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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1550)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 45 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 and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of the floor, English or French. For those in the room, of course, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

Please address all comments through the chair.

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

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I inform the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting. One witness hasn't joined yet and that test will be done if they do join.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on October 4, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of the impacts of climate change.

I would like to welcome our first panel of witnesses. Representing the Fish, Food and Allied Workers—Unifor, we have Sherry Glynn, the inshore representative. Representing the Prince Edward Island Aquaculture Alliance is Mr. Peter Warris, director of projects and industry liaison.

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

I invite Ms. Glynn to begin, please.

Ms. Sherry Glynn (Inshore Representative, Fish, Food and Allied Workers - Unifor): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of over 13,000 of our members from Newfoundland and Labrador, thank you for the opportunity to address the honourable members today.

The Fish, Food and Allied Workers union represents every in-shore harvester in our province, encompassing approximately 3,000 owner-operator enterprises and their crews. Our scope of membership also includes workers in fish processing plants, marine transportation, metal fabrication, hospitality and brewing across the province.

FFAW acknowledges and appreciates Prime Minister Trudeau's visit to the community of Port aux Basques to see first-hand the level of destruction from hurricane Fiona, and we welcome the announcement of the \$300 million recovery fund for impacted Atlantic Canadians.

This fund, to be distributed over two years to assist with the rebuilding of federal and community infrastructure in P.E.I., Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, will be quickly exhausted given the scale of repair and replacement required across all three provinces.

In addition, as climate change continues to make ocean conditions and the nature of storm systems increasingly volatile, coastal infrastructure must not only be repaired but improved upon to withstand future challenges. Due to the time-sensitive nature of our industry, the uncertainty of the timelines for completing this work is of great concern.

In the hours and days following Fiona, our union began getting reports from harvesters in Burgeo, La Poile, Rose Blanche, Fox Roost, Port aux Basques, and all the other communities on the southwest coast, about the degree of destruction that was happening in their areas. We started talking to the provincial Department of Justice and Public Safety, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency about compensation plans and application forms.

Just one week after the storm, we were on the ground in the affected communities to begin the process of documenting losses and applying for compensation. In total, we are assisting 37 harvesters through the application process of the disaster financial assistance arrangements program. Those 37 harvesters have lost almost 40 stages, 30 wharves, eight slipways and three fishing vessels. Those stages were filled with lobster pots, halibut and cod trawl, nets, deep freezes, haulers, generators, grapnels, rope, floats and everything else needed to operate the fishing enterprise.

With the fishing season just a handful of months away, harvesters are facing serious questions, not the least of which is regarding the financial burden of rebuilding: Where will the money come from? Will it come in time? Where and how will they rebuild? Fishing infrastructure is naturally along the shoreline, but harvesters are wondering how to rebuild in a way that makes their infrastructure more resilient. In some cases, the shoreline itself has changed significantly, making it impossible to rebuild in the same location.

Harvesters are concerned about the impact that the storm will have on their lobster fishery next season. As DFO pointed out in their infamous tweet, lobsters were hurled ashore during the storm. The damage done to the ocean bottom from wave energy and sedimentation is largely unknown at this point. In addition, hundreds of pots and nets were swept out to sea, and harvesters are concerned about the impact of this lost gear on fish resources.

The FFAW is calling on the federal government to support the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in recovering eligible expenses associated with damages and to provide compensation specific to the fishing sector to ensure that professional assets are restored for the 2023 season. These 37 licence-holders and enterprises represent millions of dollars in revenue to a very rural and resource-dependent region of our province.

In recent years, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has invested millions of dollars in removal of lost and derelict gear throughout Atlantic Canada. Our union has proudly contributed to this initiative. We recommend that investments in marine debris and gear removal be scaled up to swiftly remove lost gear from the marine ecosystem.

A lot of uncertainty remains months after Fiona struck. However, a couple of things are clear: first, disaster relief programs need to be at the ready and responsive to the needs of the fishing industry; second, the federal government needs to invest in new, storm-resilient infrastructure like breakwaters and reinforced wharves.

The time to act is now. The FFAW is positioned and prepared to expedite consultation on support programs and work with government to facilitate delivery of financial assistance.

- (1555)

Make no mistake: Without immediate concentrated economic support from all levels of government, the fishing industry on the southwest coast of the island is in jeopardy.

I thank you for your time and attention to this really important issue this afternoon.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Peter Warris (Director, Projects and Industry Liaison, Prince Edward Island Aquaculture Alliance): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to everyone here for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Peter Warris. I'm the director of projects and industry liaison with the P.E.I aquaculture industry.

Briefly, the aquaculture industry on P.E.I is a farming industry that produces seafood. It's not a fishery. That's a key difference I want to highlight. P.E.I is the largest mussel producer in North America. It's the largest oyster producer on the eastern shore of Canada.

Our farmers have invested thousands of dollars in infrastructure for their leases, which cannot be removed prior to this type of storm. There are hundreds of lines and thousands of cages or stocks on a farm. They can only be sunk to get them out of the way of this kind of weather. Obviously, the animals that they are farming need to remain in the water in order to survive.

Estimates for the damages to the aquaculture industry on P.E.I include the following: mortality and loss of market-ready shellfish, which are going to cause immediate product shortages, reduced exports and loss of income to the harvesters; loss of mussel and oyster seed, which are the juvenile animals that are our livestock for the next two to four years, and therefore the impacts are going to be carried forward and affect exports and potentially market shares in the future; and lease infrastructure that has been damaged or swept away, including ropes, buoys, anchors, cages, etc.

Shore-based infrastructure, including buildings, launch points and wharves, has been damaged. As well, for our land-based fin fish farms, significant quantities of fuel needed to be used for their backup power generators, without which we would have seen much higher losses in terms of stock.

Based on the feedback we've received so far, in partnership with the province and DFO locally, we're estimating at the moment that we're looking at about \$74 million in terms of damages. That's going to continue through the winter. It will probably be months before we have a final figure on that. Right now a lot of gear is being sunk or is ready for the ice to come in. We might not be seeing the level of mortality until the spring.

What does the aquaculture industry need in an immediate sense?

Smaller farms will, hopefully, be covered under the existing provincial disaster financial assistance program. We've been helping our members complete the application with the Red Cross. However, that program at the moment is capped at \$200,000. For many of those, that's not high enough. We would like to see that cap increased, potentially up to the full \$2 million.

They need to know if they are eligible for compensation, including for replacement of lost and damaged gear and lease infrastructure, for loss of market crop and seed, for the labour that's been involved in the cleanup, and for the cost of rebuilding.

We have larger companies that are not eligible for the existing program because they have more than 20 employees but that still suffered significant damages. We would like to see a separate program being developed, possibly with ACOA.

Looking further into the future, there are no reasonable insurance programs available for the aquaculture sector at this time. Again, aquaculture is a farming industry. Our members need support just as other Canadian farmers do. We would like to see those types of supports led by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, which understand farmers' needs. Some potentially suitable support programs such as that for business risk management, already exist under the established Canadian agricultural partnership. We would like to see aquaculture being made eligible to participate in those types of programs.

Another point is looking at the future planning. For a lot of the wharves and small craft harbours that were damaged it's difficult to assess the future needs with respect to those types of infrastructure when aquaculture vessels are not counted or considered currently under small craft harbours. They are not actually considered part of the core fleet even though in many cases, our members' boats are using those wharves more and for longer periods of time than the fishing vessels are.

• (1600)

In order to know what Canada's future marine infrastructure needs are, everyone must be included as part of those consultations. We'd like to see aquaculture vessels acknowledged as official users of small craft harbours.

Thank you again for your time today.

The Chair: Thank you.

The third witness still hasn't joined us by video conference, so we'll go to questions.

Mr. Small, we'll start with you for six minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses today.

Mr. Warris, you made an interesting comment there about aquaculture not being considered an official user of small craft harbours. Do you think that's fair?

Mr. Peter Warris: No, not at all.

Mr. Clifford Small: You mentioned that aquaculture would like to see a separate program developed with ACOA. Could you give us a couple of sentences to describe exactly where you'd like that separate program to be headed?

