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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1530)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 39 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022.

Before we proceed, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

In terms of interpretation, those on Zoom have the choice at the bottom of their screen of either “floor”, “English” or “French”. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

Please address all comments through the chair.

Finally, I will remind you that taking screenshots or photos of your screen is not permitted. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on January 20, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of the North Atlantic right whale. We will hear from witnesses for the first hour and a half and then finish the meeting with 30 minutes of drafting instructions.

I would like to welcome our panel of witnesses. Representing the Acadian Peninsula Regional Service Commission is Jules Haché, member of the board of directors. Representing CORBO Engineering is Philippe Cormier, president. Appearing as an individual and in person is Mr. Gerard Chidley, captain of his own fishing enterprise.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today. You will each have up to five minutes for an opening statement.

I'll invite Mr. Chidley to begin, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Chair, a point of order. You know what I am going to ask you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Everything has been checked for sound and interpretation, so we're all good.

Go ahead when you're ready, Mr. Chidley.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: It is for the well-being of the interpreters.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerard Chidley (Captain, As an Individual): Thank you, Chair.

Good afternoon, Minister, panel members and, certainly, the secretariat.

Thanks for the opportunity to appear as a witness on this very important issue for our industry. My name is Gerard Chidley. I'm an independent owner-operator from Newfoundland and Labrador. We own and operate a 20-metre fishing vessel on the east coast of the island. We are a multispecies licence-holder with a vessel crew of seven members. It's a family-run business and has been that way for 50 years, with 50 years of experience fishing on the ocean in many NAFO divisions and for many species. My certification includes a Fishing Master, First Class and a Master, Near Coastal certificate in the Merchant Marine.

In those years, I served in many capacities and chaired many different organizations and fleets. I have served as ICCAT commissioner, NAFO commissioner, chair of the FRCC, and industry chair of MUN and CFER. I've chaired our crab and shrimp committees and served on the inshore council for 10 years with the FFAW, of which I'm still a member. I've partnered with the Marine Institute, which is a division of MUN, in bycatch reduction trawl designs, as well as in energy efficiency studies on trawls and vessels to provide a more ecofriendly operation.

Early in 2021, I was made aware that there were discussions under way to look at reducing breaking strains on haul-up ropes to allow the rope to bust in the event of entanglement with right whales. I remember my first thought: right whale, wrong solution. I remember discussing this with some of my fellow harvesters and I thought that whoever came up with this had never spent any time on the North Atlantic fishing crab, cod, Greenland halibut or any other fish that required the use of haul-up lines.

In November of 2021, I wrote an email to some of our regional DFO people. I included some of our Newfoundland and Labrador federal members and some of our provincial people. I've shared that email with you for your reading enjoyment. The fact that this hasn't been viewed as a ridiculous idea is the reason I'm appearing before you today. I'm hoping to shed some light on the devastation this will cause our industry by answering, from my experience, any questions you may have.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, we work in a completely different environment on the east coast. We encounter every obstacle from ice to debris lost from cargo ships in storms.

Not many incidents encountered are reported. You may ask why that is. It's because we communicate with each other and provide positions of danger on a real-time basis. This is what we need to do to mitigate any possible right whale encounter before it becomes an incident.

Put a tracking device on the animal at first sight and broadcast the positions on a real-time basis. I have reviewed the sighting maps provided by DFO. We do not have a right whale problem on the east coast. Simply put, you may never have to deploy a tracking device. You will note that in my email, I spoke only to breaking strains, but the same applies to ropeless fishing gear. While most of us have individual quotas, we do not operate on individual pieces of ocean like patches of farmland.

I will highlight what I know to be major issues that threaten our resource if we go down this ill-conceived path.

Loss of fishing gear inflicts huge replacement costs on harvesters. There is ghost fishing at a time when money has been spent on clean oceans initiatives. There is a threat to conservation and sustainability of resources due to the immeasurable impact of lost gear and ghost fishing. There are higher fuel costs due to more trips being necessary to land product, as well as the impact on onshore employment when fishing trips are lost or reduced.

Certainly at a time when the environment is front and centre, there must be concern for the increase in the carbon footprint of fishing when more trips are necessary. In all of this, the unintended consequences of reducing the gear-breaking strains is that this gear can now be parted by small pieces of ice, and other small mammals will become entangled due to the smaller diameter of the rope.

Those are the notes I've provided for the meeting. I made some notes by hand so I could continue, because as I spoke a little faster, I still have a minute or so left.

• (1535)

As I mentioned, tracking the right whales provides many benefits, whether they come into our fishing zone or other zones. We

use satellite tags to track bluefin tuna. Breathing animals would be easier, as they surface to breathe. The benefits are not limited to insight into the life cycle of the right whale; they include a real-time record of the migration routes and any deviations, accurate time of entry and departure electronically, the ability to broadcast real-time positions to ocean users and increasing co-operation from industry and other ocean users.

Last but certainly not least is the safety concern, which is of the utmost importance to us as vessel operators. Reducing breaking strains poses a huge risk factor if the rope parts while in the hauler. That's why we change our gear every four years. If the gear is frayed, there's always the risk that someone will get struck with it when the rope parts.

There were no meaningful consultations by DFO with industry on this issue, other than an invitation to participate in a Zoom call, where most of the allocated time was taken up by presentations and very little time given to engage industry. Being an optimist, I'm going to give DFO the benefit of the doubt on this one, and being an optimist, I will take the lack of consultations by DFO with industry on this issue to mean that a lack of sightings and presence in our fishing zones means a minimum likelihood for sightings or other incidents to occur, and therefore no action is necessary. The DFO whale group headed by Wayne Ledwell also agrees with this.

What is disconcerting is the lengths those organizations will go to in order to forward their cause with a seeming disregard for the impact on other ocean users and environments. What's equally disconcerting to me is that the governments of the day—that's not reflecting any colour—are willing to condone those antics, as they are extremely damaging to the value of our industry and in turn our rural economies.

Thank you.

• (1540)

The Chair: I have to stop you there, Mr. Chidley. We've gone a couple of minutes over your five minutes, actually. I know that you've provided a copy of your statement to the committee.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jules Haché (Member of the board of directors, Acadian Peninsula's Regional Service Commission): Hello, everyone.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for giving our communities on the Acadian peninsula the opportunity to take part in this meeting.

