



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 136

Tuesday, November 5, 2024

Chair: Mr. Peter Schiefke



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• (1640)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 136 of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Before we begin the meeting, I want to remind all in-person participants to read the best practices guidelines on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to protect the health and safety of all participants.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, September 18, 2023, the committee is resuming its study on regulation of recreational boating on Canada's waterways.

All witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Colleagues, I'd now like to welcome our witnesses here with us today and joining us online.

We have Dr. Colin Rennie, professor, University of Ottawa, who is appearing as an individual. Welcome to you, sir.

We have Dr. Jesse Vermaire, associate professor, Carleton University, who is appearing as an individual. Welcome.

From Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons, we have John Gullick, manager, government and special programmes, by video conference. Welcome to you, sir.

[Translation]

We also have André Bélanger and Coralie Massey-Cantin from the Fondation Rivières.

Welcome.

[English]

Finally, from MacDonald Turkey Point Marina, Inc., we have Brad Thomson, general manager, who is joining us by video conference. Welcome to you, sir.

We're going to begin with opening remarks today.

[Translation]

Ms. Massey-Cantin or Mr. Bélanger, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. André Bélanger (General Manager, Fondation Rivières): Thank you for inviting us to speak to the committee.

For over 20 years, the Fondation Rivières has been dedicated to protecting the natural aspect of rivers, water quality and access to riverbanks. We believe in encouraging the growth of the respectful use of waterways. The more people use waterways and love rivers, the more people will want to protect them.

We recently completed a consultation process for a sustainable cohabitation model on the Richelieu River. We think that this should give you food for thought. This process was carried out with Covabar, the watershed organization responsible for protecting the river. It brought together 20 municipalities; four regional county municipalities, or RCMs; tourism business associations; environmental organizations; user representatives; Canot Kayak Québec; and Nautisme Québec. Everyone was around the table.

We listed 71 public and private river access points. You won't be surprised to hear that 70% of them were reserved or designated for recreational boating. This makes sense, since the Richelieu River is a major waterway between Canada and the United States. For a long time, it was used exclusively or almost exclusively by pleasure boaters, who still monopolize the entire body of water. This is no longer the case. The consultation process brought to light the desire of residents and elected officials to develop access for other types of use. These uses include canoeing, kayaking, paddle boarding, swimming, scuba diving—a popular activity in the Richelieu River—and fishing.

This enthusiasm for outdoor activities reflects a major trend. It goes hand in hand with public concern for environmental protection. In addition to being a navigable waterway, the Richelieu River ranks second in Quebec, after the Ottawa River, when it comes to the number of fish species. It's a rich area for biodiversity.

The consultation process also revealed that, to protect the river, only 30 of its 240 kilometres would require regulations. We would need to protect about 30 kilometres in areas where usage conflicts arise. In some places, this would mean prohibiting certain forms of navigation, limiting speed or maintaining a healthy distance from the shoreline. We could also develop navigation corridors. For example, where necessary, we could have one area reserved for divers and another for swimmers.

In principle, these are simple solutions. As you can see, they don't amount to much. Make a navigation corridor, install buoys, and so on. This would resolve a variety of issues. In practice, the solution is bound to be complicated. The current regulatory process is flawed, complex, outdated and needlessly cumbersome.

Transport Canada's premise is that education will resolve usage conflicts. That isn't true. Conflicts arise because certain uses aren't compatible. We need to set up protected areas for swimmers and areas where paddle boarders won't be knocked over by excessive waves or grazed by motorboats. We need to have the right use in the right place. That's the first premise.

The second premise is that usage conflicts don't arise with people of good will, but with offenders, meaning the people who don't want to listen to reason, who believe that the body of water belongs to them and who don't listen to recommendations.

We can talk about dialogue or education, but we can't educate people who don't want to be educated. Yet Transport Canada's whole approach to education is based on the premise that, if we educate, it will work. When we completed the consultation process concerning the Richelieu River, we found that a consensus emerged in favour of some type of regulations in certain areas. Unfortunately, we'll need to start the education process all over again. We'll do it because we have to. However, it's pointless and it bogs down the decision-making process.

Moreover, the regulations don't provide the flexibility needed to find solutions adapted to the area's support capacity and to community aspirations. The solution lies in striking the right balance among multiple parameters, such as speed, number of boats, type of boat and permitted areas. However, this doesn't take environmental criteria into account at all. It doesn't protect the health of bodies of water.

In an attachment to our brief, which will be sent to the committee, we provided a short literature review outlining the potential impact of unregulated navigation on turbidity, or water clarity, on shoreline erosion and on the destruction of endemic aquatic grass beds.

To put it simply, grass beds are like aquatic grasslands populated with fragile and rare plants. When they are crushed by boat propellers, these plants take a long time to grow back. In some cases, they just don't grow back.

Other witnesses have spoken at length about the problem of wake boats. The science is clear on this. Wake boats produce a water column that is five to seven metres deep. This water column whips up sediment and destroys aquatic life. Waves made by ships that travel less than 300 metres from the shoreline accelerate ero-

sion significantly. We did a simulation, and on the Richelieu River, there are very few places that are less than five metres deep.

We also consulted marina owners, and they were all in favour of regulations that would be reasonable, nuanced and adapted to the realities of the environment. Education alone does not create a sustainable model for co-operation.

We have two recommendations for Transport Canada: deploy national navigation standards in partnership with Environment and Climate Change Canada, and adapt the process to take environmental considerations into account.

Now that we know about the problems caused by wake boats, what are we waiting for to set standards?

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bélanger.

[English]

We will now go to Dr. Rennie.

Dr. Rennie, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Dr. Colin Rennie (Professor, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you to the committee for this opportunity to speak to you today.

At the outset, I want to note that I did speak to this committee a couple of years ago, as some of you may remember, on the topic of the impact of commercial shipping on shoreline erosion. At that time, I summarized a study on the St. Lawrence River that I was conducting. I reviewed the physics of large-ship wake waves in narrow channels, new measurement technologies, nature-based shoreline protection strategies and current research needs. Here, in collaboration with my colleague Professor Jesse Vermaire from Carleton, I'll discuss wakes produced by pleasure craft.

The likelihood of a boat wake contributing to bank erosion depends on the power of the waves; the water surface elevation with respect to the bank; and bank characteristics that determine bank stability, such as bank angle, sediment grain size, cohesion, consolidation, pore pressure and vegetation. It's not only large ships that may induce shoreline erosion; smaller pleasure craft can also generate relatively large waves. Wake boats, as an example, are specifically designed with a deep draft to induce a large wake for recreational purposes, such as water-skiing.

While pleasure craft are generally too small to generate a large primary drawdown wave, which is what I discussed on the St. Lawrence, the subsequent V-shaped Kelvin wake wave can be large enough to erode shoreline bank sediments. This has been documented in some previous studies. For example, as reference, Bauer et al., 2002, estimated erosion rates of between 0.01 millimetres and 0.22 millimetres per boat passage. That's a small amount per passage, but the cumulative effects of thousands of passages could be substantial.

We believe there is a need to identify where zero-wake zones and speed limits are required to reduce shoreline erosion and ecological impacts associated with recreational watercraft use.

Pleasure craft boat wake has been implicated as a possible contributor to shoreline erosion on the Rideau Canal waterway. As part of a larger NSERC-funded study in collaboration with Parks Canada, we've been working on measuring boat wake waves and turbidity associated with various pleasure craft in the Rideau River. We have a study site near Eccolands Park, just south of Ottawa.

The experimental design involves running various individual boats at set speeds and distances back and forth past an eroding river shoreline cutbank. I will focus here on three boat types—an 18-foot bass boat, a 22-foot wake boat and a 29-foot small cruiser, as you would typically see on the Rideau. The boat speeds we used were slow, medium and fast for each type of boat. The distances from shore were 30 metres, 60 metres and 100 metres.

We collected various data with several instruments, but here I'll focus on water level and turbidity collected with an RBRduo instrument at 2 hertz. We placed this instrument six metres from shore to measure the waves and the turbidity. I also took repeat measurements of the bank over a couple of years using a survey-grade GPS to monitor recession of the bank.