Mr. Peter Warris: I think the program itself could be very similar to the existing provincial disaster financial assistance program. It just needs to be made eligible for the larger companies. I believe the existing program is designed to address the needs of smaller companies, hence the limitation on I think 20 employees or less, or \$2 million in revenue. Obviously, some of our members don't fall within that, but in terms of the criteria, the damages that have been caused by the storm are basically very similar; they're just on a larger scale.

• (1605)

Mr. Clifford Small: What do you think could be done to help your industry better prepare for these types of weather events in the future?

Mr. Peter Warris: I think there's a lot of work to be done in terms of looking at aquaculture in other parts of the world, and in other parts of Canada as well, where farming is done in deeper waters, in rougher waters, and with heavier engineering. Obviously, building back better is something that we'd definitely like to see.

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay.

You don't really know how much damage you have. You quoted \$74 million. Where do you think that figure will end up? What will you ultimately need in order to be able to survive and to continue in aquaculture in P.E.I.?

Mr. Peter Warris: I would hesitate to put an exact number on where I think that figure will end up. We have responses from about 85 members, I believe, so I could anticipate that to creep up around the \$80-million mark, potentially.

In terms of what we need to survive, I think in the immediate sense, for a lot of our members, they have been completely devastated by this storm. We have lease infrastructure that is just basically gone, completely gone, and they need immediate financial support in order to redevelop those leases.

Mr. Clifford Small: Are you finding that the necessary resources are being made available to you in a timely fashion?

Mr. Peter Warris: My understanding is that there's still some uncertainty as to what exactly will be covered by the program. We are now working through the process of helping our members with their Red Cross applications. I'm not aware of anyone actually completing that process as of yet.

Mr. Clifford Small: How's the anxiety level right now amongst your industry there in P.E.I.?

Mr. Peter Warris: For some members, I think it's fairly high, yes.

Mr. Clifford Small: All right. Thank you.

Ms. Glynn, how is the application process moving along for the harvesters you represent?

Ms. Sherry Glynn: Thank you, Mr. Small.

It's going reasonably well. As I mentioned, we're moving through the DFAA process. I think by the end of the week we'll have maybe eight of the 37 ready to submit.

If I get too detailed, please cut me off. The stumbling block or the biggest thing we're facing with that program is proving ownership for the infrastructure that's in that marine reserve space, which I believe is 15 metres from the high-water mark, that nobody owns. When you can't own it, you can't insure anything in that space. You also can't have any kind of a deed or title to that, so when it comes to proving ownership to avail this funding, that has proven to be very difficult. It's something that we're working through.

The province is certainly helping with that, but there have been a lot of hoops to jump through, especially when it comes to harvesters who had fishing infrastructure in resettled communities, we'll say, or communities where the population residents were resettled years ago. People basically have their fishing infrastructure there. Sometimes there's a cabin there. There's a wharf and a stage and that kind of thing. That has been very difficult, because there's no town council in place that can prove or provide supporting documentation for ownership of that. So that's been a struggle.

The other limitation we've seen with that program is that it's for uninsurable losses. Vessels are considered insurable. We had three vessel losses in that region of the province, on the southwest coast. Those folks were going to have to move through a different program with that, which I believe was the intention of the ACOA funding as kind of a backstop to the DFAA. We're still awaiting details on that.

Those are a couple of the challenges we have at this point.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Glynn and Mr. Small.

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

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's great to see the witnesses here. It's always good to see my fellow colleagues.

My first question is for you, Ms. Glynn. I think this may be our last session of this particular study. We've talked to a broad cross-section of people, from government to NGOs to fish harvesters to processors, and we all agree that a lot has been invested in small craft harbours but a lot more needs to be, based on Fiona and other Fionas to come. When I have someone like you and our other witness here, I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you this. When we talk about "future-proofing" and "build back better", what does that mean to practitioners like you? Can you give us some insight? If you had x dollars tomorrow, where would you start with a particular harbour? Where would you start with a particular process operation that's close by the water?

Mr. Warris, I'll be coming to you with the same type of question.

So where would you start, Ms. Glynn? Let's unpack the term "future-proofing" for a second. From your perspective at the FFAW, what does that mean to small craft harbours? What does that mean to inshore fishers? What does that mean to processing units?

Ms. Sherry Glynn: I'm certainly not an expert on marine infrastructure and I certainly wouldn't try to present myself as that. What I can relay, from working just about on a daily basis with those 37 harvesters, is some of the questions they're asking: How high do I

need to build my wharf? What do I need to expect? What do I need to prepare against? There are those kinds of practical questions.

I was fortunate enough to sit in last week in person in one of your hearings, and it was Mr. Leys, a marine engineer, I believe, or a—

Mr. Mike Kelloway: That's correct.

• (1615)

Ms. Sherry Glynn: He made a number of good points about new infrastructure performing better in the storm than older infrastructure. It was about the upkeep and keeping that infrastructure in top condition, which allows it to weather a storm better. It's about upkeep of what we have.

Another thing is on technology and new building material and new techniques, to investigate those and see what that has to offer. Sometimes that's going to be things like breakwaters: How large and high do these new breakwaters need to be to withstand the conditions that we saw two months ago—two months ago to the day almost—to withstand that?

Research into that and adopting best practices from other locations would all be very helpful in helping harvesters make those decisions and basically guide their investments.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you for the answer.

I'm not an expert on future-proofing. However, you are consistently talking to your stakeholders in terms of what will work and what wouldn't work. We need to hear more from the practitioners of the trade in terms of how to future-proof and build back better.

Mr. Warris, in terms of aquaculture, I'm wondering if I can address the same type of question from your point of view. You talked a little bit about it.

You highlighted that there are some best practices out there in terms of other countries that have future-proofed the aquaculture industry in a more prudent and effective way. I'm wondering if we could talk a bit about that as well, in terms of future-proofing from your perspective.

Mr. Peter Warris: It's not that other jurisdictions have necessarily future-proofed more effectively, it's just that they are already operating in conditions which potentially we're going to have to operate in given the potential impacts of climate change. Certainly as we're looking at warmer waters, we're going to have to look at farming in deeper waters. They already farm mussels in deeper waters in New Zealand, Newfoundland and other areas of the world. We need to look at those jurisdictions to see how they're operating.

There are a lot of lessons to be learned already—potentially—for that. As Ms. Glynn said, she's no expert when it comes to marine engineering, but I think the expertise is out there, and we need to get those people in to talk to our members, our stakeholders, so they can access that expertise.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: If we take Fiona, for example—and I think you alluded to it in your opening statement—in terms of best practices, or practices in general that we learned this time around from Fiona, what can you ascertain from your own experience? You're not a structural engineer, nor am I, but what can you ascertain from observing the catastrophic impact that the storm had on aquaculture, small craft harbours and even processing plants? In Cape Breton, one was essentially wiped out because of the waves and what-not.

From what you've seen, what are some learning outcomes that we can achieve here?

Mr. Peter Warris: I think the industry is going to need to be supported in redeveloping their infrastructure. As I mentioned in my opening statement, there are thousands and thousands of dollars invested by owner-operators, small businesses, in their sites and leases already.

With what was done during Dorian, which was the last storm that had a big impact on us before this one, lessons were learned. Gear was sunk well ahead of the storm. However, in this particular case, in some areas it didn't matter. Cages were still destroyed and product was lost. Certainly in the case of seed collectors, a lot of that product was lost completely. It's not just a matter of changing the best practices, it's a matter of supporting the industry to be able to undertake those changes in a—

Mr. Mike Kelloway: In a consistent way?

Mr. Peter Warris: —reasonably timely manner. We don't know how long it's going to be until the next one of these once-in-a-century storms comes along.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: That's also true.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Madame Desbiens for six minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will continue with you, Mr. Warris.

You talked about the possibility of having a program for your sector comparable to what exists in agriculture. I'm quite sympathetic to that idea. I have to say that I sat with my colleague on the agriculture emergency committee that was set up at the time of the pandemic, and we realized that the program had been very supportive of farmers for reasons other than climate change, although climate change was probably involved in the pandemic that occurred, but that's another issue. In any case, this program has helped farmers cope with unpredictability. It allowed them to stay afloat.

As far as fish farms are concerned, specialized equipment is needed. Could a program like the one in agriculture be set up for the fisheries sector, i.e., a participatory management program where the government, the fishers and all the stakeholders in the fisheries sector would participate in setting up the necessary funds?