My name is Jules Haché, and I am the mayor of Lamèque, New Brunswick, and a member of the Acadian Peninsula Regional Service Commission. The commission provides municipal services across the region, and represents 14 municipalities and 32 unincorporated territories.

Today, I will talk primarily about the importance of the fisheries to our communities. I will leave it up to our professional associations to make specific technical recommendations regarding right whales.

The fishing and seafood processing industry is a very important economic sector for the entire province of New Brunswick, and especially for the Acadian peninsula, a rural coastal region with about 50,000 residents. The social fabric of our communities is greatly influenced by this activity, and has been for generations. The sector is also supported by a well-respected research network and increasingly modern processing facilities.

As a result, any measures taken that have a significant impact on fishing methods are also likely to have major economic and social consequences for our communities.

According to a recent study by economists Maurice Beaudin and Marcel Lebreton, the impact of New Brunswick's fishing industry goes far beyond this sector of activity. We have close to 6,500 fishers and fisher helpers who work on 2,300 boats. These boats are anchored in 70 commercial fishing ports, so many of them are dynamic centres for services, employment, investment, community life, recreation and tourism. There are also about 60 processing companies that employ roughly 7,000 people, not to mention the companies related to the industry. In 2021, New Brunswick exported more than \$2.2 billion in seafood products to more than 70 countries around the world, making the province one of the country's largest exporters.

In northeastern New Brunswick alone, where the Acadian peninsula is located, fishing and processing account for close to 4,400 direct and indirect jobs. These jobs alone represent \$207 million in salaries and benefits. According to a study conducted by economist Maurice Beaudin in 1998, fishing and fish processing are by far the greatest economic drivers of our region, accounting for nearly a quarter of jobs and employment income.

Our professional organizations in the fishery sector, which have already appeared before this committee, have always been willing to participate in various initiatives to mitigate the impact of fishing practices on ecosystems, including the right whale. In 2018, the introduction of the first measures to protect the right whale created a real climate of general uncertainty. This uncertainty was felt by all the stakeholders affected, and by all our communities given the direct and indirect impact of this activity on our regional economies. As we stated then to the fisheries and oceans minister, who is also responsible for the Canadian Coast Guard, the Honourable Dominic Leblanc, at the time, we knew that the federal government had to take steps to protect the species. On the other hand, in this scientific equation, it is very important that socio-economic and human factors be given equal consideration.

Since then, the focus has been on imposing certain restrictions. We can agree that they have had some success in reducing the mor-

tality of right whales resulting from fishing gear. These restrictions have nonetheless also had an impact on the fishing industry. Efforts should henceforth be focused on this industry, primarily by optimizing fishing practices under the current conditions in order to ensure the sector's viability and the security of the people working in it.

● (1545)

If we want to achieve that, cooperation between our professional associations and DFO representatives is paramount.

In addition, with all the initiatives it has undertaken in recent years to reduce the impact on marine ecosystems, the industry should reap the benefits of a positive communication strategy on the international stage. Sending out a constructive message about fishing industry efforts to coexist with the North Atlantic right whale would surely better maintain the integrity of our U.S. and international markets, and it would also showcase what's being done by the thousands of fishers in our regions.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe Cormier (President, CORBO Engineering): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, good afternoon.

My name is Philippe Cormier. I'm an engineer and naval architect, and president of CORBO Consulting Engineering, a New Brunswick firm founded in 2007 that employs approximately 40 engineering and architectural professionals.

As you know, in 2017, Gulf region snow crabbers were quite shocked to find dead North Atlantic right whales entangled in their fishing gear. Because I had worked regularly with fishers, the associations representing them came to me to find ways to reduce the impact of commercial fishing on that species.

From 2018 on, with help from the Atlantic fisheries fund, we carried out an initial three-year project and assessed 19 very broad solutions, which led us to quickly develop world-class expertise.

Without going into too much detail, we were among the first to test rope-free technologies for commercial fishing. We helped create the first low breaking strength ropes. We looked at existing fishing techniques and how fishing ropes behaved in the water—basically, all kinds of technologies and methods to help us mitigate past, current and future risk.

We worked with several snow crab and lobster fisher associations all over Atlantic Canada and Quebec, and brought to the forefront the ongoing efforts of Canadian fishers and the Canadian government to ensure that commercial fishing can coexist with North Atlantic right whales in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Since 2018, a number of national media outlets have reported on this work, as have foreign media outlets *The New York Times*, the BBC, *National Geographic*, *The Guardian*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *Seafood-News.com* and many others.

After an initial round of testing that cast a wide net, since 2020 we've been focusing our efforts on the techniques that we believe hold the most promise for risk reduction.

In 2021, with help from the folks at the DFO and the Atlantic fisheries fund, we became the first in the world to have a commercial fishery in closed areas using rope-free systems. During the 2022 season, over 20 fishers took part in a trial, catching over 203 metric tonnes of snow crab using 1,000 traps without any vertical rope in the water that could put marine mammals at risk.

While these trials have yielded very positive results, we still have several technical and logistical challenges to overcome before this option can be implemented on a larger scale. It's important to note that this tool should allow fishers who wish to do so to continue fishing in closed areas in the presence of North Atlantic right whales. It would be impractical, unsustainable and, most importantly, unsafe if this option were used outside of closed areas or fishing grounds not suitable for this solution.

Another technology we're putting a lot of effort into is the use of low breaking strength or weak link ropes. The theory is that this technology would allow a fishing line to break at a tension of less than 1,700 pounds, or 770 kg, whereas the lines currently used are nearly 20 times stronger.

Although we've crafted tools that support the use of low breaking strength rope, our results show that a few more years of research, development and testing are needed before we can say beyond a shadow of a doubt that this solution will not create any more risk than the current situation does for the North Atlantic right whale, the environment and fishing crews.

Finally, in partnership with the Acadian Croppers Association and the ghost gear fund, we're in the midst of a recovery operation, seeking abandoned, lost or discarded traps on the ocean floor that no longer have a buoy on the surface allowing us to easily locate and recover them. We believe that hundreds of thousands of these traps currently lie on the ocean floor.