As each boat passed and the wake wave train impacted the riverbank, sediments were entrained, resulting in increased turbidity. We processed the water level data to extract what's called the "significant wave height", which is the average of the top one-third of the waves in the wake train. We also processed the turbidity to see how much the increment in turbidity was during that passage of the boat.

We have a number of preliminary observations.

First, wake waves from pleasure craft dissipate as they propagate. Thus, waves impacting the riverbank are larger if generated near the shore than if generated farther from shore. This is even on a small waterway like the Rideau. We could see a difference based on how far away the boat was.

Each boat produced a maximum significant wave height when run at medium speed. This is because at medium speed, the boat is not planing, and thus pushes more water and displaces more water. For the three boats that I'm talking about here, the medium speed was on the order of 20 kilometres per hour.

Maximum significant wave heights produced by the small cruiser and the wake boat were similar, on the order of 15 centimetres. This was larger than those produced by the bass boat, which was on the order five centimetres.

The turbidity increment increased almost linearly with the significant wave height, which suggests that shoreline erosion will be a function of wave height.

Lastly, I did measure a recession of the bank over a year's time. It was 10 centimetres at the bank top and about half a metre at the bank bottom, suggesting that the bank is getting steeper over time.

Thank you.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Rennie, and welcome back. I want to remind you that on your third visit, you become an honorary member of the transport committee.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We will now go to Dr. Vermaire.

Professor, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Dr. Jesse Vermaire (Associate Professor, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me and allowing me to present at this committee.

I'm an associate professor of environmental science and geography at Carleton University. I have expertise in aquatic ecosystems, near-shore environments and how human activities can change near-shore environments.

As stated by my colleague Professor Colin Rennie, we've been collaborating on a research project. Colin discussed the experimental work we've been doing. Today I'll talk about some observational work on boat passes on the Rideau River that we've also just done. This is part of a larger NSERC-funded project.

In the summer of 2023, we carried out observations on boat passes at two sites on the Rideau River. The first was the W.A. Taylor conservation area at 3250 River Road in Ottawa, and the second was at Eccolands Park, again on River Road. Both sites are popular for boating because they have marinas or public boat launches that are available and free to use.

All of our observations on boat passes were made during the day—typically between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.—and in weather considered good for boating. We weren't out when it was a rainy day, for example. That's what these observations were based on.

Our first observation, based on access to information data, was that recreational boating is very popular in Ontario. This is data from during the pandemic. On average, 18,400 new pleasure craft licences have been issued each year in Ontario from 2019 onward.

On the Rideau waterway, as is likely elsewhere, the number of recreational boat passes per hour was very site-specific and depended greatly on the weather and the day of the week—whether it was a weekend or a holiday, for example.

The Rideau system is popular for travelling longer distances. However, with the exception of cabin cruisers, most boats stayed within one section of the river and didn't transit the lock stations. Over 57 hours, we observed 838 boat passes. That's approximately 15 boat passes per hour, on average. Boat passes reached a maximum of 72 per hour during the August civic holiday long weekend. That also coincided with a fishing tournament near the site.

The most common boat types we observed were personal watercraft. Smaller motorboats were 21% of all boat passes, followed by fishing boats, such as small aluminum boats, at 18%. Cabin cruisers and yachts made up 14% of all boat passes. Bowriders and decked boats were 13%, and pontoon boats were 8.5%. Water sport boats as a combined category—water-skiing, wakeboarding or wakesurfing boats—accounted for 13.5% of all boat passes. Wakesurfing boats were fairly rare, accounting for only 2% of all boat passes we observed.

We also noted that no water sport activities were observed in posted no-wake zones on the canal at our sites close to marinas, suggesting that recreational boaters are respecting the posted no-wake zones near marinas.

Similar to the experimental work Colin mentioned, our observational study shows that cabin cruisers and wakesurfing boats produced the greatest wave heights on the Rideau Canal. The purpose of this observational work was to compare experimental work with the real-world situation of how boats are passing through and using the canal.

We're also currently investigating how recreational boating is influencing the underwater soundscape. Because I'm also an ecologist, I'm interested in that. There's very little data on that for fresh water. While we need to collect more data and analyze it, it's very clear that recreational boating is the dominant anthropogenic noise in the underwater soundscape in the Rideau waterway.

Thank you.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Vermaire.

Next we will go to Mr. Thomson.

Mr. Thomson, the floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks, sir.

Mr. Brad Thomson (General Manager, MacDonald Turkey Point Marina Inc.): Thank you.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Brad Thomson. I'm the general manager of MacDonald Turkey Point Marina. I've been in the boating industry for

34 years full time, after eight years of part-time work, starting at age 11.

I'm here today regarding funding cuts to CanBoat's flare disposal program. CanBoat was formerly called the Canadian Power Squadron.

The disposal of expired flares is a very concerning public safety issue. MacDonald Turkey Point Marina alone has sold 438 flares this year, and we currently have over 500 expired flares in our possession. Customers bring these flares into our store or leave them at our door, and we've even found them in and around our garbage containers.

Expired flares are hazardous goods that require special handling and disposal services. Not only are these expired flares a safety risk to our marina staff and the disposal service we use, but they're also an extreme hazard to the environment, including lakes, landfills and wildlife.

Federal regulations require boaters to carry Transport Canada-approved flares on their boats. The flares are valid for four years from the date of manufacture that's indicated on the flares. Considering the number of recreational boats across our country, the result is an extremely large quantity of expiring flares on a regular basis, with no cost-effective or regulated way to dispose of them.

On November 9, 2021, the Transport Canada policy of acceptance of electronic visual distress signals in lieu of pyrotechnic distress signals on pleasure craft came into force. I'm uncertain how many boaters are aware of electronic signals as an alternative to flares, because Transport Canada's "Safe Boating Guide" is dated July 2019, so it's almost five years old. That's over two years before the policy came into effect.

On behalf of the boaters and marine operators of Canada, we would like to see federal funding reinstated to CanBoat for its flare disposal problem and also see Transport Canada update its safe boating guidelines, both online and in print, to advise boaters of the use of alternative electronic signals.

I'm also here today representing MacDonald Turkey Point Marina regarding Transport Canada and the Canadian Navigable Waters Act, which has impacted our rights to control the waterways within the marina.

MacDonald Turkey Point Marina has been under current ownership since January 31, 2005, with the marina itself dating back to the 1950s. It was through the hard work of man and machine in the 1950s that the waterways were dug out to create the marina. MacDonald Turkey Point Marina owns the bed of the waterways within the marina, as indicated in the following quotes taken from a Transport Canada letter dated February 6, 2020:

The letter provides the official position of Transport Canada and supersedes all previous correspondence....

The Government of Canada does not own the bed of the channels that form part of the Turkey Point Marina.

The Canadian Navigable Waters Act applies to the channels within the property known as the Turkey Point Marina.

The Canadian Navigable Waters Act prevents the marina from having any control over its waterway. As a result of the Transport Canada letter, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, in a letter dated March 4, 2024, has taken the following position, as quoted from that letter:

The Ministry is of the opinion that Turkey Point Marina may not restrict the public's right to fish in navigable waters, regardless of the ownership of the bed....

Fishermen impede navigation in our channel rather than promote it. They can be a hindrance and a danger to navigation within our waterways. On any given Saturday or Sunday during the summer, we can have upwards of 1,200 boats within our busy waterways.

We also have an issue with troublesome former customers who have "no trespassing" orders issued against them to stay off the marina property. With right of access to our waterways, they can still disturb our customers.

It's nearly impossible to enforce these orders through local conservation officers and the Ontario Provincial Police due to the waterway access. MacDonald Turkey Point Marina would like Transport Canada to review the marina's control over its waterways.

Our industry is also dealing with the burden of the luxury tax that has cost our industry millions due to reduction in boat sales, job losses and business closures. Also, considering the volume of gas we sell at the marina gas bar, the carbon tax is an additional expense to our customers.