Are fishers open to the idea of a financial assistance program that would allow funds to be available in crisis situations, such as storms that occur due to climate change? This would be a program that would involve both the fishers and the government.

We should not wait for the government to react after a crisis occurs. We need more predictability and we need to give ourselves tools.

Did I understand what you said in your statement?

• (1620)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Warris: I referred to existing programs, such as the Canadian agricultural partnership program, which has been established for quite some time. We feel that since these are programs for farming operations, many of them would translate very well to the aquaculture industry, which, as I mentioned, is really a farming industry. Programs for income stabilization, disaster relief and business risk management are already established for Canadian terrestrial farmers.

Certainly, our national organization, CAIA, the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Association, has been talking about piloting business risk management programs similar to those under CAP for the shellfish aquaculture industry for some time. There's no point in reinventing the wheel. The programs are there already. Aquaculture just needs to be able to either access the existing programs or have a subsidiary program set up for just the aquaculture sector, basically based on the same model.

They are already there and working. They may not be perfect. I'm sure there are some farmers you could speak to who would probably say they are not, but it would certainly be something we would like to see.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Do you get the impression that there is so much concern in the fishing community that some fishers are thinking of changing jobs?

If there is no financial assistance for fishers after storms like the ones we've had, it will create a challenge for many business owners and fishers who will have no money to reinvest in new equipment. This will jeopardize an important part of the fishery.

As we speak, do you get the impression that fishers are reviewing their financial situation?

[English]

Mr. Peter Warris: I would say there definitely is some anxiety. The need for immediate financial assistance is there, especially for some of our members, whose lease infrastructure was completely destroyed. In some areas, we have not just partial damage but also leases that were torn away completely.

For those people to reinvest the time and effort, and go out and completely rebuild what was constructed over many years...to rebuild from new, with the potential for another storm to come in, and there still isn't any financial backing.... Yes, in an industry that supports rural economies across the province...I think that would cause them a lot of anxiety.

We have members impacted by Dorian. They just finished getting everything back together after that storm and have now been impacted by Fiona. It's very heartbreaking for them.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. Your time is up.

Before I allow Ms. Barron to start, I want to let her know she was well represented in her absence by Mr. Bachrach and Ms. Zarrillo. They did a fantastic job.

You now have six minutes.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am happy to hear that was the case.

Thank you to the witnesses here today. I'm happy to be back.

Mrs. Glynn, I want to ask you a few questions based on some of the things you discussed in your open statement. You provided some clarification to my colleague MP Kelloway, as well.

You were talking about storm-resilient infrastructure. I want to make sure we're really clear when we write recommendations to the government on how best to move forward.

What do you foresee as the key qualities and characteristics of storm-resilient infrastructure, in terms of what the government should be investing in?

• (1625)

Ms. Sherry Glynn: Thank you for that question, Ms. Barron.

As I mentioned, there are a couple of things we've been hearing from members, regarding wharves and stages. How high do we need to build those, now? What is high enough? Some people relayed the numbers to me along the way. At one point, a wharf or stage eight feet above the high-water mark was fine. They carried on like that for years and years without an issue. Apparently, that's no longer fine. In one of our communities, we had a 140-year-old heritage structure that withstood 140 years of storms on the southwest coast of Newfoundland, which is not a very hospitable place at the best of times. Fiona destroyed it. In a matter of a couple of hours, it was destroyed.

We know that what we have is not good enough, anymore, because it's all gone. That shoreline was wiped clean. Therefore, we need a different approach. We need to engage experts in marine infrastructure and engineering to get that technology and those techniques in place.

Wharf and stage height is one thing. Another thing harvesters in the area have constantly mentioned is breakwaters. I think we saw, in some of the presentations last week on Cape Breton and P.E.I., that dredging is super important in some areas. However, dredging of the bottom, for the substrate type we have in that area of Newfoundland.... It's not so much dredging that's important. Breakwaters are incredibly important in that area. We need to look at the newest technology and techniques in breakwater construction, so the shorelines and the infrastructure itself—those wharves and stages—are adequately protected.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

That's valuable information for us, as we move forward to ensure the infrastructure being rebuilt, as an investment, will last into the future—and that it's region-specific, based on all the qualities you're talking about. That's very helpful.

You also spoke about lost gear and ensuring there are processes in place to remain responsive and ready when a disaster like hurricane Fiona takes place. I'm wondering whether you could speak a bit to the prevention side of that.

What do you foresee might prevent the quantity of lost gear? Could you, perhaps, expand a bit on what you saw and what you're hearing from fishers on the water about lost gear? What are they seeing?

Ms. Sherry Glynn: On the prevention part, a lot of that comes back to the more resilient infrastructure, like we've been talking about. Really, in the days since Fiona and some of the visits out there I've already had some harvesters relocate gear. They've bought land in some of these small communities and they will shift whatever they can further away from the water's edge. That's something that harvesters have taken on themselves to try to do to make their own enterprise more resilient in the decisions they can make themselves.

I think the second part of your question, Ms. Barron, was about improving the process of leave for applying for compensation...?

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Any information around it is helpful, so yes, go ahead with that.

Ms. Sherry Glynn: Okay. Thank you.

The biggest change that I think would be helpful would be just to streamline the process. I don't think any of us should have been or should be in the future terribly surprised about these dramatic and devastating climate-related events. In September, it was eastern Canada. Next month or six months down the road, it could be central Canada, western Canada or the north.

These are all realities that we're facing, and when Fiona hit, in some ways it felt like we were starting from scratch and trying to—I know these programs existed—find ways around it for how we could make this work for the fishing industry. We know these events are going to happen, unfortunately, but I think we could be better prepared and have the processes in place.

We're over two months down the road now. It's nine weeks or so since the hurricane struck. I and a co-worker have spent several weeks in the area and have done a lot of work on this, and we're still just now looking at—hopefully—getting some applications submitted to the DFFA program. That was with assistance from the province to answer questions. They're quick and everything; it's just if that process could be streamlined and provide people with some predictability. I think that's what everybody finds difficult in this: They're not sure what's going to be covered. They're not sure what that compensation might look like. They're not sure of the next steps.

It's not that we want to water things down. I mean, we all realize that we're spending other people's money and we must be incredibly accountable to Canadian taxpayers, but if there were a bit more predictability and streamlining of that application process it would be very helpful.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

I will let the committee know that our third witness has joined us: Mr. Arseneau, from the Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

I would need consent from the committee to allow him to start an opening statement. I notice that he doesn't have a set of House earphones. If that's the case, if we do, I would ask the interpreters to let us know if there's a problem with it, and we'll cut it off or not. Could we....

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I'm just concerned about the interpreters.

The Chair: I realize that.

Perhaps what we will do in the case of people not being comfortable with not the right equipment, we could ask Mr. Arseneau to send in his written statement to the committee, so that the committee could have that and use that as a statement, but I will remind members that if they want to ask Mr. Arseneau a question, in the next two questioners, to identify that you're asking a question of Mr. Arseneau, and we'll see what happens, okay?

Mr. Bragdon, you have five minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing today and for sharing some very important information with us at the committee. Important considerations have been contained in the testimony that we've heard from all the witnesses so far.

I want to address my questions primarily to you today, Mr. Warris. Thank you for joining us here from the beautiful island of Prince Edward Island. I had the privilege of visiting there shortly after hurricane Fiona went through. I visited some of the wharfs that were directly impacted—Stanley Bridge, of course, and North Rustico—and witnessed some of the direct effects and huge impacts that were held there.

One of the concerns we're hearing directly from those who rely on the fishing industry for their livelihoods is that in the immediate aftermath of the storm, lots of politicians came running in with

promises of help and aid and all kinds of resources. All of us want to do what we can to make sure that help gets there, but oftentimes, after the immediate aftermath of a storm and it blows out to sea, the politicians go back and people are still left to try to clean up the mess and deal with the situation. The key is to make sure that there's expediency, that there's urgency and that there's continuity in the help that is coming from here to the provinces, and in particular to the wharfs that have been so impacted by hurricane Fiona, so that those harvesters and those in the aquaculture business who have been so devastatingly impacted are getting the help they need in an expeditious way.