I'd like to conclude by saying that there's no silver bullet to solve the problem yet, but we have covered an incredible distance in just five years. I can assure you that we're way ahead of our neighbours to the south. The secret to our current and future success can be summed up in a few points.

First, the speed with which fishers decided to tackle the problem head on and their commitment to finding effective and sustainable solutions. In addition, the bond of trust that's developed between fishers, engineers, scientists and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The funding provided by the Canadian government and the provinces that made it possible to carry out these experiments. Fi-

nally, the time the DFO put into getting it right science-wise instead of imposing a regulatory disaster, which could have been even more damaging to the ecosystems than the initial situation.

• (1550)

Thank you for your attention.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll go now to Mr. Small for the start of the question round.

Mr. Small, before you begin, I'd like to pass along on behalf of everybody in the room well wishes to your mom as she deals with some health issues.

You can now start. You have up to six minutes, please.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for your well wishes. Thanks to all the witnesses who've taken time out of their busy schedules to help us out on our very important study on right whales, which we care so much about.

My question is to Mr. Chidley.

Mr. Chidley, I know you have a tremendous amount of experience in the crab fishing industry over the years and you're familiar with the rope that's required to get your pots to the surface of the water and onto the deck of your boat. What's the breaking strain on the current vertical ropes that you use to retrieve your fishing gear?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: Thank you, Mr. Small. It's anywhere from 2,500 pounds per square inch to 3,500 pounds per square inch. That's basically the equivalent of a 9/16 polysteel rope or a 5/8 polysteel rope, and depending on the size of the vessel, it may go up a little bit from there, but not a huge amount.

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay.

Have you witnessed this size of rope break under day-to-day operations, say, in deeper water or in rougher than normal conditions when you have to operate?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: No. Under normal conditions it was a tried and true practice for us.

The reason we use 9/16 polysteel rope is that it actually holds less current and has less drag. We can go to a heavier rope, but it doesn't give us any more advantage because we're fishing in five-metre seas, and we usually knock off fishing when the seas are around six metres. Our vessel is a 22-metre vessel and we do multi-day trips and we fish up to 260 to 270 miles from land.

• (1555)

Mr. Clifford Small: What would happen if you had to use rope with a weak link with a breaking strain of 1,700 pounds, based on your experience?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: We just wouldn't be able to retrieve the gear, because most of the average depth of waters where we're hauling is 100 fathoms. It's 600 feet of water. When you're looking at it, there are five or six [*Inaudible—Editor*] and the upthrust of the vessel alone.... It's very seldom that you end up on the Grand Banks with a sea state of less than two metres, so it's just not practical to use anything less.

We tried some smaller gear when we were gillnetting and we ended up having to go back to the 9/16 rope. That was so we wouldn't be providing.... Ghost fishing is the big issue. When you lose the gear, it's not only just the expense of the gear; the damage to the resource from ghost fishing is our main concern.

Mr. Clifford Small: In some areas of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Chidley, I understand that harvesters are fishing as deep as 250 fathoms. Is that correct?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: Yes. That's a common depth, actually, in the NAFO divisions 3K and 2J and in the northern part of 3L, and in some cases when we're fishing outside of Canada's 200 miles, we're down in that same depth of water. That type of rope then allows us to retrieve the gear out of that depth of water. It's a significant strain, and we cannot do it like.... Even dropping it down to a half inch, which is only a 1/16-inch drop, means that the rope will part before we get half the pots to the top of the water.

Mr. Clifford Small: Given your knowledge of ropeless retrieval systems, what do you think are the drawbacks of this technology?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: It's similar to the talk about the breaking strain. If you were fishing in your own.... With farmland, if you're on your own farmland, you know exactly where you put your crops, and in shoal water like the gulf, using that gear may have its advantages. In the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the guys operate in a lot of shoal water. Where we operate in deep water, if you were operating in the area by yourself and there was no one else in that zone, then you have the potential to use that style of gear.

However, if you go out now the way we are—we're competitive because we're IQ fishers, with individual quotas—it's competition for ground, and it's not all at the bottom. The substrate is not all conducive to crab fishing and it's not conducive to cod fishing. We're probably only fishing 15% of the ocean floor that we have licence to fish, because that's the only substrate that's good for crab, and we have issues to deal with.

If you're the first guy out there and you don't have your gear marked properly, the next guy who comes out will put his gear right on top of yours because he doesn't know where it is. It's like a guy dropping a case when he comes in through the door. If the next guy doesn't pick it up and the first fellow trips over it, and the next fellow trips over it, you end up with a whole pile of bodies. Good luck on getting the first fellow out from underneath it, and that's the problem.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do I have any more time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you think that DFO has done all that it can do to consult with the fishing industry in your province, Mr. Chidley, or have they just simply chosen to use a one-size-fits-all approach and not put enough resources into making a policy that works for all regions?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: In my humble opinion, the fact that there were only Zoom calls held by invitation to look after such an important issue meant that the consultation process was faulty from the beginning, because over half the time was taken up just on presentations. There was hardly any industry involved in it at all, and for something like this, a major shakeup of the way we've been doing business, something should have been.... There are other ways of handling things, especially in areas where you don't have any sightings or incidents. The water's just too cold.

By the time the right whale decides to come to Newfoundland and Labrador, where he's going to go up through the Laurentian Channel, we're finished fishing anyway. We start in April and we're finished by July 31 and sometimes by the end of June. Most of the gear is out of the water at the end of June anyway, because we have harvested all of our product.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for being here with us, Mr. Cormier. I would also like to thank you for the work you have done in recent years to develop these new ropeless trap and low-breaking-strength rope technologies.

My first question relates to ropeless traps, which have been tested in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the last two or three years. I would like you to repeat, for my colleagues, how many crab have been caught in these ropeless traps. I think you said it was 230 metric tonnes. Is that right?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: It was 230 metric tonnes.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I would like to make sure that my colleagues have a clear understanding of the situation. The traps were used in areas that were closed because whales were there, and they were used by the Acadian Peninsula crab fishing fleet.