On behalf of all our customers and all those in the industry, we are asking that the government reconsider these taxes.

• (1700)

Thank you for your time and attention to these details.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Thomson. That was five minutes and two seconds. Well done, sir. We very much appreciate that here at committee.

Mr. Gullick, last but not least, sir, I'm turning the floor over to you. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. John Gullick (Manager, Government and Special Programs, Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons): I'll try not to repeat Brad's comments too much about flare disposal, but that's really what I'm here to talk about.

We are requesting that Transport Canada please provide funding for the safety education and flare disposal program to Canadian

Power and Sail Squadrons, which was previously administered through CPS-ECP and is now called CanBoat/NautiSavoir across Canada in both official languages. There is no other Canada-wide program, and there are only a few local disposal options left.

As members of the boating industry, we are keenly aware of how many boaters are carrying both the pyrotechnic distress flares required by Transport Canada regulations as well as older flares that are now expired and potentially dangerous.

Pyrotechnic distress flares require proper disposal. In recent years, many disposal options through municipal waste management and other government agencies, like police and fire departments, have now been discontinued. Many people do not know how to dispose of their expired flares and therefore do so inappropriately.

The Transport Canada-funded Canadian Power and Sail Squadron's CanBoat distress flare collection and disposal program has been very successful. It was national in scope, in both English and French, and has collected over 200,000 of any brand of flare that boaters brought to a CPS-ECP CanBoat flare disposal event. Those events have been taking place since 2000. They were staffed by trained CanBoat volunteers and operated in concert with CIL Orion Explosives, which properly handles the actual disposal and funds 40% of the cost of that disposal.

Funding of these events under the boating safety contribution program was not renewed after 2022. Just FYI, the cost of disposing of an average recreational flare is about \$2.50, and then shipping will add another \$1.00 to \$1.50 to that amount, so you can see how much it actually costs to dispose of these things.

We know that it's dangerous for municipal workers to find these discarded in household garbage. Environmentally, it's very dangerous, as well as illegal, for individuals to fire off flares unless there is a legitimate emergency. You can understand the environmental effect because, these flares, when they start to weep... I mean, what you're talking about is an explosive, plain and simple. We had instances, which have been reported, in which workers actually had flares go off in their hands.

Again, for the sake of the safety of Canadian boaters nationwide, we ask that you please provide the funding to Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons—CanBoat/NautiSavoir—for this unique program. I say this respectfully as John Gullick.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gullick.

We begin our line of questioning today, and for that I turn the floor over to Dr. Lewis.

Dr. Lewis, you have six minutes. The floor is yours.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming here today.

My first question is to Mr. Thomson.

Mr. Thomson, I've been hearing from various operators that they're suffering under increased costs, including utility costs. How much have you seen your utility and fuel costs increase over the past few years?

Mr. Brad Thomson: I'm sorry, but you're breaking up there. I couldn't hear you at all.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Okay. Let me start with another question, then.

How have government regulations, like the carbon tax or the Navigable Waters Act, impacted the marina and boating industries?

Mr. Brad Thomson: For the boating industry, the Canadian Navigable Waters Act directly affects private enterprise. We're a private marina here. It's not like it's the middle of the lake. We try to do our best to control what goes on in here, and sometimes we have people here who do not want to act with respect. There are sometimes 2,000 or 3,000 people in here on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. They come in with a high rate of speed and create a large wake that can damage property, but also they'll stop and fish in the middle of the channel or play their music right around dinner time when people are trying to enjoy dinner with their family.

Unfortunately, at this time, in the way the Canadian Navigable Waters Act is read and the way that some of the other agencies, such as the Ministry of Natural Resources, are interpreting it, these people are allowed to stop and anchor right in our waterway. We don't have an entrance and an exit; we have one entrance, and the exit is the same here at MacDonald Turkey Point Marina, so it makes it very difficult to have any kind of control in our waterway.

It's no different here in Long Point Bay from any of the marshes and hunting clubs along the north shore of Lake Erie. They're all posted as no trespassing, but now everybody can go in there and fish, whereas previously they were capable of keeping folks out.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: You also mentioned the carbon tax. Can you elaborate on how the carbon tax is affecting your business?

Mr. Brad Thomson: The carbon tax affects our business directly because we're a big fuel resale business. Here at the marina, we're finding that people are just are not using their boats as much as they were. When they're coming over to the gas bar, they're not traveling. They're maybe not doing the visits down to Buffalo or up to Windsor or maybe doing part of the Great Loop or going up to the Goderich area. They're staying local. Instead of coming to the fuel dock every Saturday or Sunday afternoon, we're seeing them come once a month now, and they're only going up the beach and anchoring.

The biggest complaint is the cost, the cost of fuel and taxes and whatnot. The carbon tax is a big thing. A lot of people are really keeping their money tight to their jeans. They're not willing to spend it and they're not going very far from home, and that affects tourism all up and down the lake.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Okay, thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Gullick.

With respect to the flares that you spoke about, how have the changes to the regulations over the years affected how expired flares are disposed of?

Mr. John Gullick: Essentially, all of the options, or pretty well all of the options, have been removed over the years. We've been required to carry flares on most vessels for as long as I can remember, and that goes back something like 50 years.

You have to carry six flares, and they're good for a four-year period. Then you have to get another six flares, and then another six flares. You'll get rid of them over time. The problem is that those options that were available to boaters—for the most part being able to drop them off at fire stations and police stations and so forth, and I'm not sure about the municipal special stuff—have all been removed, so there are no options.

• (1710)

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Have you ever had a time where government was more active in assisting boaters to dispose of these expired flares, which could be an environmental and health hazard?

Mr. John Gullick: The government has never been active in assisting boaters in disposing of their outdated flares, to my knowledge.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Have the regulations changed recently? What has changed so that this has become such a big problem?

Mr. John Gullick: What's changed is that there aren't any options, or very few options, available to get rid of your expired flares—

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Then what are people doing with them?

Mr. John Gullick: —without doing it illegally.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: What are people doing with them, then?

Mr. John Gullick: They go overboard, or they're putting them in waste disposal and they end up in landfill, which is not allowed. They're firing them off, which is not allowed, or they're leaving them, as Brad has said, on the doorsteps of chandleries and marinas.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: What's the problem with that?

Mr. John Gullick: In terms of where they leave them, then how do those places get rid of them?

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Is there a danger to it?

Mr. John Gullick: Yes. We're talking about explosives here. When they start to weep.... Quite literally, in the last few years, I've had two instances when I've had to call the OPP and ask them to send the bomb squad to a boater's residence to deal with flares that were starting to weep.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Lewis, and thank you very much, Mr. Gullick.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for agreeing to testify. They are sharing a lot of new information with us, and it is very enlightening.

I'll start with our friends from Quebec.

Mr. Bélanger, you told us about the Richelieu River and the municipalities you represent.

I'd like you, first of all, to tell us about the collaboration you and your organization have established with the municipalities and what your conclusions are based on.

Mr. André Bélanger: This is a major collaborative approach. Municipalities trust us because we stand up for the river. Our goal is really to protect the river.

We also monitor water quality, for example in the case of the enclosed swimming area in Belœil.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: That's fine, thank you.

You told us that 70% of boaters were asking for changes.

Can you elaborate on that?

Mr. André Bélanger: In fact, we mapped out access to the river, because elected officials wanted to develop access for types of boats other than pleasure craft.

What we have seen—and it was actually a nice surprise—is the significant interest, even for marinas, in participating in a collaborative approach that would involve access for other users rather than just motorboat enthusiasts.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Okay.

We're talking about canoeing, kayaking and other activities, such as scuba diving.

You piqued my curiosity when you said that implementing your recommendations would be complicated.

Have you and the municipalities started the process provided under the Canada Shipping Act to come up with a regulatory framework?

Mr. André Bélanger: We did take part in the implementation of regulations in the Saint-Marc-sur-Richelieu and Saint-Charles-sur-Richelieu region, but it was at the end of the process.