Can you speak to that for a moment? In your estimation, has the assistance come readily? Are the wharfs being repaired expeditiously? Do you feel that these harvesters will be able to get back on the water, doing what they do, in a timely fashion?

• (1635)

Mr. Peter Warris: In terms of the wharves, I can't really speak to them directly. Our members do use small craft harbour wharves and other launch points that are administered by the provincial government. It's great that some funding has been assigned towards the development and future-proofing of those harbours and other infrastructure.

In terms of the program that's out there now to help our smaller employer members with the impact they've suffered directly from the storm damage, there was a lot of uncertainty around what would be covered. There still is some uncertainty around what will be covered and how that will happen. Certainly, the Red Cross, who administer that program, have said that they're going to support our members through that. We've been supporting our members through that application process. It's not necessarily going to be an immediate thing, and it shouldn't necessarily be an immediate thing, for some of our members. As I mentioned, they potentially won't see damages until further through the winter, so we don't necessarily want them to rush into something and then realize that they have significantly more expenses than had been initially estimated.

I would say, looking to the future, that if the aquaculture industry could access CAP or a similar program, then that would provide a level of certainty to the industry that they will have a program there from the get-go specifically for aquaculture. At the moment, the provincial program really is general to everybody.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: One of the things we've heard quite a bit, Mr. Warris, from those in the aquaculture sector, and of course from those in the harvesting sector on the island, is the absolute need for sound, solid investment in the infrastructure to get it up to speed on our wharfs, in particular small craft harbours. This was identified in a report that came out three years ago. There needed to be strategic investment not only in the wharfs and the infrastructure for small craft harbours but also in the area of dredging. I know that in Malpeque there have been some real challenges in the harbour with a major dredging need there.

It seems like promises get made, and a lot of commitments, and the blue economy always gets talked about, but if we do not invest and adapt our infrastructure for the future.... We know that storms are inevitable. We know what's going to be coming. What we have to do is strategically invest in adequate infrastructure to support the incredible potential of our blue economy, that being aquaculture and fisheries going into the future.

Along that line, we know that there will be harvesters that want to get back on the water. Do you feel that they will have adequate resources in place and that small craft harbours and wharfs will be up to speed in time for the oncoming seasons?

The Chair: Mr. Bragdon, we've gone way over time.

I'd ask Mr. Warris to submit an answer in writing to the committee, if he could, please. Thank you.

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

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

For the record, because we have a number of people appearing before this committee on small craft harbours and the need to urgently put money in—and do a statement about politicians coming in and out—the recent fall economic statement from the government provided \$1 billion dollars—a billion dollars—for emergency...and \$300 million for small craft harbours. The official opposition voted against both, so there goes the concern for the importance of rebuilding after Fiona.

Now I will go to Mr. Warris.

You made a statement, and I would like for you to expand on it to the committee. P.E.I. is unique on the mussel side. We can see the immediate damage to infrastructure, small craft harbours and around there. We've had ample witness testimony on that.

The mussel industry is under water, so we don't see it. I want the committee to get a full appreciation for the damage, which will carry forward for a couple of years. Could you explain to the committee why it will take a number of years for this industry to recover and what steps we have to take to assist it over those several years?

• (1640)

Mr. Peter Warris: Thank you for the question.

In the immediate sense, with lost product, market-ready product, obviously that's gone. That's therefore going to impact the markets. The majority of the shellfish produced on P.E.I. is exported, certainly from the province and in a lot of cases from the country. It's a good economic driver for the province. That has an immediate impact.

The infrastructure that's been damaged to the point of no longer being usable, or basically being completely destroyed, is going to limit the ability for product to be grown. Those areas can no longer be farmed as they stand right now, so they need to be rebuilt. In many cases, the growers are going to need the financial support to do that, and that's going to have to happen over the winter.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: We still don't know the full impact, until fisheries reopen—and we'll see in Nova Scotia in the coming days that fishery open—of hurricane Fiona on lobster and crab and some of the pelagic species

However, on mussels, it's not something that will be there in a month or so. Am I correct? For that biomass that was lost, it will take some period of time to recover to that stage.

Mr. Peter Warris: Yes, in terms of the seed or spat for the mussel and oyster industry....

For those who are unfamiliar, juveniles are collected from the open water for shellfish aquaculture. There are hatcheries, but they're certainly a very small proportion of the seed that is collected. Those collectors are out in the open water. It happens on an annual basis. There is a season where the seed is running, and then it's collected and grown on the collectors. It's harvested and then put into either socks or cages for the following years.

The seed that was lost because of the storm is gone. The seed that would have been growing in socks and bags through next year and in the following year is not there. It's not going to be grown. In the case of the oyster side of things, it's going to be two to three years further down the line.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay, thank you.

You referenced earlier about the market share. Could you give some testimony to the committee on the negative impact it could have on P.E.I.'s mussel industry market share?

Mr. Peter Warris: The potential exists for there to be product shortages, as I said. P.E.I. is the largest producer of mussels in North America. We farm approximately 80% of the mussels produced in North America. Both mussels and oysters are very popular. They are very widely known as quality products, and there are very strong markets for those products. Restaurants across the country and across North America and in other parts of the world are still going to want to have those products on their menus. If we're not providing them or are unable to provide them for a few years or at least fully provide to the level that we have before, the potential exists for them to go elsewhere for that product. There are other producers in the world. The concern is that we could lose that share of the market, which is why supports need to continue into the future, not just in the immediate sense. The industry is going to need to be supported so that if that does happen, we can regain that pre-eminence.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey. That clears up our first hour of committee testimony and questions. I want to say a big thank you to Mr. Warris, Ms. Glynn and Mr. Arseneau for joining us—albeit late, but he did join—and for sharing their knowledge with the committee today on this very important study.

We'll suspend for a couple of minutes now while we switch out the panels.

• (1640) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses.

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, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

There is interpretation for those on Zoom. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either “floor“, “English” or “French”. For those in the room, of course—you will be well used to it—you can use the earpiece and select the right channel. I remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

From the department, of course, we have Mr. Adam Burns, acting assistant deputy minister, fisheries and harbour management; Chris Henderson, deputy commissioner, operations; Stephanie Hopper, director general, small craft harbours program; Gary Ivany, assistant commissioner, Atlantic region, Canadian Coast Guard; Ms. Lori Cuddy, area director, Prince Edward Island, by video conference; and Mr. Doug Wentzell, regional director general, Maritimes region, by video conference.

Thank you, all, for taking the time to appear before committee today.

You now have five minutes or less for an opening statement.

I believe, Mr. Burns, you're at least starting it off. I don't know if you're giving the full five minutes or not, but you're up.

Mr. Adam Burns (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Harbour Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): I'll see what I can do. Thanks, Chair.

Hi, members.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is responsible for sustainably managing Canada's fisheries and oceans resources and safeguarding our waters, while supporting economic growth in the marine and fisheries sectors. With the longest coastline in the world, Canada's marine and coastal areas are an essential part of our country, our economy and our livelihoods.

However, as our climate continues to change, so do our waters. Rising sea levels, reduced sea ice and increased frequency and severity of storms and storm surges are damaging our shorelines and coastal infrastructure, particularly Canada's small craft harbours.

[*Translation*]

The Small Craft Harbours Program is responsible for approximately 1,000 harbours. Together, these harbours represent more than 10,000 structures with a total value of over \$7 billion. More than 5,000 volunteers participate in the program each year through local harbour authorities who help keep harbours essential to the fishing industry open so that they can provide safe and accessible facilities for commercial fishers and other users.

[*English*]

The impacts of hurricane Fiona were immense, including significant fishing gear loss from various active fisheries and aquaculture operations and damage to over 140 small craft harbours across Atlantic Canada and eastern Quebec.

To help address some of the devastation caused by this storm, a \$300-million hurricane Fiona recovery fund was announced in early October. From that fund, \$100 million has been allocated to support the immediate and urgent work to recover lost fishing gear and to address repairs to many of our small craft harbours.

Since this record-breaking storm, our small craft harbours program staff have been diligently working with local harbour authorities to ensure that harbours are cleaned up and urgent repairs are addressed.

Hurricane Fiona also created the need for increased dredging at a number of harbours because of the significant coastal erosion. Dredging operations continue at impacted harbours as we speak.