I am sure there were small hurdles here and there, but has it worked well so far? Were the traps able to activate the mechanism, on the bottom, that lets the rope rise to the surface and lets the fisher catch the buoy?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: As you say, we have been testing these technologies since 2018. We have tested systems from various companies. This year, as I said, 20 of our fishers used them in areas that were closed.

It went relatively well from the technology point of view, and we had a 96 per cent success rate and raised 677 traps, if I am not mistaken. However, if we take into account problems with tangled ropes or human error, the success rate falls to 87 per cent. As I said, there is a lot of work still to be done, but the technology, at least, the triggering mechanism itself, is relatively reliable.

I have just attended the Ropeless Consortium annual meeting that was held in New Bedford, at which this point came up frequently. We have to equip these systems with artificial intelligence to avoid human or other errors.

Mr. Serge Cormier: When these human or technological errors occurred, were you still able to locate the trap and get it out of the water?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: Yes. The gear used for ropeless fishing is relatively expensive. To reduce the costs, the fishers decided to use trawl nets and put ten traps in each one, on average.

Mr. Serge Cormier: On that subject, we have heard a lot of witnesses say that it could not work, but the ropeless system you use lets you put more than one trap in a row on the sea bottom and see where they all are. The fishers were afraid of piling their traps on top of each other, but, if I understand correctly, the technology lets them see where the other fishers' traps already are, is that right?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: Yes, the technology exists. We have an app that shows us where our traps are on the sea bottom. When I get to an area where there are other traps less than three nautical miles away, which is the distance at which a fisher can normally see another fisher's buoys, the other fishers' nets and the ropeless systems appear on the app. Everyone can see it.

However, we observed that the precision of the system needed to be improved. We have had a lot of talks with the manufacturers. The communication systems also have to be improved, because there is no cell network in the Gulf, and so fishers have to rely on their satellite communication system.

• (1605)

Mr. Serge Cormier: I don't have a lot of time left, so I am going to ask you a question about low-breaking-strength rope and I would like you to answer just yes or no.

Are the tests you have done on this conclusive enough to determine that this technology can be used immediately, without it having devastating effects on whale protection? Should we wait a bit?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: The results are absolutely not conclusive. There is still a lot of testing to be done on that.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Right.

[English]

Okay. That's perfect.

For my colleagues around the table, maybe you have heard that NOAA and DFO, I think, provide a one-year extension to foreign countries to review the comparability findings for their commercial fishery, so I think this gives us a little bit more time to prepare for some of the new gear that was supposed to be, I can say, mandatory for next year. I think we should look into that. What does it mean if weak rope is part of that?

I'm going to end there, Mr. Chair, because I think my time is done. Is that right?

The Chair: It is, sir. You've gone a little bit over.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for six minutes or less. I was skipping over the two ladies that time. I apologize for that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chidley, after you sent your letter to Fisheries and Oceans Canada in November, did you hear anything back from the department? Did the department ask to meet with you? Were you consulted?

[English]

Mr. Gerard Chidley: No. The only conversations I've seen were when discussions were still being had here at the House. I sent the email to Mr. Small, got the contact points and said, "Listen, this is important. I should make an appearance in person." As we're finished for the season, it was a timely thing.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Do you think you could adapt to the solutions proposed by Mr. Cormier, given the conditions in which you fish? Do you think this could be achieved before the end of 2023?

[English]

Mr. Gerard Chidley: I think the difference is that the Gulf of St. Lawrence fishing area is a lot different from the one we're in. We're into the one-knot to three-knot currents the whole time. We try to use the rule of thumb of 5% greater than the bottom deck. That's the maximum slack we'll have on our fishing gear, with lead rope interwoven about every 25 fathoms apart. That kit takes the slack off the surface. It puts out less rope but still allows you to retrieve the gear.

I think slack rope on the water is a bigger issue than anything else, for whales of any type. However, I don't think this is a one-size-fits-all or one-shoe-fits-all approach. What will work, where there are incidents of sightings.... If a right whale is in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, I think this system they're setting up has potential. However, in our area, there are no sightings or occurrences whatsoever in the deep water. We haven't seen them. I have had 50 years on the ocean and have never seen a right whale yet. That says a lot.

They should continue with their work in the gulf. If it's an extension they need for operating out there, by all means develop the gear and make sure it can work. If there is something that allows fishers increased activity in a now-enclosed area, by all means. They're going to jump to do everything possible to get in there.

Good luck with the development. I look forward to seeing how it will work in the gulf.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Cormier, do you think it is achievable and realistic, even with the deadline postponed, to manage to do all your tests, get all the necessary gear, and computerize all the fishers' gear?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: I certainly think it is possible. However, I believe we have to take the time it needs. Rushing things won't help develop this technology. We have to follow the steps and the scientific methods.

Most importantly, we have to work with the fishers. If we want them to sign on, they have to be involved from start to finish, both in the testing and in developing these technologies.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Listening to you, we can see that you have put an absolutely fantastic system in place. Do you think enough promotion is being done about efforts like yours, that are intended to save the foreign market and evaluate the exercise?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: No, I share Mr. Chidley's opinion: more promotion could be done for this.

As I said in my presentation, our tests have generated a lot of interest both inside and outside Canada, but we can do better.

American companies like Publix, the major grocery chain, have used the advertising videos we have produced in recent years about snow crab, to inform the public about how the snow crab population in Canada is fished ecoresponsibly. This is a great example of positive visibility, but I think there could be more involvement in this, from whatever quarter.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. You're right on the mark.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses. Welcome, in person, as well to Mr. Chidley.

My first question is for Mr. Chidley. You spoke about the safety concerns relating to the whalesafe gear that's being used. I'm wondering if you could expand on that and perhaps provide a few examples of what you're seeing on the water. What should we be considering in our recommendations to address these safety issues?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: Yes, certainly. Thank you for the question.