In that specific instance, the process was completed, but there was opposition from some user groups, which led to a situation where everything could have collapsed and failed.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Actually, I wanted to talk to you about the opposition that has emerged. Do you ever worry about private clubs being set up in those municipalities? These clubs would use

the law to impose limited access on users, resulting in user costs. Overnight, everyone would become great protectors of the river without having any real knowledge of what is at stake.

The conditions imposed by these clubs can give rise to exorbitant costs. I'm thinking in particular of the obligation to wash boats, both inside and outside, before accessing the body of water. I don't want to minimize the effects of not washing a boat; that's not my intention.

However, some clubs charge as much as \$450 for launching a small boat. This has a negative impact on tourism.

Could you tell us more about that?

Mr. André Bélanger: We're moving away a bit, though, from the federal government's responsibility. The respective responsibilities of the federal and provincial governments could become complementary when it comes to allowing municipalities to regulate the type of boats on the water. The aim would be to prevent the emergence of these private clubs.

Part of the responsibility here lies with the Quebec government. This is the question of access. However, the complexity involved in setting up regulations prevents municipalities from intervening with the diligence and flexibility required to reconcile the protection of the water body with what we would call the capacity for social support. What do groups dedicated to environmental protection wish to see?

We mustn't forget that, when we talk about bodies of water, we have to take into account both riparians and municipalities. The latter represent all citizens.

In some cases, privatization may indeed take place.

• (1715)

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger. We'll come back to that later, if we can. You've opened doors to other interesting topics.

Mr. Rennie, thank you for your presentation. It's always a pleasure to welcome university representatives, because academics base their views on science and evidence. You mentioned something very new today. We've never heard of it.

Criteria were mentioned, such as the 30 kilometre-per-hour speed limit and the requirement to stay no closer than 300 metres from shore. We also talked about the waves caused by boats with strong wakes and big boats.

From your side, you talked about the harmful effects that the accumulation of small waves on a large scale can have. This is a new argument for us.

Can you tell us more about it? How are small waves measured, and why did you conclude that their accumulation could cause environmental damage?

[*English*]

Dr. Colin Rennie: Thank you.

Just to clarify, we did measure boat wake waves from pleasure craft, including wake boats and the cruiser, that were up to 15 centimetres. I wouldn't necessarily classify those as small waves. When they hit the bank, you could see that they stir up the sediments quite a lot.

If you tried to measure the bank recession from one of those waves, it would not be measurable; it's too small. You do have to see it over a period of time, which is why I surveyed the bank both this year and last year, and we'll do it again next year. In fact, we've looked at satellite imagery. We've seen that it's been receding over a couple of decades at about the same rate.

Does that help?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Yes, that does help. Thanks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Vermaire, you gave us some statistics, including the growing number of boats in the marine industry. You said that 18,400 new boating licenses had been issued. Since each license is linked to a boat, that's a lot of boats.

You told us about an increase in boats, but since when has this considerable increase been evident?

[*English*]

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: Thanks for the question.

That was sort of during the COVID lockdown period, basically from 2019 and onward. We didn't have data from before that. We're working on compiling that as well.

There's this perception that the number of recreational boats increased during COVID as people....

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here today.

I will now turn to the representatives of the Fondation Rivières.

This is our third meeting on this study. We've had the opportunity to discuss the regulatory process on several occasions. Many people have told us that large-wake boats, in particular, are a major source of irritation. However, I'd like to raise another point.

In Quebec, trucks are not allowed on all roads, nor are scooters, whether municipal roads or highways. Drivers also know that school zone regulations and speed limits must be respected. So there are rules in place. This is not the case for boaters on a river or lake. There are no rules, unless you take steps locally.

Does this situation seem normal to you?

What would be the solution to remedy this shortcoming?

Mr. André Bélanger: We could put signage in place, for example. In addition, municipalities have the power to create reserved

lanes for certain types of boats. In fact, this should be recommended by default. It's important that the right boat sails in the right place. That's important.

Excuse me, but I've lost the thread a bit.

Could you rephrase the question?

• (1720)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Should there be a national regulatory framework?

I think you mentioned this in your opening remarks.

What should this framework be based on, and how should it be established?

Mr. André Bélanger: Let's take paddleboarding as an example. It's important to note that paddleboarding is the equivalent of BIXI biking on rivers and lakes. It's an extremely accessible activity, and it's becoming increasingly widespread. Regulations must set limits on boating speed, indeed, but they must also define separate reserved areas for swimmers, for low-wake craft, and for large motor-boats.

This type of regulation exists on public roads, but not on bodies of water. People have the impression that a body of water is not a public highway. So they think it's every man for himself and that the water belongs to everyone.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: If we were ever to establish a national regulatory framework, we'd have to keep in mind the notion of cohabitation and take into account the various uses. There should be places where certain uses are not allowed, for example.

There are about 10,000 lakes in Quebec, and I don't know how many rivers. If we had to regulate all the lakes and rivers individually, it would take hundreds of years.

Should there be some sort of basic regulation to build on, without the need to post regulations everywhere?

Mr. André Bélanger: Imagine the opposite. Right now, the burden of proof is on the applicant. You have to show that there was no awareness among users and that water bodies should therefore be regulated.

If, on the contrary, we allowed some form of temporary regulation, measuring its impact on both the population and the water bodies, and regularly reviewed this regulation, we could have a national standard.

This could make it easier to implement regulations and validate them quickly. The burden of proof would then be on demonstrating that these regulations are not appropriate, rather than demonstrating the opposite, i.e., that regulations are needed, which is currently the case.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: This leads me to ask you a question I've already asked another witness. What could be considered a reasonable timeframe for the implementation of a regulation, from the moment a local will is expressed and the moment a process is set in motion?

Witnesses told the committee that it would take three or four years, from start to finish, for a regulation to be put in place. Personally, I've seen a case where the process took seven years.

I'd like your opinion on that.

Mr. André Bélanger: We need a maximum of two years. As we know, elections are held every four years, and it takes two years to reach a consensus with elected representatives and officials. It will take another two years for regulations to be put in place.

If there's a change in elected officials following an election, we've at least won a regulation. Consequently, a two-year period seems perfectly reasonable to me. We need a first year to test the mechanisms and a second to implement them a little more formally.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: You raised the notion of effectiveness as regards three aspects, namely the social aspect, the aspect related to the environment and biodiversity, and the aspect affecting safety.

Do these three aspects come together at some point?

Mr. André Bélanger: Currently, the Boating Safety Guide covers issues related to user safety. In terms of environmental capacity, there is a challenge, as Mr. Rennie demonstrated earlier. As for social capacity, this is the community's ability to accept nuisances or to accept interactions between the type of craft and the type of use.

On the Bonaventure River, for example, fishers don't have the same perception of the water as canoeists. So we have to find a balance, and that's what we mean by cohabitation. This is measured by surveys and satisfaction assessments. When we do this type of exercise, we're able to grasp the population's receptiveness to the regulations.

• (1725)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: So the notion of cohabitation should be added to the process, as it is not currently taken into account.

Mr. André Bélanger: Yes, it should be added.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

It's 5:25 p.m. Mr. Bélanger and Ms. Massey-Cantin, I know you have to leave. On behalf of all the members of the committee, I'd like to thank you for joining us, and wish you a pleasant evening.

[*English*]

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have six minutes, sir.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): There we go, Mr. Chair. I guess the witnesses I wanted to ask questions to have to leave, so that's unfortunate.

Which witnesses do we still have with us? I see Mr. Thomson and Mr. Gullick on Zoom.

The Chair: You have Dr. Vermaire and Dr. Rennie. The two professors are here with us, sir.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That's fantastic.

Thank you to the IT folks for the view of the room there.

Thanks to all of our witnesses for joining us for this study. It's a really interesting one.

I was remarking at one of our last meetings about how different the context is across Canada. We're talking about recreational boating and its impact on aquatic environments, and a lot of that seems to be a result of high density of use. There are many parts of northern Canada where the density of use by recreational boaters is exceptionally low, so I would assume that the impacts are consequently low as well.