Our small craft harbours program has been working and will continue to work and carry out in-depth assessments of damage in order to address longer-term repairs. We are confident that the vast majority of impacted harbours will be operational come this spring.

Further to the damage caused to our small craft harbours, hurricane Fiona significantly impacted a large amount of fishing gear. To date, harvesters estimate that tens of thousands of units of various fishing gear have been lost due to gear drift and infrastructure damage. Funding was provided to boost Fisheries and Oceans Canada's ghost gear fund, which supports concrete actions to prevent, retrieve and responsibly dispose of lost fishing gear. At present, \$1.5 million in additional funds has been made available to the ghost gear fund to undertake immediate critical gear cleanup activities, with \$28.4 million allocated for proposals going forward. The call for proposals is now open and will be accepting applications until December 28 of this year.

Thank you for the opportunity to join you today. We're happy to take your questions.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you for that. That was a little bit under time. We always like to save a bit of time for the questions.

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

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Burns.

You just said that you have \$100 million to support fishing gear recovery and repair of small craft harbours. Earlier in this same meeting, Mr. Morrissey said that \$300 million would be provided for this initiative.

What is the right figure?

Mr. Adam Burns: The \$300 million is the total amount announced by the Government of Canada for the Fiona recovery measures. Some of that is with ACOA, so they could speak to the specific investments they are making. I was referring specifically to the \$100 million that's been particularly earmarked to address small craft harbours and ghost gear.

Mr. Clifford Small: One-third of that \$300 million is for fishing industry purposes.

Mr. Adam Burns: Specifically small craft harbours and ghost gear, yes.

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay.

What's the dollar value that your department has assessed for the damaged and destroyed small craft harbour infrastructure? Do you have a dollar value on that yet?

Mr. Adam Burns: One of the tasks we'll be doing, supported through the initial funding we've received, is the necessary engineering work to complete a full assessment to know the exact answer to that question. We don't have a precise number to give you today.

Mr. Clifford Small: We had some disputed testimony earlier in the week. Stakeholders said that there's not a chance small craft harbour infrastructure would be ready for this upcoming season.

You've just said that we'd be ready. What's the plan to expedite that?

Mr. Adam Burns: We've been working very diligently to undertake the immediate dredging needs and the primary repair activities. As a result of that, the vast majority of the impacted harbours will be operational come spring.

There's a very small number of harbours, somewhere between two and ten, that may not be operational. We are already working on plans to accommodate the impacted harvesters so that their operations will be able to continue.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

Mr. Perkins, can you take over from here?

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses.

If I could follow up on that, Mr. Burns, my understanding from testimony we've heard is that no engineering contracts have been let for the design of some of these wharves that need repair, especially the ones that have been demolished. I think an earlier DFO estimate was that 20 or so have been demolished.

Also, obviously there's a question of whether or not there are the materials and the labour out there to perform the work within that time. Can you maybe shed a little more light on how that will happen by the spring?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper (Director General, Small Craft Harbours Program, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): If I may, most of the cleanup, early assessment and repairs have already been done at most of the harbours. We're currently under way for planning in terms of the longer-term repairs that will need to be occurring over the coming months and, being mindful as well of the weather, the season we're entering into as well, that planning is happening. However, repairs and planning are under way.

• (1700)

Mr. Rick Perkins: On the \$100 million, I have wharves in my riding. For a recent one in Lunenburg, the estimate is \$25 million to replace it. When you have a number of demolished wharves, which you have, how is it possible that \$100 million is adequate to deal with the wharves and, in the case of what we heard in testimony just before yours, also with the \$70 million plus in damage to the aquaculture industry in P.E.I.?

Mr. Adam Burns: In terms of funding the support for disaster recovery for other aspects, like what you're referring to there with aquaculture, that would be separate from the \$100 million that's been announced to date related to small craft harbours.

The money is meant to do the short-term repairs, to support the engineering assessments of the wharves that are severely damaged, and to get us to a point where we understand more completely what the overall impacts have been. Then we can start to make a plan for the full repair and obviously assess what the full cost of that repair would be.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. So the full repair won't be done by the spring...?

Mr. Adam Burns: No. As I mentioned, there are somewhere between two and ten harbours that we believe will not be operational in the spring.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay.

Three years ago, this committee produced a report on the state of small craft harbours. I think your predecessor, Ms. Lapointe at the time, suggested—I don't know how many predecessors there have been—and the committee recommended as a result that the A-base funding needed to double for small craft harbours. Do you believe that A-base funding for small craft harbours needs to be doubled?

Mr. Adam Burns: Right now, we're focused on harbour repairs related to Fiona. I haven't come here with a full assessment of what any sort of future budget would need to look like. We're focused on the engineering assessment of the damage, so we can identify what the full cost will be.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

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

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

Again, I'll make one comment. Whether it's a hundred, three hundred or a billion, we're discussing what's needed to improve the infrastructure of small craft harbours. Regardless of the amount, the official opposition voted against providing any additional money to the east coast to assist after hurricane Fiona.

My concern—and this is a point on which I do agree with opposition members—is the timeline for getting projects designed and tendered, and getting work going. What I would like to hear from the members of the department is whether there are ways we can simplify and speed up the process for getting some work done.

I'll start with Mr. Burns, then I'll ask Ms. Cuddy to comment on how we can improve the timelines for getting projects approved and delivered, as they relate to small craft harbours.

Go ahead, Mr. Burns.

Mr. Adam Burns: Thanks.

Absolutely. We are working very closely with the various service providers in the regions to get as much work done this fall as we can, so we benefit from as many of the engineering and overall assessments as we can, in order to have a plan ready to go for the spring, when construction season restarts.

We are working with Public Services and Procurement Canada to ensure that, to the maximum extent possible, we're streamlining the processes and getting as much work done as is reasonable this fall, before the snow flies.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: My question to Ms. Cuddy is this: Will small craft harbours be operational this spring in fishing areas that depend on those harbours?

Ms. Lori Cuddy (Area Director, Prince Edward Island, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): I can only answer for the P.E.I. area. For the question, in general, I'll defer to—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I'm just asking about P.E.I.

Ms. Lori Cuddy: Yes, all wharfs in P.E.I. should be operational this spring.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The fishing season will start on time. There will be no delay due to the infrastructure of small craft harbours.

• (1705)

Ms. Lori Cuddy: Exactly.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thanks.

My other question would be this: Do you see a role for the local port authorities? There's been a lot invested in the operation of port authorities. They have acquired an expertise, over the years, on some projects.

Could the government roll out some minor maintenance projects through port authorities, in order to speed up the process?

I'll start with Mr. Burns, then go to Ms. Cuddy.

Mr. Adam Burns: We already have the authority to engage with the harbour authorities for smaller projects.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: If you have the authority, are you going to do that over the next number of months?

Mr. Adam Burns: I believe we already are.

I'll turn to my colleague.

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: Certainly. It depends on the scale of the work that needs to be done.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What's the scale you can deal with? Don't be evasive. I want to get—

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: If it's a minor repair—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What's "minor"?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: If it's a longer-term, major capital project that will require over a year and a half, or years, then we'd obviously be looking at—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What's a minor repair?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: Minor repairs are things that could be done within a couple of weeks.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Put a dollar value on the minor side.

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: We have procurement options, within the department, to go directly to harbour authorities for up to \$80,000, after which we have to go through our own DFO procurement hub and, following that—as Mr. Burns mentioned—Public Services and Procurement Canada.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How long has the \$80,000 limit been there?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: I can't answer that, actually. It has been there [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you get back to the committee? Perhaps it's time we re-evaluated. The ceiling should be risen for this emergency situation, in order to allow port authorities to play a more substantial role in procuring the contracts they need to do repairs at their facilities.

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: We'll endeavour to get that information to you.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay.

Ms. Cuddy, do you want to comment? I know it's local, but you deal extensively with the port authorities in Prince Edward Island. Some deal with small projects quite effectively. Is that a way of getting some of the money? Sometimes we may argue over whether a hundred million or several hundred million or a billion is enough. I'm hearing from a lot in the industry that we do have a capacity issue. One of them is contractors. We cannot deal with that. Are there adequate contractors around to provide this work in a timely manner? The other is the ability to get approvals to the local ports in a timely manner so that they can engage in some of this work themselves.