The big issue when we're fishing offshore, in any fishery we're involved in, is that the rope strength has to be of sufficient breaking strain that we're not going to part the rope when it's in the hauler under normal working circumstances. The difference is that when the first pot is leaving the bottom, the weight is not so great, but when the last pot is leaving the bottom and the first one is at the rail, we have sometimes five or seven, depending on the depth of

the water, that are coming through the water at the one time. Most of those pots, just under normal weight circumstances.... The pot itself that we use is 40 pounds. If there are 100 pounds of crab in it, with the drag coming up through the water, we don't have to cut it, but if we touch that with a knife, there's a zing. It's just like a guitar string. If that rope parts at a critical time, our crew member handling that could end up with severe lacerations to the hands, the face or anything else. That's the big issue.

That's why we have a tendency to knock off fishing when the sea reaches five metres, because we know gear will part when the seas are between five and six metres. We stop at five metres. We're talking about a sea state of 16 or 17 feet. Because we're at sea for multiple days and our vessels are larger, that's what....

I just have a comment. One of the things that Mr. Cormier said was about developing gear. In that development, you have to look at the cost, because in lots of cases around Newfoundland and Labrador, lots of guys only have a 10,000-pound crab quota. It's probably out of reach for that type of a fishery, whereas in the gulf, the guys like us probably have 100 or 200 tonnes of crab to catch on an individual basis. The economics are totally different when it means investing in that type of gear.

I'm sorry I got away from your question. The constraints that we find ourselves under in this environment are just in addition to the work we're doing.

• (1615)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: No, it's all very helpful, especially because we're in the last stage of the study. It helps to formulate the recommendations and bring everything together. I'm happy with any additional information.

I'm curious if you can provide some perspective. I appreciate that after 50 years out on the water, which is great, you're here and sharing with us your wealth of experience. Over those 50 years, I believe you said—correct me if I'm wrong—that you've never seen a North Atlantic right whale in the waters.

We're also seeing, as a result of the climate crisis and, of course, human-made activity, some changes or a shifting in behaviours, and so there is a potential that we may see North Atlantic right whales. I definitely can't speculate as to whether or not you will, but I'm curious about what you feel would be the best way for Newfoundland and fishers in that area, where you're saying there aren't any North Atlantic right whales, to participate in this process to ensure we're prepared if we are going to see an increase of whales.

Mr. Gerard Chidley: Personally I'd be looking at approaching the same fund that Mr. Cormier and his team were using to develop a tracking device that can provide real-time access to ocean users on where those whales are. As I said in my presentation, you may never have to deploy a tracking device in Newfoundland and Labrador waters because they may never show up, but in the event that they do start to show up, if you have those devices developed, you can put them in.

I sent some information to the chair on it. I know it was probably a bit cloudy. I just sent a snapshot of vessel activity when the fishing is closed as opposed to.... Can you imagine? It's like a gauntlet that those whales have to go through when they're coming to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and when they're going back out of it. It's just like going through a gauntlet. The simple reason is that while, yes, they may use echolocation to determine where one or another is, it's not just big cargo ships or the fishing vessels. The sailing vessel has much more potential to hit a right whale, because it's quiet.

There are lots of aspects on which we should be providing real-time data to ocean users. We get updates all the time on everything from water temperatures to weather forecasts, so why not a hit that tells us there's a whale there? We'd certainly invest in that kind of technology. We wouldn't have a problem with that.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Building off that, you mentioned the consultation that included a Zoom call with some presentations. Can you share a little about what you would imagine a more effective consultation process would look like? Who do you would feel would be best to be part of that consultation?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: COVID got us away from a lot of the interaction of in-person calls. Normally, the DFO process would be to hold a round of consultations. They'd pick probably five different parts of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Then they would look at the evidence from our past to say that there's no sign of any of those, but what if they do show up?

You would get much better engagement if industry provided cooperative decisions on how things should work as opposed to a top-down approach that says that this is what you have to do, because that stuff doesn't work; you get too much opposition to it.

I'm glad that the gulf fishers are participating with Mr. Cormier in this activity, because it has to be done. It seems like it's more prevalent in the gulf, and it may change over time in our zone too, with global warming—we don't know.

We do have one little kind thing on the Grand Banks: We have that cold intermediate layer that covers the ground on the Grand Banks that's been good for our shellfish industry, so that's kind of keeping everything else at bay. That's why the swordfish are outside in the Gulf Stream up around that end and on the Grand Banks, and why the Americans are down on the Grand Banks too.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. You're a little bit over.

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

I understand, Mr. Arnold, that you're going to share your time. I'll leave it up to you to decide to do that with whomever you're going to share it with.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. If there's some time left, I'll be sharing it with Mr. Bragdon.

First, thank you to the witnesses.

There's another piece that I want to make sure we get into this study, and it's possibly a task for the clerks.

As of July 1, 2020, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation's submission on the enforcement matters process, governed by USMCA article 24.27 and article 24.28 of the environment chapter of the free trade agreement between Canada, Mexico, and the United States, has some requirements.

On January 4, 2022, Oceana filed a submission on enforcement matters, SEM 21-003, north Atlantic right whales, under chapter 24 of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada agreement. In its submission, Oceana asserted that the United States is failing to effectively enforce its environmental laws in respect of collisions between north Atlantic right whales and ships, typically called vessel strikes. It also alleged that the U.S. is failing to effectively enforce its environmental laws with respect to entanglement of moving right whales.

On June 3, 2022, the secretariat determined that the submission warrants the preparation of a factual record under article 24.28 and so informed the council and the environment committee. According to the website of the CEC, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, the CEC council would normally vote on whether to authorize the secretariat to prepare a factual record within 60 working days of receiving the recommendation; however, as of October 28, there is no record of any vote by the council or record of authorization by the secretariat.

This looks like a potential significant impact to U.S. fisheries operations, and I'm wondering if the analysts could possibly do some research and provide it to the committee so that we could consider the possible implications here in Canada of this situation and might be able to include it in the report. Thank you.

Now I'd like to move on to Mr. Philippe Cormier, please, for a quick question.

How many companies are involved in contracts to test either ropeless gear or weak-break-strength gear?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: Just to confirm, are you asking how many companies build the equipment or are testing it?

Mr. Mel Arnold: I'm wondering if you know how many companies are working with Department of Fisheries and Oceans or the Government of Canada on developing and testing that type of gear here in Canada.

Mr. Philippe Cormier: I would say that probably at least four other groups that I'm aware of are testing it in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Many companies fabricate that type of equipment. We've been using one.