Listening to Dr. Rennie's and Dr. Vermaire's testimonies, it sounds like there's really a proven link between intensive use by pleasure craft and these impacts on shorelines and on the aquatic environment.

In your view, is the extent of the impacts worth a concerted federal approach to regulating recreational boating to minimize those impacts?

Dr. Colin Rennie: As an academic, I'm always much better at the science and the engineering than the policy. I think that's more in your purview.

From what I've seen, I think the general understanding is that boat wake can impact shorelines, both in terms of bank erosion and impact on species. For example, Professor Vermaire has been looking at the impact on nests of shoreline birds. If there were a policy that tried to minimize those impacts, I certainly would support it.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Are the findings that you've come up with in your research fairly consistent with what you see across the academic literature, or are there varying findings from the research community when it comes to the impact on aquatic environments?

Dr. Colin Rennie: I think I can say that what we've seen is consistent with previous literature, yes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Dr. Vermaire, do you want to add your thoughts on that?

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: I agree that it's consistent across the literature, but a lot of factors go into the impact. A lot of that has to do with shoreline habitat as well. If the shoreline has its natural vegetation there, including aquatic plants, the impact tends to be less, because the vegetation reduces wave energy.

In terms of regulating boats for shoreline erosion, I think it's also important to think about the shoreline itself and what that looks like in terms of its vegetation and also its slope and topography and things like that.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: This committee study builds on a previous study that was proposed by my colleague, Mr. Barsalou-Duval, which looked at shoreline erosion on the St. Lawrence River.

Looking at other jurisdictions around the world that have experienced this kind of erosion and have connected it to recreational boating, are there some jurisdictions that you feel are managing those effects in a more proactive or a more progressive way than Canada is currently?

Dr. Colin Rennie: I can't say that I have an answer to that question. That's a very good question that's worth pursuing.

Last time, I did an extended brief after the meeting, based on questions that emerged, and I sent that back to the committee. It might be worth taking look at that.

• (1730)

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: I'd agree with that. I don't know off the top of my head either.

I do know that there are maybe not jurisdictions, but other academics looking at different options for where you need to harden shorelines. Natural shorelines are always the best option in conserving that vegetation, but in instances where shoreline hardening needs to be done to stop erosion, people are studying different methods that can still provide shoreline stability but increase the biodiversity around it, as opposed to just riprap or a plain concrete wall.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you.

I'll turn now to Mr. Thomson and Mr. Gullick.

Both of you gentlemen mentioned the flare program and your concerns about that. I'm wondering how the government could best finance any programs around collecting and disposing of flares from recreational boaters. It seems to me that an obvious approach would be to add a deposit so that there's some incentive for boaters to return them properly and have them disposed of properly or to incentivize someone else to pick them up from the beach or from the garbage and dispose of them properly.

Has there ever been a discussion about a deposit program similar to one we have for soft drink containers?

Mr. John Gullick: Not that I'm aware of.

That's part of the problem, because there is no way of funding the collection and disposal of flares as you have suggested doing through having a deposit or whatever.

There's also the cost to the marinas and the chandleries. They have to have bunkers to store these flares while they're waiting to ship them off to one of the manufacturers for disposal. There's a cost there as well. It's very difficult to get people to even think about that, let alone really do something about it.

We introduced this program in 2014—by “we”, I mean Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons, CanBoat—because there was a growing need to be able to dispose of these flares. We got funding for that program over eight years from the boating safety contribution program, but that funding stopped last year. Even though we applied, we were not accepted.

My understanding is that this year we reapplied for next year and the two years following, and that the program had been put on hold—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gullick.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

We have Mr. Lawrence next.

Mr. Lawrence, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The majority of my questions will be for Mr. Gullick and Mr. Thomson.

I'll start with you, Mr. Thomson.

We've heard a lot of talk about the luxury tax, but actually, in a lot of our testimony, it should really be renamed the “union workers and small business tax”. It's had a tremendous impact on the workers who construct these boats and a tremendous impact on those individuals who are involved in the tourist industry.

Would you agree with my analysis and, quite frankly, with the testimony of other witnesses?

Mr. Brad Thomson: Yes, I would agree with that.

It hasn't affected the rich, as far as we can see. The main concern here is that it affected the middle class, the workingman of Canada, the working men and ladies. Some of the pontoon boats we're seeing now are over \$250,000. Basically, that's just a recreational Saturday or Sunday afternoon boat. It's not something that they're going to take on a two-week vacation cruise.

For these folks who were selling the boats at the dealerships and renting the docks—like me—at the marinas, right down to the grass cutters and the boat detailers, there have been jobs lost and businesses closed, and sales of larger yachts have been going down south. It has been a burden on the industry. I just hope that there is some sort of resolution and that everybody can chime in here and something can be done to help everyone out. Let's get things rolling and moving in a positive way. Let's get the economy going. Let's sell some boats. Let's keep some people employed.

• (1735)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you.

I'll move on from there to discuss the carbon tax. We've also had testimony that it's impacting local economies and hurting small business owners and leading sometimes to the layoff of unionized workers, which has created a significant challenge.

The theory behind the carbon tax goes something like this. It's supposed to increase the cost of fuels—that's what it does—so that people are encouraged to buy alternatives. Are there currently economically viable alternatives to utilizing fossil fuels in the recreational boating industry?

Mr. Brad Thomson: No, there aren't, not at this time, not for recreational boating.

Obviously, a sailboat is wind-powered, primarily, but at this time we don't have nearly the infrastructure for the electric boats that are coming on board. We just simply do not have the hydro infrastructure for the charging mechanisms.

At this point, and where we are at, especially here in Turkey Point, there is no way. There is nothing. Fuel is the mainstay right now.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you.

I want to go on to the current flare issue, which, it sounds to me, is a problem largely created by the federal government. It mandates these flares. I think you said you need six. They last for five years. They need to be on every boat.

While the government is saying that yes, you have to have these flares, they're not giving any solution to what to do with them after five years. Am I correct there, Mr. Thomson?

Mr. Brad Thomson: Yes, you're correct.

In the past—and John can back this up—the Canadian Power Squadron would have the Tillsonburg Power Squadron and the Port Dover Power Squadron here, and they would have events here on multiple weekends throughout the summer. People could come and get information on the courses they could register for, and they could also drop off their expired flares here at the marina.

Actually, all our other marinas in the area would advertise this event. They also would have their customers bring their expired flares to our location or to another marina up the lake. We all worked together on that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Thomson.

Mr. Gullick, would you also agree with my synopsis that this is a problem created by a mandate that the federal government is putting in place, but that it's then leaving boat owners in the lurch by not giving them any alternatives for flare disposal?

Mr. John Gullick: I would say yes. The mandate is there. They have introduced a way of reducing the number of flares that you have to carry, and Brad has talked about that, but even if you have electronic flares or a VHF or a cellphone with cell service, you still have to carry a certain number of flares, and they're only good for four years.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Just quickly, because my time is running short here, I don't quite understand the necessity to have flares if you're in an area with cell service. Simply having a cellphone, I think, would solve the problem, would it not?

Mr. John Gullick: It doesn't appear to have. They've reduced the number required by half if you have a VHF or a cellphone, but they haven't reduced the number entirely.

Your cellphone won't work at the Long Point lighthouse, just for your information.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's my time. Is that right, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: That is your time.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, from one chair to another.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm always looking forward to giving you more time, however, Mr. Lawrence.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gullick, I have a few questions for you.

You've said a few times that the Canadian government should do more, especially after imposing this luxury tax. If you were to buy a boat, I guess you would understand that there's money to be disbursed. On average, anybody who buys something....

If I were to buy a Ferrari and I was planning to take it out, after a year I would have to do an oil change or I would have to change the brakes, and I wouldn't expect to pay 50 bucks or 100 bucks to get an oil change; I would expect to pay close to thousands. It's expected of me to understand that if I have a luxury item, I need to have a luxury life and money that I am able to spend. Do you agree with me?