Ms. Lori Cuddy: For P.E.I. we have already engaged with the harbour authorities and have contracts with them for Fiona-related cleanup and those minor repairs that my colleague just mentioned.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for six minutes or less, please.

[Translation]

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

I thank the witnesses for coming. We know that they have a lot to deal with, in this crisis situation where everybody is waving their flag at the same time. It's quite a complex issue and I extend my sympathy to them.

For my part, obviously, I am more concerned about the situation in Quebec. I have proposed a study on small craft harbours, which the committee will soon undertake, and I believe that hurricane Fiona will have highlighted the urgency of proceeding with this study.

In the meantime, do you have any idea how many decrepit ports in Quebec need to be brought up to speed quickly?

Do you have an estimate of what this will cost for Quebec? Do you do an assessment for each province?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: We assess the needs of all our ports across the country. Of course, we also rely on our regional offices to prioritize. I don't have specific numbers for you today, but certainly there is a regular assessment of the condition of our ports to determine how and when the work needs to be done.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Could you send this information to the committee, so that we know where we stand and can form an opinion on it?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: Yes, we can certainly provide that information. There are certain criteria that are evaluated.

• (1710)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

I went to the Magdalen Islands before hurricane Fiona, and the situation at the Cap-aux-Meules wharf was already complex, given that it is partly under the jurisdiction of Transport Canada, supposedly, and partly under Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Some sort of barge was installed to increase the berthing space. However, it does not work when the boats arrive loaded with fish or lobsters. I have seen fishermen who had to manoeuvre to attach their boat to the barge and allow their colleagues to unload their cargo, because the barge would not allow them to do so. God knows that the main economic activity of the Magdalen Islands is lobster fishing, and all this makes the situation more complex. Hurricane Fiona added to this and highlighted the emergencies experienced on the Magdalen Islands and in various ports on both shores of Quebec.

Was there a plan before Fiona and, if so, was it changed? You've already done a lot, as we've seen, but the reason there was an urgency to do a study on small craft harbours was because there was still a lot to do.

Now that hurricane Fiona has passed, are you able to give us an order of magnitude of the additional costs it will have caused, compared to what you had anticipated?

Is my question clear?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: I understand your question, but I don't have the answer. Unfortunately, we can't quantify that.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: You were probably already planning to invest some money in refurbishing the more decrepit ports, and Fiona will certainly have made them worse. So I imagine that there will be an increase in the investment needed. Has this been budgeted for?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: We are continuing, as we always make sure we do, with the assessments I mentioned earlier and we factor them into our planning.

We are in the second year of implementation of the \$300 million that was provided in Budget 2021. Projects and planning are ongoing.

As mentioned, there is also \$100 million earmarked for small craft harbours, among other things, over the next two years. How that will be used is also part of our planning.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Do you think it would be necessary or appropriate to have a fund, plan or program to support infrastructure, given the new realities of climate change? Do you think it would be in the government's interest to plan for funds that might be needed in extreme cases where the lack of infrastructure would compromise fishing, for example?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: I can't really comment on that. I do know, however, that in the \$300 million announced following Fiona, there is the \$100 million that I mentioned that is specifically for that, but as I understand it, it may also be for other purposes.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Is this enough?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: Unfortunately, I am unable to answer this question today. This is not our area of expertise.

Mr. Adam Burns: What I can say is that we need to wait for the engineers to complete their work to determine the costs and to make plans to reopen the hurricane-damaged ports.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: You don't have set priorities, either. You're going to focus on what's most urgent, rather than the economic aspects of fishing. Is that kind of how you see the situation?

Mr. Adam Burns: Actually, we are doing both of these things at the same time. The idea is to put a plan in place so that fishers can continue to fish. In order to do that, we take both aspects into consideration.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I imagine you will proceed by priority.

Thank you so much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here again.

This will build off many of the questions that have been asked. We're hearing from witnesses over and over about absolutely the need for action to be taken immediately, so that we can ensure that fishers are out on the water as planned, but also about the importance of weather-resilient infrastructure or natural infrastructure. Through this process of rebuilding, what considerations are taken to ensure that we're not just continuing to put a band-aid solution on this but are actually rebuilding appropriately to take into consideration the future extreme weather events that will inevitably occur?

• (1715)

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, climate resilience in the infrastructure that we'll be rebuilding and repairing is one of the key or ultimate things we'll be asking the engineers who are doing the evaluations, and who ultimately will be doing the plans for those repairs, to keep in mind. The plans should reflect climate-resilient infrastructure. It's absolutely part of the plan.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Through that planning process, is there any consultation happening with local communities, harvesters and so on? We know that much knowledge is gained from talking to those who are in those specific regions.

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: Certainly. From the outset, that's been the nature of the small craft harbours program. We have a very, very close relationship with the harbour authorities and those working in the communities. There's a very tight relationship there.

As well, when we're doing our planning and are considering any repairs or building, we do consider different climate adaptation tools that are in use, and that we'll also continue to adapt based on recent climate events, to make sure that those considerations are taken into account when we're doing future planning as well.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Were the considerations around rebuilding more resilient infrastructure considered in the decision to implement \$100 million to the rebuilding process? How does this play into the budgeting implications?

Mr. Adam Burns: A portion of the \$100 million is for ghost gear retrieval. The portion that is specifically for small craft harbours is for the immediate dredging and minor repair needs as well as for the engineering assessments and the development of longer-term rebuilding plans. Most of that work is separate from long-term climate-resilient infrastructure, but it will be built into the engineering assessments and rebuilding plans that come as a result of that investment.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: If I have a little bit of time, can you speak to what you're hearing through this process on the key features of climate-resilient infrastructure?

I would like to also hear from Mr. Ivany and Mr. Henderson on their perspectives, out on the water, of what they foresee as increasingly more resilient infrastructure so that we're not having to continue to react to instances like this as they occur?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: Like I said, we are continuing to work with the harbour authorities. In terms of what sort of climate adaptation tools continue to be refined, if you will, as we go forward, there's obviously no magic solution to anything. However, as we invest and rebuild, that is certainly taken into consideration.

We do.... Again, I can't repeat enough the nature of the close relationship with the harbour authorities and taking their concerns under consideration when doing the planning.

Mr. Chris Henderson (Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you for the question.

I'll start by pointing out that for us in the Coast Guard, responding is what we do. We will always do that. Sadly, I think it's the case that we'll always have to be responding to extreme weather events.

We're going to continue to try to get it right. We're putting a lot of effort into making sure that our new infrastructure is climate resilient. We've been building new search and rescue lifeboat stations as an example, some in Atlantic Canada and some in British Columbia. Those were made to the best standards we can get and that we know of at the moment.

With respect to consultation, in the past we haven't always done it right, for sure. However, we are consulting now, and I can share an example from British Columbia—Vancouver Island—with Port Hardy. We built a search and rescue lifeboat station there without consultation, and we heard about it. We then built a new environmental response depot in close consultation with the Kwakiutl, and it was a very successful experience. That is a robust facility. It's built high out of the water, with lots of space. It accommodates rising tide, and there's a lot of excess capacity for the work to move up.

We're taking these steps as we go. We're retroactively looking at facilities that need additional work. We're also building climate resilience into our new ships, through the fleet renewal plan, so that there's better sea-keeping, better design, with reduced emissions. We know we're building ships that have longer legs and better capabilities to do search and rescue. Our bay-class lifeboats, for example, can go further; they can do more than the ships they're replacing. We feel that we're going to be better postured to deal with the unfortunate results of extreme weather when they inevitably hit us.

● (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. You were a little bit over, but that's okay. You're just back fresh....

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

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

Unfortunately, I'm working remotely today.

I have some questions—I believe Mr. Ivany will be best to answer them—and I'd like to pass the other half of my time to Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Ivany, what were the significant effects of hurricane Fiona on Canadian Coast Guard operations in the Atlantic region?

Mr. Gary Ivany (Assistant Commissioner, Atlantic Region, Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you very much for the question.

The Canadian Coast Guard in the Atlantic region has unfortunately been dealing with severe weather events quite a bit in the last few years. We had a very good plan going in. We spent a lot of time in the days ahead of hurricane Fiona on preparedness. Through all of that good planning and resources that we put in ahead of time, there were very few impacts at all on Coast Guard floating infrastructure. All of our ships were well positioned away from the storm and ready to respond.