The reason is that we wanted to be able to see all of them at the same time. That will actually be one of the issues when fishermen start using different brands. It's an issue that's been discussed at the Ropeless Consortium for the past three years now. If everybody—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I'd like to move on now to Mr. Chidley.

Mr. Chidley, you described tracking devices for bluefin tuna. Could you better describe the size and use of those types of devices and why they might or might not be usable for tracking right whales?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: Those devices are supplied specifically and are tailor-made for bluefin tuna. They're satellite tracking devices. The tuna doesn't have to come to the surface to breathe. Every time they do come to the surface, the information is downloaded through a satellite. That's then tracked through Canadian parts in New Brunswick.

With a mammal that has to come to the surface to breathe all the time, every time they come to breathe, you're actually getting a real-time track and a hit. With today's technology, that should be easy to download to any of our vessels on a real-time basis.

• (1625)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Is there any time left to share with Mr. Bragdon?

The Chair: He has eight seconds. Probably all he can do is say his name.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): That's all good. Thanks for being here today.

The Chair: There you go. Your time is up, Mr. Bragdon.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for being with us, Mr. Haché. You are the representative of the Acadian Peninsula Regional Service Commission, which serves 14 municipalities and 32 local services districts. You are also the mayor of the town of Lamèque.

I think we can say that your region and the Shippagan region are the two major commercial fishing centres in the Acadian Peninsula. At the beginning of your presentation, you said how important fishing is in your region, which has many crab fishers.

Do you think the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is giving sufficient consideration to the impact that fishery closings and measures like the ones relating to whales have on coastal communities?

We know that if we don't protect the whales we will certainly lose access to some markets, and this may be hard on our communities. However, should we take a somewhat broader view when it comes to taking measures like those?

Mr. Jules Haché: Definitely, every spring, as fishing season approaches, we quickly feel tension setting in, because there are unknowns.

Here in my region, our seaports are blocked by ice and our fishers are often under enormous pressure because they are afraid they will not be able to get out at the same time as the others and will not be able to get to the fishing grounds where they usually go.

That creates tension, because all our plants, our workers, and all our related businesses usually come to life at the same time as the fishers start preparing their boats, so it has an enormous impact on our communities.

Mr. Serge Cormier: We saw these whales arrive in our region in 2017. Five years later, in 2022, would you say that the fears you refer to have decreased or are they still just as strong?

Mr. Jules Haché: We still have some fears, but we know that the efforts by entrepreneurs and scientists have produced significant results. Mr. Cormier has just presented us with a very interesting study, which is very positive. I think we are going to have to increase investments in these areas to speed up progress and perfect the technologies.

However, even knowing the results, there will still be worry because of the foreign countries where we export our products, which are the fishing companies' customers. Bad publicity can hurt us very effectively and it is very difficult to get away from it after that. That is why I spoke only about positive messages in my statement. A demonstration of the efforts made and the results obtained would be a major asset.

In this entire phenomenon, as I said, the human dimension and the socioeconomic effects on the regions, as well as the indirect effects, have to be assessed on the same basis, because they are extremely important.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, I will give the remainder of my time to Mr. Morrissey.

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

My question is for Mr. Chidley.

This committee has heard numerous testimonies. I'll condense them: It comes down to no one size fitting all in a solution. Canada must take steps to protect the whales; otherwise, there could be a significant impact in terms of our customers in foreign countries.

One of the solutions.... Biologists appearing before the committee indicated that current tracking devices used on other species could not be adapted for use on north Atlantic right whales because of the biology of the animal. These devices simply will not work on them. Everybody agreed that this technology would be [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Again, up to 2017, there was no problem in the gulf. Then they showed up quickly, and the results were disastrous. Do you not think it would be prudent for DFO to be proactive in recognizing that the whale may migrate into your area and that we should be prepared for when that happens?

• (1630)

Mr. Gerard Chidley: Yes, by all means, you have to be proactive, but you also have to look at the development they're taking into consideration for the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Why not develop a tracking device suitable to deploy on the animal, whether it be a whale or whatever? They have much thinner skin than bluefin tuna. If you put it on a whale, you may find that one type doesn't work. Then you do more investigation and develop the equipment to be able to do that, if that's what it takes.

On the other side of it, we're saying that even if you don't put on a tracking device, the minute a whale is sighted and you broadcast that sighting, it helps a big lot. If it's sighted in one area, it doesn't go a mile without breathing, so the ships.... I sent a snapshot of the pictures of the ships on the ocean. There are always going to be ships identifying what a whale is. Even though we have a significant amount of fog on the Grand Banks, the whales aren't there then. The whales are not on the Grand Banks at that time of year.

In my mind, the development of technology to put a tracker on the whale is more helpful to our area than it probably would be in the gulf, where the ropeless gear may work better because of the shallower water. That's all I'm saying. I'm not saying there's no need to do anything, but we have to be.... You can't just bar off the highway because there's one reckless driver. You have to be able to adapt as you go. To me, that's developing the gear. We will succeed if we do that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

We will go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The differences among the various fishery sectors continue to concern me.

Mr. Haché has shown, and I think we have taken note of what he said, that the fisheries are essential and represent an essential component of the economy. Without them, whole economic and social sectors would collapse in many coastal communities, be they in Acadie or in Quebec, the Gaspé or the Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Mr. Cormier, would it be a good idea to look at this by sector in order to find solutions to the whale transit, whether they are feeding or are just passing through? Should we take a sectoral approach in order to provide solutions?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: I think a sectoral approach could be a good idea.

From working with people in different regions, whether in Prince Edward Island, in New Brunswick, in Quebec, in the Gaspé or in the Îles-de-la-Madeleine, we have seen that each region is different and has its own environment.

To come back to the presence of the whales, we were talking earlier about tracking devices. We are in the process of creating a prototype that should be ready by 2023, in partnership with a firm in France. This device would allow us to track whales in real time and, using hydrophones strategically positioned on the sea bottom, to know what type of marine mammal it is. We would thus know exactly where the whales are and where they are going. We could also track boats, to avoid collisions, all with the aid of the artificial intelligence we are now developing. The technological aspect of this project is progressing well, with the help of the Atlantic Fisheries Fund.