Mr. John Gullick: I will leave this to Brad. I'm just dealing with flares. I'm not dealing with the luxury tax.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: You talked about the luxury tax before, so I'm coming back to you, because you said when you responded to my colleague across the way that the Government of Canada imposed this luxury tax. I'm going to say—

Mr. John Gullick: I'm sorry, but I did not mention the luxury tax. That came from Brad. It's not in my statement.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I'm sorry about that. Who mentioned it? Was it Mr. Thomson?

Mr. Thomson, can you reply to that? It's the same question I asked Mr. Gullick. What do you have to say about that?

● (1740)

Mr. Brad Thomson: Do you mean about the luxury tax?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Yes.

Mr. Brad Thomson: It's definitely a cost, obviously. Everybody knows their expenses. It doesn't matter if you have a—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Do you want the federal government to pay up for a luxury item that a Canadian wants to get?

I'm going to ask you a question. Do you believe that the Government of Canada should not support the one million Canadians who have access to the dental program and should support more people in buying boats because of the—

Mr. Brad Thomson: What the industry is saying—and Rick Layzell mentioned it in his testimony, I believe, last week—is that a lot of the sales are being lost because a lot of the boats are being purchased south of the border.

I can't speak to your reference about dental care and all that. That's not my business.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I'm just highlighting it because you're saying that the federal government doesn't do enough. If I go according to your—

Mr. Brad Thomson: The federal government has cost businesses the sales of vessels over the \$250,000 mark. It has prevented ongoing work. Businesses have closed their doors because of this. That's what we were mentioning. That's what Mr. Layzell from Boating Ontario Association mentioned last week.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: If I'm spending \$250,000 on a vessel, then I think I should be ready to absorb other costs, other supplemental costs. It's like buying a house, practically. It's close to buying a house, I would say. It's only normal that there are going to be extra costs.

You're continuously saying that the federal government is not doing enough, but I think it's a bit stretched—

Mr. Brad Thomson: When you buy house, you don't pay 10%.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, I'll leave the rest of my time to my colleague Stéphane Lauzon.

[Translation]

The Chair: That's fine.

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you very much.

Mr. Thomson, you are the manager of a private marina.

Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Brad Thomson: I'm sorry. It's not being translated.

[Translation]

The Chair: We'll check it out.

It seems to be working now.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: All right.

Mr. Thomson, you manage a private marina. How many slips are there in your...

[English]

Mr. Brad Thomson: It's still not being translated.

The Chair: We're going to suspend for just one minute to make sure that translation is functioning properly.

• (1740)

(Pause)

• (1740)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

It goes to show how important the work is that our interpreters do every single day, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them.

[Translation]

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I'd also like to thank the interpreters.

Mr. Thomson, you mentioned that you manage a private marina. How many slips are there in your marina?

[English]

Mr. Brad Thomson: We have 750 slips and we have 127 year-round cottages on our waterway. We have a four-pad boat ramp, so on a nice Saturday or Sunday afternoon, there could be up to 1,200 boats using our waterways. We're on approximately 83 acres.

• (1745)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: How many slips were not rented this summer?

[English]

Mr. Brad Thomson: We were, I believe, 92% occupied this summer.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: When I got a grade of 90% in school, I considered it a good grade.

On what basis do you say there's a drop in clientele? Do boat owners come and talk to you about the fact that they're going to put less fuel in their boats because of the gas tax? Do people really talk to you about that?

[English]

Mr. Brad Thomson: Yes, the biggest complaint my staff and I get is the cost of fuel.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: You're talking about middle-class Canadians who earn \$90,000 a year, buy a boat worth over \$250,000 and have to pay the luxury tax applicable to that asset.

How much does it cost to fill up with gas at your marina for a boat worth, say, \$250,000 or \$300,000?

[English]

Mr. Brad Thomson: It all depends. If it's a pontoon boat, it could be \$250. If it's an offshore fishing boat, it could be more than \$500.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: So it costs \$250 to fill up the tank.

If you take into account the tax applicable in relation to carbon pricing, which is 5%, do you think that has any impact? Do you think families will decide not to go boating for a week because of this?

Are you sure you want this to be mentioned in the report?

[English]

Mr. Brad Thomson: The customers have spoken many times—

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I'm sorry, but my time is up. I'm running out of time to get your answer.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rennie, thank you for being with us again at the committee. I very much enjoyed the testimony you gave at your last appearance.

As I understand it, you conducted tests on the Rideau River, in the Ottawa area.

You mentioned that high-wake boats and pleasure cruisers would be the two main types of craft that would cause the biggest waves.

How can you compare waves produced by a small boat to those produced by a boat with a strong wake or a pleasure cruiser? What would a ratio of 1:10 or 1:100 mean?

What data are quantified? Have you done this exercise?

[English]

Dr. Colin Rennie: We saw that the waves from the wake boat and the cruiser were similar in magnitude, at 15 centimetres or so, for the significant wave height. The bass boat was about a third of that, at five centimetres.

We also measured the increase in turbidity for every wave that passed. We found there was nearly a linear increase. It was actually slightly more than linear. The exponent was 1.1. This means that even if the boat has a smaller wave, we have an understanding of how much sediment it kicks up. We could do a cumulative estimate of the impact of those smaller waves, as well as an assessment of the cumulative impact of the larger waves.

That's a bit of an empirical exercise. What we prefer to do—which is what we're going to do—is make a numerical model with the data we have, calibrate the model with that data and then apply it to different boat types. We'll be able to have a better estimate of the impact of each type of boat.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: You mentioned the increase in turbidity in bodies of water, which is linked to the passage of a boat. Does the cumulative effect of waves, for example, represent a linear relationship or one that can be exponential?

Can you give us an idea of the curve that might represent this relationship?

[English]

Dr. Colin Rennie: I didn't get that. Did you ask how I know the turbidity related to the boat type? What's the key to the question?

[Translation]

Could you repeat the question, please?

[English]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: How would you qualify the curve, the cumulative...?

Dr. Colin Rennie: Let me say it's almost linear, but it's a slightly increasing fit. In other words, as the waves get bigger, the turbidity increases are even larger, to some extent.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Thank you, Dr. Rennie.

Next we have Mr. Bachrach. The floor is yours for two and a half minutes, sir.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll pick up where I left off in talking about the flares, because it seems like the kind of problem that should be easily solvable.

Here you have a product that you don't want to see ending up in trash cans or on the beach at marinas. What we need is some leadership, and we need some sort of program to ensure that these are disposed of properly. When you buy tires, you pay an eco fee on top of the cost of the tires, which allows you to take those tires back to registered facilities, which are compensated for the task of collecting those tires and disposing of them properly.

To both of our witnesses who spoke on this topic, would you support moving toward such a system, which would require regulation but wouldn't necessarily require a subsidy through taxation of the non-boating public? It could be financed by the users of the products.

Is that something you'd support?

• (1750)

Mr. John Gullick: I would say yes. It's something that we've talked about at the Standing Committee on Recreational Boating at Transport Canada for a number of years, but I think an intervention by the government is required to make that happen.

However, in the meantime, we've still got this program, and even if you were to introduce a fee that goes along with the flares that are sold today, what about the flares that have been sold over the last 50 years? We've been collecting flares that quite literally have come from the World War II era, and there's no fund to pay for those.

If you're going to do something, I would applaud, but I think that while the introduction of a service fee comes into place, there needs to be a balance against an effort like ours, which will actually collect any flares from any boater coast to coast to coast, regardless of their age and type.

Mr. Brad Thomson: I support the power squadron's ideas from the past as well, because right now I really do not have a safe place to store any more of these flares, and we find them weekly now that we're in our off-season. It just becomes a danger and a hindrance. I keep them away from my staff, but it is a very dangerous situation that we're in here.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Mr. Muys. Mr. Muys, the floor is yours for five minutes, sir.

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Thomson, Turkey Point Marina is actually only about 45 minutes from my house. It's a beautiful part of Ontario, and I've had the pleasure of being in that area many times over the years as a young kid and also more recently.

