lead to better collaboration. Finally, we suggested that a panel be established to talk regularly about the fisheries and discuss other issues we'd like to see addressed in the coming years.

• (1310)

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Mr. Lanteigne.

Can you tell us about the benefits of external consultations from a scientific standpoint? Currently, the department's scientists are in charge but you also have expertise in this area, you're out there every day, it's your livelihood.

What can you directly contribute to the department and to its scientists?

[English]

The Chair: Could you give us a very short answer, please?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Lanteigne: We can provide them with a great deal of information. The fishers see the impact of actions first-hand and are the first to observe changes.

I'll respect the chair's opinion.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Mr. Lanteigne.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I want to say a huge thank you to all our witnesses today for their participation and for sharing their knowledge on this particular topic.

Thank you to our clerk, our analysts and our interpreters.

Ms. Barron, I don't know if you have your hand up.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Yes.

Mr. Chair, I believe you forgot me in the last round of questioning.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I thought we were done.

You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I'm sorry, everyone. We thought we were out of here.

[Translation]

My question is for Ms. Roussel, from the Association des crevetiers acadiens du Golfe.

You've shared a lot of very important information with us. What are the key points that need to be raised with the government?

Mrs. Eda Roussel: When it comes to shrimp, species-specific research needs to be done to determine the impact of rockfish predation on shrimp. We know the impact of seal predation on the cod fishery. There has been a cod moratorium for over 20 years and our fishers are afraid shrimp will suffer the same fate.

It's quite important to have specific research surveys on shrimp because the data does not corroborate what our fishers are saying. Rockfish have a significant impact on shrimp, so that needs to be the priority. We need to do more research on shrimp and on how rockfish are affecting shrimp stocks.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you very much.

[English]

For my next question, I will ask Mr. Brown a bit more about the flooding we saw happen in British Columbia last year.

The minister indicated that the PSSI may be able to help in the wake of last year's flooding, but didn't point to any specific initiatives that would be used. As climate change gets worse, with people expecting more flooding, do you feel DFO needs to do more to address these concerns through the PSSI or other funding sources?

Mr. Dave Brown: Yes, it's definitely a concern.

One thing I want to bring attention to is the devastation currently going on at Strawberry Island and Nicomen Slough. It's one more example of the department's failure to protect critical salmon habitat. Chinook and Harrison sockeye rear there. If we want salmon for our future, we need to look out for these areas and fully enforce the existing habitat protection laws on the books.

I know that doesn't directly answer your question, but with the flooding and impacts, to see this kind of thing happen is significant and concerning.

• (1315)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

That concludes our rounds of questioning for today.

Again, I thank our witnesses for appearing, virtually or in person, and for sharing their knowledge with the committee as we try to do a report on this very important topic.

I want to say thank you to everybody involved: the analysts, clerk and translators.

I wish everybody a good day. We will be back on Tuesday with science at DFO again. I will see you then. Take care.

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