To come back to your question, I would say that the idea of taking a different approach for each sector could be beneficial.

• (1635)

[*English*]

The Chair: We've gone a little bit over.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

It seems like all the witnesses are getting a good assortment of questions, so I might just stick with Mr. Chidley, who is here beside me, and continue on with some of my questions to you, if that's okay.

First I want to acknowledge that I appreciate that you spoke quite a bit about the tracking devices and how there's a need to adapt and improve upon the technology. We did hear from some previous witnesses around some of the inefficiencies of the current tracking devices as they pertain to the North Atlantic right whale. That's helpful information. Thank you.

You mentioned the double impacts of the lost gear and the economic impacts. I believe you mentioned a bit about the economic impacts, the impacts on fishers of losing their gear, but then also the increase in ghost gear that results in the waters. Can you share a bit if there are any specific fishers who are talking to you about that? Can you elaborate on what stories you're hearing around that and if you're seeing increased ghost gear in the oceans as a result of this whalesafe gear?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: The last part of your question I didn't fully understand, but we don't have any whalesafe gear yet, right? That's not part of our fishery. Really, we don't want it to be part of the fishery until it's proven, tested and true that we can put something there so that we can successfully retrieve our gear and do it in a safe manner.

Earlier I said that basically it's not just the economic hit on gear replacement; it's actually the sustainable issue, the use of the resource. Ghost fishing does an unquantified amount of damage on the bottom. Over the years we have adapted, such as by putting biodegradable twine in our pots, but over time this has an impact on the crab, especially when they're in the molting process.

We've done everything we possibly can in regard to management. There's been co-operative management with Fisheries and Oceans too, I must say, over the years that I've chaired the fleets, and basically any decisions that were done were done jointly. We look at what the resource is and how it's behaving and what you do with twine sizes for grading the crab on the bottom, not disturbing the females, and we have the biodegradable twine in the event that there's lost gear.

The problem now is that we're seeing a very huge cost in gear replacement, because we have to replace the gear every four years. It's made out of steel; the steel naturally rusts out and the pot gets lighter, so the pots go all over the ocean floor. Offshore, we use 100 pots in the string close to 20 fathoms apart. This is a two-mile string, and we only use two haul-up lines in two miles. We have 12 strings of gear for the both, so it's 1,200 pots we're licensed for. It's a significant investment that fishers have in the ocean at the time. If you're out there looking around to be able to say if you're going to be able to haul today, the day you can't haul your gear because you're trying to keep from busting it off is a day that's costing you money, and it's costing the industry money, a lot of money.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

We'll now go to Mr. Perkins, who I believe is going to share some time with Mr. Bragdon if he's more friendly than Mr. Arnold was. We'll see what happens.

Sir, you have five minutes or less between you.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): We'll see what happens too.

If I could start with a notation for the analysts, Ms. Brown at meeting 36 said that she would table with us U.S. right whale numbers. I'm following up to make sure we have that so that we can use it as part of our report.

Mr. Chidley, I appreciate and thank you for your comments. I'd like to follow up a bit.

We had a lobster fisherman from southwest Nova Scotia here last week, Shawn Muise. He was testing this summer. He's in a winter fishery but was testing weak gear in the summer. He had to stop their fishermen—as did the Brazil Rock Lobster Association and the Coldwater Lobster Association, who were also testing it—from doing it because of the potential danger for crew members. They particularly talked about the weight and the plastic parts of the mechanism that broke and could, under tension, harm crew.

Have you seen that happen, or have you just been told about it by others?

• (1640)

Mr. Gerard Chidley: No, we've been proactive over all our time in regard to that. Every now and again, we will bust a string or our gear. If you're fishing in a five-metre sea and all of a sudden you

get an eight-metre to ten-metre sea and you're working with the gear and the hauler, if you don't have the proper settings on that hydraulic system to allow it to back off, then you're going to snap that gear off the same as thread sewing cotton, like the old expression used to be. That's the issue.

We always are prepared for that, but when you're introducing something into the system that you know is going to happen, that's the problem. We know we're going to break that line every time we hook onto it. That's because we fish in that type of environment.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Their comment was that basically 100% of it broke, and that was in summer conditions, not winter conditions, which are totally different.

Mr. Cormier, we had testimony last week from those same southwest Novas who tested the ropeless gear. They said it was \$4,000 to \$5,000 for each lobster pot, times 400 pots, which is what an LFA 34 lobsterman would have. That's obviously a cost that is prohibitive to be functional.

What does the ropeless gear that you've been testing cost per unit?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: I believe it's about the same cost. I can give you the exact number.

That's basically the reason that our fishermen, in consultation with us, decided to go with trawls instead of the individual pots that they used to use to fish. That's another thing that they have to learn to fish with, because they've never fished with trawls before. Instead of having 10 ropeless units, they have one, but they have 10 pots, one after the other. They've had some issues with getting mud in their traps, so they really have to learn how to fish with that. By talking to each other, they learn how to—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm sorry, but we're short on time. I think I'll pass it over to Mr. Bragdon.

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: I have minute. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses.

I'll direct my questions to you, Mr. Chidley. Thank you for coming here. I respect your many years of experience.

I want to ask you about the consultation process. Obviously when policy is being implemented—and I know you alluded to this in your testimony—I'd like you to elaborate....

Do you feel, not just on this particular issue but on several issues relating to fish harvesting in Canada, that the harvesters' voices are being heard adequately within the department? If not, what would you suggest? There is critical importance in having that frontline witness as we consider policy direction. Can you speak to that and provide some insight as a fish harvester?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: I'll say it in the shortest way possible: No. Consultations are not what they used to be. I know that we're all getting over the challenges COVID gave us because of the in-person problems, but I think in the future we have to get back to the more regional meetings. You don't have to be doing them in every community, but pick different parts in the provincial regime.

Years ago I chaired the fisheries resource conservation council, which was actually the advisory group to the minister. If we had a special task to do, we'd go out and do it. Then we'd provide a report. That's not there anymore, so that avenue is gone.