You mentioned that you have up to 1,200 boats in and around your marina at the summer peak. It struck me, because some witnesses at this committee last week indicated that on a lake that has a surface area of about 102 square kilometres, the maximum number of boats that should be allowable is 31.

I wanted to run that by you and see what you thought about that. Does that make any sense at all?

Mr. Brad Thomson: We handle and we store boats, so on any given evening, there are approximately 750 boats in the marina. That's how many docks we have that are able to house boats. Then there are 127 cottages that also have slips at their properties that can use our channels to access Lake Erie, and we have the boat ramp, so yes, on any given Saturday, on a nice day we'll have 1,200 boats.

I'm not sure.... I don't know anything about that study, sir. Thanks for the question, but we can certainly handle our boats. Mind you, they're respecting waterways and traversing the channel slowly.

Mr. Dan Muys: I was just trying to draw the comparison that obviously, at that rate, it was 3.3 square kilometres per boat. If you were to extrapolate that based on your volume of boats, you'd cover a quarter of Lake Erie, so that makes no logical sense.

You mentioned that over the last.... Let's maybe look at the last three seasons or three years, so 2022, 2023 and 2024. Do you have any specifics on the data or the number of boats or traffic or days of use that you've had, to draw that visual as to the curve of use?

Mr. Brad Thomson: The curve of use in our area, basically, is June, July and August. Once we hit Labour Day, it drops. We were very busy during the COVID years. Coming out of the COVID years, it did slow down a little bit, but those summer months are our busy curve.

• (1755)

Mr. Dan Muys: You indicated some of the costs associated with boating that are impinging upon use. Are you seeing, in 2024 and in this past summer versus previous summers, maybe less time on the water or less use? What are you seeing as the impact?

Mr. Brad Thomson: We're definitely seeing less use in terms of distance travelled. Absolutely, that is a fact for boaters out of our marina. They're not going as far. They're not taking the trips to Erie in Pennsylvania, or Windsor or Buffalo or Leamington or Fort Erie. They're staying local and—

Mr. Dan Muys: Why is that?

What are the factors that are contributing to that?

Mr. Brad Thomson: It's basically cost. Our boaters are struggling right now, and the price of fuel.... Also, just as with everything else, it doesn't matter if you have a car or whatever: You have insurance costs. The cost of recreational boating has gone up. The fuel costs have gone up. The cost of purchasing boats has gone up. It has affected them, and they're just not going as far.

Mr. Dan Muys: Among those costs, I think you've indicated the carbon tax and the luxury tax. There have been many other cost factors. Is that correct?

Mr. Brad Thomson: Yes, that's correct. The carbon tax is probably the biggest one that we hear on a weekly basis when the people pull up to the pumps. To be honest with you, they do complain about the price of fuel.

Mr. Dan Muys: Thank you.

To recap, obviously the carbon tax and the price of fuel are having an impact on the length of trip, on the boating industry and on the volume of business that you're seeing at your marina. We know that we can extrapolate that to other boating areas of Ontario and in the country.

I thank you for your testimony, Mr. Thomson. On behalf of the committee, I just want to apologize for the disrespectful way in which you were treated by some of the members of this committee in the last line of questioning.

Mr. Brad Thomson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Muys.

Next, we'll go to Mr. Badawey.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to direct my questions to Mr. Thomson.

Mr. Thomson, first of all, I want to say thank you and congratulations. I know how your marina operates. Greetings from down at Sugarloaf Marina harbour down in Port Colborne. A lot of people are coming along Lake Erie because of people like you and the operation you have, as well as the other operations along the north shore of Lake Erie. Thank you for that.

My questioning is going to go more toward Mr. Thomson and what we can do for you. Of course, “we” means the federal government, but also in partnership with the province and the municipal government. I'm also the co-chair of the Great Lakes task force, so a few of my questions are going to be relative to the environment, which I'm going to start off with.

On the environmental footprint, the environmental impact that you have on the lake, does the marina take any measures to protect Lake Erie's water quality? Are there any green initiatives planned for the marina?

Finally, with respect to the environmental aspect, is there any marine life protection as it relates to the wildlife and fish habitats in your specific area?

Mr. Brad Thomson: There are, absolutely.

Actually, MacDonald Turkey Point Marina is an elite “clean marine” member in good standing of Boating Ontario. We are always cleaning our waterways and picking up debris. We always get a lot of floating debris and whatnot, as well as garbage—believe it or not—from the land that ends up in our waterways through storm drains and whatnot in the area. We do have a big initiative.

We also work very closely with the Erie Bassmasters. We're always doing shoreline cleanups. Also, all of our tournament events here are involved with the Long Point Bay Anglers' Association. They're all catch-and-release bass tournaments. I believe there are eight or nine now out of our marina.

It's in our best interest to take care of nature and take care of these fish and wildlife in our area. People come to see and respect that, and we have to do our part to respect it as well.

Mr. Vance Badawey: That's great. Well done.

My second part of questioning, Mr. Thomson, is with respect to the operational and infrastructure capacity that you may require within your operation.

I see that your capacity right now at the marina is about 750 slips. You have a few that are covered and a few that aren't. It's a full service marina. Once again, congratulations on that. I don't know how much work that is. Having been the mayor of a community that has a marina in Port Colborne, I can appreciate the work that you and your team have to do to keep that up.

Both during peak season and off-peak season, are you looking at expanding your facility in any way?

• (1800)

Mr. Brad Thomson: We're not looking to expand it right now. We do have room—

Mr. Vance Badawey: Or improve?

Mr. Brad Thomson: We're always improving the marina, whether it be the roadways or the shorelines.

Right now, a big thing for us is just maintenance of the status quo. We went through several years, as you would know, with high water. That was a burden, especially on our shorelines. We fought through getting permits and everything.

We're on the rebound here now. It is heavily on maintenance. That's the biggest game right now that we're looking for.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Okay.

Is the funding that you have coming in all basically on you with the operational capital side? Do you have any participation from your municipal government or any other partners?

Mr. Brad Thomson: We are on our own. It's all money that we collect from our tenants and customers. We have no federal or municipal funding in any way.

Mr. Vance Badawey: There's nothing. Okay.

You're seasonal, and unfortunately, we have the cold months, and of course there's the off-season. With that, are there any other planned infrastructure improvements that you're looking at in the future, especially when it comes to your capital? Of course, sometimes your capital offsets your operational side if you're financing any debt. Is there anything planned? That's question one.

As question two, what wouldn't be covered under your current base of revenue that you collect during your peak season and during your off-season with storage and things like that? What would be your ratio and difference in terms of the revenue that you need?

Mr. Brad Thomson: We need a lot of revenue. As I was mentioning earlier when I had a question about the electric vehicles coming, we don't have proper hydro service. As a matter of fact, to my knowledge, the Turkey Point area itself does not have the infrastructure, so we would have to fund that on our own at this point, and unfortunately that is not an option for the marina.

Moving forward, as I say, we're just going to maintain the status quo right now until infrastructure can be upgraded in our area.

Mr. Vance Badawey: My final question is for you, Mr. Thomson, and it's a recommendation to you.

One of the reasons we put in place, for example, the luxury tax, the carbon tax and things like that is that we reinvest those dollars into different services, whether they be offsetting property taxes, water bills from the infrastructure side or other services both municipal and personal, but I don't want to get into that.

What I'm most interested in is where some of that help can be placed on you as a marine operation—or anybody, for that matter—so that some of those dollars can be contributing to you as well as municipalities and Canadians.

I'll ask that you pass that on to us. That would be wonderful.

Mr. Brad Thomson: We can always use that money for maintenance dredging to make our canals deeper. Drinking water is also a big issue here. I make the drinking water right now, so there's hydro, channel access and deeper water, and drinking water.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Thomson. That was a great job.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Badawey.

Next we have Mr. Vis.

Mr. Vis, the floor is yours for five minutes, sir.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Chair. It's nice to see you today.

To Brad, for the middle class and those working hard to join it, just to clarify, do they enjoy paying the carbon tax at your marina?

Mr. Brad Thomson: No, they do not.