Mariners around Atlantic Canada really heeded warnings for this storm and stayed out of the way. We had cruise ships moving to different ports. We had tankers and ferries all doing the right thing by being in the right place away from the direct impact of the storm.

Direct impacts on Coast Guard in Atlantic Canada, floating assets, were very minor. Certainly our college in Cape Breton received some damage there. However, our staff, officers and officer cadets who were there pretty quickly turned that negative situation into a very positive situation, by opening up the facility on emergency power, making food and supporting Canadians close by who needed assistance.

Mr. Mel Arnold: What about other land-based assets? Were there other impacts?

Mr. Gary Ivany: They were very minor. All of our fixed aids of navigation and pretty well all of our towers sustained the winds in that area very well. Certainly, we saw damage around Port aux Basques, but our infrastructure in those areas all stood the challenges that Mother Nature provided them that day.

Recent investments in the oceans protection plan allowed us to put redundant systems into our peripheral marine communications and traffic services sites, as well as harden some of our radar sites. All of those assets functioned very well. Those backup systems all worked when power went down and communication was needed from a vessel traffic services perspective and a safety perspective.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Will any Coast Guard resources previously allocated to other purposes need to be reallocated to deal with restoring capacities after Fiona?

Mr. Gary Ivany: In this case, it was.... We spend a lot of time on preparedness and readiness in the Coast Guard. Whenever there is a response, we turn all resources to responding.

In certain parts of the plans, whether we were planning to do maintenance or planning to do the preparedness type of work on assets, whether floating or fixed aids, we did need to turn attention to and input additional resources to replace aids and do other minor repairs that had to be carried out to buildings and some infrastructure.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay.

I think I have to turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Perkins.

● (1725)

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

I'll try to make it quick.

In this excellent report from the committee, which I think, Mr. Chair, you chaired in 2019, "DFO noted that climate change is leading both to greater demands for dredging, but also the extent of repairs required", and it identified a wharf in New Brunswick that was being undermined. Obviously, no work was done, because that's the one that was impacted by Fiona.

Do you have an assessment of the state of all the small craft harbour wharves and whether they are in Atlantic Canada and whether or not they're able to withstand these kinds of storms?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: As I responded earlier to Madame Desbiens, we conduct regular assessments of our harbours and determine on a priority basis the need and the scope, and plan towards...as I said, based on a number of criteria, socio-economic being one of them. We don't have an overall number, as we said earlier, to give you in terms of what that could be for all of our harbours. However, we do regular assessments and reassess as well after certain weather events such as Fiona.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Did the wharves that you had recently done projects on in these areas in Nova Scotia and P.E.I. in particular fare better in the storm, or was it the weaker wharves that hadn't had any work done where most of the damage was done?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: What we've been seeing is that as we have been incorporating the different climate adaptation tools as work progresses, as we've been doing, as I mentioned before, with the different funding envelopes, whether it be budget 2018 or budget 2001 when reinvesting, those structures are standing up fairly well to significant weather events.

Of course, that depends on where they're located and on a number of other circumstances, but in general, where we are able to invest and are doing that planning, it is seemingly beneficial.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I know that hurricane Fiona was a little more devastating in other provinces than New Brunswick, but I also know that in southeastern New Brunswick some wharves were heavily damaged.

My first question concerns wharves in northeastern New Brunswick, specifically those in my riding of Acadie-Bathurst. Although hurricane Fiona was not as severe there as in other areas, there was damage. Some docks were damaged. Also, there were problems with silting up at the entrance to some of the docks. As a result, fishers will certainly find it difficult to go fishing at sea in the next season.

Have you done an assessment of the damage to harbours in northeastern New Brunswick, including the silting problems experienced by some of them?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: I would like to have a clarification, Mr. Cormier: are you talking about the ports in northern New Brunswick?

Mr. Serge Cormier: I'm talking about the ports of northeastern New Brunswick.

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: As mentioned, we do assessments of all our ports on a regular basis to determine what the needs are. Certainly, dredging is a challenge at many of our ports. That is why we are working closely with our teams and also with contractors to put in place solutions to avoid delays, impediments or problems during the opening of the fishing season.

Mr. Serge Cormier: To tell you the truth, I can name almost all the harbours in my region that are experiencing problems and for which, every year since I was elected in 2015, I have had to call your department to have dredging done at the last minute. We all know what these ports are. I am sure you also know the location of all the ones that need dredging every year. Why do you wait until the last minute to make these decisions?

As you said earlier, we can let the harbour authorities do this work, up to a certain amount. I thought it was \$90,000, but you said \$80,000. Why not let the harbour authorities do this work, if you don't have the time to do it or if you have other small craft harbour projects to deal with?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: We are working closely with the harbour authorities to be able to run a program while ensuring the safety of our harbour users. Certainly, for dredging, it's a lot of coordination. We want to make sure that all our harbours are ready for the opening of the fishery and that it is done safely.

• (1730)

Mr. Serge Cormier: I understand, Ms. Hopper, but we already know which ports need dredging every year. I can name a few:

Grande-Anse, Pointe-Verte, Petit-Rocher and Pigeon Hill. Why do you always wait until the last minute, at the opening of the season, to do this work, when it could be done a little in advance? I know there's ice sometimes, but why not plan them and do them in advance?

Also, why not let the harbour authorities do the work using the available contractors? I would like you to give me a reason why you can't let them do this work. I understand that there are rules to follow, and I'm sure you're with them on this. I have been able to follow several projects that these administrations have carried out and that you have approved. Why don't you make more use of that, which could free up your resources for other purposes?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: We work closely with the harbour authorities to coordinate dredging during the spring fishing season. The weather plays a role in this process, especially in assessing the quantities to be dredged. All of these factors have a significant effect on the coordination and timing of the spring dredging.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I would like to get a clarification, just to make sure I understood correctly. You said that up to \$80,000, the harbour authorities can issue the calls for bids themselves, get one, two or three price estimates and choose the most advantageous. Does it still work that way?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: Yes, but it depends on the scope of the work to be done. If the project is suitable, we can allow harbour authorities to undertake the work themselves, up to a maximum of \$80,000. Of course, in addition to the size of the project, all other conditions must be met, the necessary environmental approvals and permits must be obtained, and there must be no problems from the point of view of consultation with indigenous peoples.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Here again, as I said earlier—

[*English*]

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

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to ask you where the main obstacle to greater predictability lies. I agree with my colleague Mr. Cormier on this point. On the ground, there are obviously recurring problems, season after season. I see it in L'Isle-aux-Coudres: every year, the wharf silts up and the dredging team intervenes. The problem is sometimes exacerbated by storms and then the volume of sand to be dredged has to be assessed, but nevertheless we know that the problem of silting comes back every year.

What can be done to create more predictability in the face of these kinds of recurring problems? Many things are unpredictable in climate change, but some things can be predicted and could be managed more effectively and functionally for people on the ground. It would put their minds at ease. Fishers would know that the work is being done.

I am not criticizing you; I just want to know what can be done to increase the predictability of these recurring activities.

Mr. Adam Burns: I will answer your question first, and then I will let Ms. Hopper answer in turn.

In reality, every year there are many things we don't know. For example, the amount of sand to be dredged at a particular small craft harbour varies from year to year. We can, of course, anticipate that dredging will be required. However, given the limited number of companies offering this service, we must make annual assessments and put a plan in place to ensure that all small craft harbours will be functional and offer all the services necessary for fishers to use them.

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: We've also started to put some tools in place, like standing offers for contractors, so they can more easily respond to emergencies. That's one of the tools we use.

We are very aware of the complexity of the situation. We work closely with the port authorities. They give us feedback from previous seasons and this helps us to better anticipate the needs.

• (1735)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. That was a little bit over, but not too bad.

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

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

A few of our witnesses also brought up the importance of science as we move forward and of developing better weather-resilient, extreme weather-resilient infrastructure and adapting it as required based on changes we're seeing within our oceans, based on the many impacts of the climate crisis.