Right now the knowledge to be able to do the proper consultations is actually in the regional DFO offices. A lot of those guys, the people in the DFO offices.... Let's say it's the Newfoundland region. I'll speak to that one. They actually come from fishing-related backgrounds, or some of their people are in the fishery, or they've been around the marine institute and on the vessels and the research trawlers over time. They know what the ocean environment is like. They have personal relationships with a lot of the fishing industry. That has been lost over the last few years. I think we have to get back to that and get the local knowledge there.

To me, the success of our fishing industry is all about co-operative management, right from the DFO to the industry to those who depend on the industry. That was what was happening over time. Even with the science programs, we always had our meetings over the year. We looked at evaluating the science programs. We looked at what recruitment was like and what harvest levels should be. It wasn't only us; the banks were also interested in that, very much so. They depended on a lot of those reports to look at how their lending institutions were going to divvy out money to the fishing industry. I think we really have to get back to the grassroots business for managing the fishery and for advice.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bragdon. I think I was kinder to you than your colleagues were.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We will go to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes or less, please.

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

It's interesting; from the fisheries side that pretty well everybody who appeared has told the committee what they do not want, but we've been light on solutions. My concern as an east coast parliamentarian is that our consumer, the consumer we depend on in Europe and the U.S., is very conscious of what we're doing in Canada as it relates to protecting the whale. The consumer speaks. It was the consumer who ended the valuable east coast seal hunt years ago when they negatively reacted to it and closed that border.

I'll start with Mr. Chidley.

What recommendations do you give to the committee to bring back...? On the one side, our consumer, and even the Canadian public, is demanding that we not have a repeat of 2017 or anything like it. We have a number of options. We recognize that one size will not fit all. You articulated well the issue of breakaway rope and why it would not work in your environment. That's clearly understood.

I'll come back to you, Mr. Chidley, but first I want to go to Mr. Cormier on this.

Mr. Cormier, we've heard that the biology of the narwhal does not allow for current tracker technology to be attached. Am I correct? You spoke about this.

Mr. Philippe Cormier: That's correct. That's actually the first thing we checked when we wanted to track the whales. We worked with biologists, and that's the answer we got.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Do you see that as an option that would become available in the next short period of time? It would be the ideal, obviously, as Mr. Chidley pointed out, if we could, but then how would you go about attaching one to all the animals that are out there? I see that as problematic. Do you see anything changing in the short term on that?

Mr. Philippe Cormier: I don't, really.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I'll go back to you, Mr. Chidley.

As a fisher, you're well experienced. What would you ask this committee to recommend, through our recommendations, that the department should focus on in ensuring that gear will not interact with the whale and in allowing fishers, at the same time, to access their resource? In the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the ropeless technology allowed fishers to reach their quotas in areas that were closed, so we achieved protecting the whale and allowing fishers to reach their harvest.

What would you advise this committee to recommend? The status quo is not an option. It's not an option that our consumer will accept.

• (1650)

Mr. Gerard Chidley: There's one thing the consumer doesn't want: an ad hoc approach to this issue. I will tell you that. If we're going to make a decision on what to do here as a panel, then it cannot be an ad hoc approach, and then we're going to come back in a year's time or so saying we did the wrong thing.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you define "ad hoc"? I don't quite know what you mean by "ad hoc". I'm not sure the consumer is really that clued in. They just do not want to see news stories of whales entangled in Canadian crab or lobster gear.

Mr. Gerard Chidley: They aren't going to see it on the east coast of Newfoundland and Labrador either.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay.

Mr. Gerard Chidley: This is the thing. I was saying that we have to develop a tracking system that we can.... If it takes a year or two to develop it.... Mr. Cormier and his team are working on gear that can actually help on the east coast, if we need to do something—that's the big "if". Don't go cutting off your arm because you have a fingernail to cut. That's the problem we have to deal with here.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes, Mr. Chidley, I understand that. Quite frankly, I'll be candid: That sounds good, but it did not stop the situation that occurred in 2017, which triggered a very negative reaction from the U.S. government. I'm from P.E.I. and I experienced what a sovereign government can do. They can close their border any time they choose. We can fight in the trade courts, and 10 years later we may win or lose, but no fishery can sustain a freeze-out from the European or the U.S. market for that period of time.

I'm not advocating we cut an arm off, but continuing to say that everyone else is the problem and we should forget about being proactive and ad hoc.... We agree that one size will not fit all, but I still don't hear concrete solutions other than "Impact somebody else, not us."

Mr. Gerard Chidley: No, that's not what it is at all.

What I'm saying is that we continue on to the development of creating a tracking system that allows us to be proactive on the east coast.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: But if the people there say that the tracking system is not achievable in the short term or even in the near future and would not be comprehensive enough to protect the whale, then it comes back to the gear.

What do we have to do to change our fishing methods or some of the material we use to ensure fishers can still get their catch and protect the whale? You're moving to put the issue over onto the whale and not address it through the gear. Do you see nothing that can be done to modify the fishing gear that would protect the whale?

Mr. Gerard Chidley: One of the things you were talking about with that fishing gear, the breaking strength—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I don't think it will work in the gulf either. I'm with you on that.

Mr. Gerard Chidley: Well, that's the same thing.

What we're saying is that there is an option here. The option here is to develop a tracking system that allows you to be proactive and lets you know where the whales are going to be. That's why radar was developed. It was because of the *Titanic*. We have to be doing that. We can't just say, "Look, you have to close the fishery because of this."

You referenced the seals. Consumers did not shut down the seals; propaganda did.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes.

Mr. Gerard Chidley: This is what we're dealing with here. The same—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes, we agree on that. Propaganda will shut us down—

Mr. Gerard Chidley: Well, if we agree on that, then we should agree on the development of a tracking system to put on right whales to protect them.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Propaganda is the consumer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey. That closes our rounds of questioning for today's meeting.

I want to say a big thank you to Mr. Cormier, Mr. Haché, and of course to Mr. Chidley for sharing their knowledge with the committee here today. We thank Mr. Chidley for appearing in person and sharing his knowledge of the last 50 years on the water in fishing various species. That is very valuable information.

We're going to recess for a couple of minutes while we switch over to an in camera meeting. Then we have some instructions for our analysts.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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