I wonder if you could speak a little bit to what you're doing to try to fill some of the gaps we're currently seeing, some of the deferring science or data that is being acquired and how that information is being integrated into the steps moving forward on rebuilding for more climate-resilient infrastructure.

Mr. Adam Burns: Clearly Canada is not alone in feeling the impacts of climate change and of the severe weather events that many jurisdictions have faced in recent years. Certainly we will be look-

ing globally as well to best practices and, as I mentioned, as engineers develop plans for rehabilitating the damaged harbours, we will be looking at their building into those best practices around climate resilience.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: How about local and indigenous knowledge? How is that being integrated?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: That's part of the discussions and communications we have with our harbour authorities. A lot of those include indigenous participants and members. That is taken into account. All the different information is taken into account and that will continue as we go forward.

The Chair: You have 35 seconds.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I'll give them back.

The Chair: That's perfect. She has given up the 35 seconds because she went a little bit over last time. That should be an example to members who do go over time frequently.

Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

Go ahead, please. The clock is running.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. The clock is running. Thank you.

I just want to follow up a little more on my last question, which was on the severity of the damage to the older wharves. Small craft harbours in my area have told me that in southwest Nova they need \$600 million. We are a long way from that.

Are small craft harbours looking at building differently—I don't like the term "building back better"—to try to build stronger, more resilient infrastructure, with stronger types of structures than our traditional wooden ones? I see that on the west coast they do a lot of steel pylons and floatable concrete decks and that kind of thing.

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, as I mentioned, one of the key things we're asking in terms of the rehabilitation plans that will be put in place over the coming months is that climate resilience be built into that. One hundred per cent we'll be looking to what seems to be working on the west coast as well as internationally. We'll also certainly be seeking the local knowledge that might further benefit the development of those climate-resilient plans.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It would probably be tough to provide a number here, so perhaps you can provide it in writing later. What would be adequate ongoing financing for the A-base funding in order to ensure that small craft harbour wharfs can have long-term capital maintenance planning? We don't seem to have that right now. It's been identified through a couple of reports.

Mr. Adam Burns: As I mentioned, we're focused right now on assessing the cost of the damage from hurricane Fiona and putting in place plans to get those wharves that have been severely impacted back online, if you will. To further answer your question, I think we'd need to provide something in writing.

• (1740)

Mr. Clifford Small: This will go to Mr. Burns or Ms. Hopper.

We've heard testimony in this study so far that a lot of divested property out there has been damaged or destroyed. What's your take on that? Will those harbours be completely left out in the cold, or will you step in to help them out?

Mr. Adam Burns: That would be a case-specific question. What I can say is that there is the broader disaster relief funding that goes to the provinces. In addition to that, and again, this would be entirely case-specific and I'm not the expert to speak to that, there is the other \$200 million from the Fiona relief fund—again, it depends on case specifics, so I don't want to mislead you—which I suppose could also be a pathway.

Mr. Clifford Small: We also heard some testimony earlier in the week that double breakwaters were found to be very effective. The first breakwater took the waves down quite a bit, and then the second breakwater could handle it. As we try to become more resilient, how much would building that proper type of breakwater drive up the cost of building?

Mr. Adam Burns: First, certainly none of us are engineers who have that expertise to know, in a given harbour's circumstance, whether the approach you're referring to would have benefit. The climate resilience piece, which would include that, is something that we'll be asking the engineers developing the rehabilitation plans to build into the plans. That's something that will be looked at through that process that will be undertaken over the coming months.

Mr. Clifford Small: You mentioned earlier that the funding there now is just an initial amount of money to try to get things up and running for the upcoming season. Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes. That's right. The purpose of that initial investment is the immediate dredging and repair costs as well as engineering assessments to get a better understanding of any additional repairs that will be needed.

The Chair: Mr. Small, you're right on the mark. Thank you for ending right on that mark. It's the first time yet.

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

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

In terms of the damage that was done, we certainly heard from a lot of the witnesses that the structures that have been around for awhile were overwhelmed by the weather we had during hurricane Fiona. I'm just wondering if you've made the observations, or if your staff have, or if perhaps you have some oceanographic science, as to whether the weather is coming at us from a different direction now. Are we dealing with changes in the currents, for instance, that have driven to other areas some of the species that the fishers fish?

I'm just wondering if in your assessment and rebuilding of some of the small craft harbours you will need to do them substantially differently because, as I said, the currents and the weather are changing on us.

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, building in all of the elements related to climate resilience is something that we'll be aiming to do as we develop the repair plans for the harbours that are most severely impacted.

In terms of an answer to the other question, I don't have an answer for you on that today.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I know that came out of left field. However, that said, are you in a position...do you have the resources to do the kind of assessment of what the future might look like?

Fiona's track appeared to be quite different from what you've seen in the past. I guess it would be helpful to know if that's what the future looks like, or if something else is going to be taking place that will make a lot of the good work you're trying to do now not work so well if the conditions change on you again.

• (1745)

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: If I may, when I referenced the different climate adaptation tools that are being used and how we're adapting them.... As we're doing our planning and doing the different geological assessments and such, we draw upon experts who take into consideration the different changes to allow for that and to better predict the model to allow...so that something that always existed in the past needs to be rethought in terms of being able to foresee different future events.

That's all part of how we're working to adapt those different tools that our engineering teams are involved in on a daily basis.

Mr. Ken Hardie: In some of our earlier testimony, I recall Mr. Perkins mentioning that he has quite a number of small craft harbours up and down his coast of South Shore—St. Margarets. If this little craft harbour isn't picturesque enough for you, go a few miles down the road and there's another one.

That begs the question, and it came up in the 2019 report on small craft harbours—there are over 800 serving the fishing communities now—do we need to think about rationalizing them or should we try to fix them all? Who would make that call?

This is your “get off the hook” subsidiary question here.

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: We currently have 973 small craft harbours across the country. A certain number are deemed to be core and essential to the commercial fishing industry. Others would fall in the category of recreational or, perhaps, non-essential, whether it's by number or whether they can go to proximity.

The divestiture program is a part of the small craft harbours program. When we are determining or doing our planning, that's certainly a consideration but, again, depending on where it is in the country—if there are closer neighbouring harbours to be able to accommodate such fishers—and the state of repair for a certain harbour, those are all taken under consideration when determinations are made on the future of said harbour.

Mr. Ken Hardie: You're speaking in the passive voice. Who makes the determination?

Who would decide if a small craft harbour is beyond repair and to not make the investment?

Ms. Stephanie Hopper: We work closely with our engineering teams, who are in the position to have the skill to assess the state of said asset and to determine whether or not its future use...and what would be required, either from a funding perspective or how that would be serving the community in the future as well. Our engineering and our regional teams are there working, again, with our harbour authorities on a day-to-day basis.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

There are only four seconds left, so that won't give you much time to ask a question. You'd probably try to sneak it in, only before I gave you the signal you were done.

I want to say thank you to the officials for appearing either in person or by video conference with the committee today, for sharing your knowledge and for answering the many questions. I think some of you are back on Friday when the minister appears on the supplementary estimates at committee, so we'll welcome you back again.

I will say one thing to Ms. Hopper, because she mentioned it in her testimony, about the dredging. On the east coast, or the eastern part of Newfoundland, they usually let a standing offer go out, and

that covers the whole eastern portion of the province. One contractor gets it, but he has to be able to provide that service. He'll move from one harbour to another as he's needed to do the dredging. They do it on a standing offer. I think it might be...there's a limit on it. There might be \$240,000 in total, but he'll do all the dredging until that amount of money runs out, and then it's up to them if they want to reassign it or not. It seems to work quite well, because you're guaranteed to get your dredging done when it's needed or before the fishing season starts.

Again, I thought I'd add that bit of information. I think it's put out through Public Works Canada, which looks after the tendering process, if I'm not mistaken.

Again, thank you everyone for another fantastic meeting.

Go ahead, Madame Desbiens.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Chair, the witness who was unable to join us by video conference, Mr. Arseneau, offers to send his testimony to all members of the committee. In addition, if we wish to ask him questions in writing, he can answer them in writing. That is what I propose the committee do, if that is appropriate.

I thank the interpreters again.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, thank you for that.

Hopefully, if anyone has a question for them, they'll send it or get the email address or the contact to send it out and get an answer back.

The meeting is adjourned.

● (1750)

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