Mr. Brad Vis: I just need to hear that one more time. For the middle class and those working hard to join it, do they appreciate paying the carbon tax at your marina?

Mr. Brad Thomson: No, they do not.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Rennie, I was intrigued by your previous research in British Columbia on scour in salmon spawning habitat. I represent the majority of the Fraser River in British Columbia, and nowhere else in Canada have we experienced natural disasters in recent times. Part of that we can attribute to climate change, but part of that we can also attribute to the federal government draining an ancient lake that was fished and lived on by the Stó:lō people, and that's Sumas Lake. Are you familiar with Sumas Lake?

• (1805)

Dr. Colin Rennie: I'm familiar with Sumas Lake, yes.

Mr. Brad Vis: Have you conducted any research on the major natural disasters, or are you aware of any of the studies on the impact that recreational boats have had on the salmon habitat after the flooding?

Dr. Colin Rennie: I can say no. With regard to recreational boating and salmon habitat and the Fraser River post-flood, no, I have not been out there since the flood.

I have ongoing collaboration with professors at SFU and UBC—Jeremy Venditti and Michael Church—and we have studied things like sediment transport on the Fraser for many years, but I have not done a post-flood study in that region.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay.

Mr. Vermaire, have you?

Dr. Colin Rennie: If had the opportunity, I would.

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: I haven't either, no.

Mr. Brad Vis: That's too bad.

We deal with a lot of interesting dynamics between the recreational fishery, the indigenous fishery and the commercial fishery, and the lack of infrastructure that our communities received. All these big factors are at play on the Fraser River now, and unfortunately we haven't received any infrastructure money to protect our waterways post flood, especially our critical salmon habitats, but I guess that will have to wait for another time.

I have one final question for you as we wrap up.

Those in the middle class and those working hard to join it, as we heard earlier, are very concerned about the carbon tax. Has the carbon tax impacted the number of boats on the Ottawa River and soil turbidity?

Dr. Colin Rennie: I wouldn't know whether the carbon tax has impacted boating on the Ottawa or the Rideau.

Jessie, do you have any idea?

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: I have no data on that. We don't know.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay.

Since 2019, when you conducted your earlier studies, has recreational boating in any way decreased along the Ottawa River?

Dr. Colin Rennie: As was said earlier, there did appear to be an increase in boating during COVID, and that was because people could be outside, but since 2019, I think there's been an increase.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay.

Just to clarify, has that had an ecological impact on local fish species?

Dr. Colin Rennie: I'll let you address that one on the ecology.

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: We don't know about that, but we've been collecting data on it. Our project is one year old now, so we don't have anything before COVID or before the carbon tax to compare to.

In terms of boating, we're doing our study in the Rideau waterway, which is a pretty modified waterway from canal construction. There are a lot of factors going on there, including water drawdown in the winter and things like that. It would probably be hard to attribute—

Mr. Brad Vis: I have one quick question.

Has recreational boating impacted our national historic site on the Rideau Canal? Is that eroding the banks of the Rideau Canal?

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: Erosion you might know about better, Colin.

Dr. Colin Rennie: I think the study we're doing is evaluating that, and we have seen some bank recession. Attributing it solely to pleasure craft use, of course, is a challenge, and that's why numerical modelling will help.

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: I would just add that a lot of the Rideau Canal shoreline has been hardened, too, by property owners concerned about erosion on their property, so they're investing their money into it. In their opinion, recreational boating is part of the story there.

Mr. Brad Vis: When British Columbians visit the national capital, it's something that they really love to visit.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Vis.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

My colleague Mr. Vis is now aware of the environment and climate change.

Let me ask you a question about climate change in your study.

[*Translation*]

You talked a lot about shoreline damage.

Have you also looked at all the effects of climate change, such as increased winds and how this affects waves?

[*English*]

Dr. Colin Rennie: It's a good question.

I would say that no, we have not at this point specifically looked at climate change. I will say that in the study on the St. Lawrence River, which is not the Rideau River, we are looking at possible changes in waves due to wind events. For the study on the Rideau River, no, we have not looked at that.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: You also spoke about pollution. What about the noise level?

I'm a good customer of marinas, in Ontario. I know the Ottawa River well, as well as the Rockland waterfront and the Rideau Canal. One of my favourite restaurants is there.

You provided an important piece of data. You said that high-wake boats don't cause damage near marinas, because boaters respect the regulations. I've had the opportunity to see this for myself.

Have you looked at places where some boaters don't respect the rule that you shouldn't sail within 300 metres of the shoreline?

[*English*]

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: We observed that the boats were respecting the no-wake zone near the marina. That's something we plan on looking at this summer, by broadening that study. It will still be on the Rideau River, but in sections where they have posted no-wake zones versus sections where they have not posted no-wake zones, we'll see if there's a clear decrease in wakes when there's a posted sign.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: What about the noise?

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: Were you asking if we were going to look elsewhere regarding the noise? Is that what you were asking?

I'm sorry. I might have missed something.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: In your study, have you been aware of the noise and would people complain about the noise of the boat?

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: No. I've heard that anecdotally, but I don't have good data to support that. From talking to people, my own personal opinion is that the wakesurfing boats are all very loud, and the music goes up automatically when the surf's up. In the wakesurfing boat that we did our test on, for example, there's a button you can push to make the engine even louder. That does bother certain people on the waterway, I've heard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: During your study, you found that there were 62 pleasure boats per hour that went by at this location. We know that there is police surveillance on the water. Personally, I was stopped twice this summer.

Is police surveillance relevant? Have you considered this aspect? I know this affects your study a little indirectly, but I think surveillance can have positive effects.

According to your study, is repression an effective approach?

[*English*]

Dr. Colin Rennie: I looked back to Steve and he said no.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: I don't think we saw any police on the waterway. In the Rideau, we didn't really see them. We did see, I think, some conservation officers around fishing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I think my time is almost up.

I'm told I have 20 seconds left.

[*English*]

Okay, I have enough time for another question.

[*Translation*]

You talked about the diversity of boat types on bodies of water, for example personal watercraft, fishing boats and other boat types that often have to cohabit.

How would you describe the cohabitation that exists between all boaters, in your case? The other witnesses mostly came to talk about small bodies of water, which are more reserved for pleasure craft.

Do you think that separate corridors should be set up for each category of craft, or have you found instead that there is good cohabitation?

[*English*]

The Chair: Give a 15-second response, please.

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: They definitely have.... I don't know what the answer is to that.

I'd say that overall, what we have seen in the Rideau River is that most people get along and most people are polite. Most people, if they see someone canoeing, slow down.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: They respect it.

Dr. Jesse Vermaire: I believe one of the witnesses who left who said that it's just the odd person.

Overall, I'd say boaters are very respectful to one another, and that's what we witnessed.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: So it's a matter of managing what constitutes the exception.

[*English*]

It's the exceptions we have to deal with, because all the rest seem to be a big family. That's what I feel.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lauzon.

[*English*]

Mr. Gullick, I want to turn to you, sir, to make sure that there are no audiovisual issues that need to be dealt with.

Mr. John Gullick: No, I just wanted to respond to that question about harmony.

I live on the Trent-Severn system and I see boats coming past here every day. I would say that regardless of size or type of boat, etc., there is a great deal of harmony and respect among boaters.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gullick. I appreciate that, and I concur.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rennie, you measured the approximate speed at which a boat produces the strongest waves, by type of craft. You say that, above a certain speed, a boat skims the water, or at least glides over it. The boat then produces fewer waves.

I imagine you've also found that, depending on the type of craft, the speed at which the wave starts to decrease is variable.

Am I wrong?

Could you tell us more about that?

[*English*]

Dr. Colin Rennie: That's true. I did say that they were all on the order of 20 kilometres per hour for the maximum wave, but certainly there is variance among the boat types. I was giving a number to get a sense of what speed might produce the maximum wave.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I raise this point because I know that some mayors or organizations have already sought to regulate

navigation on bodies of water, particularly to reduce the amplitude of waves produced by watercraft. But this has proved difficult, given that all boats produce maximum waves at different speeds. It should be noted that the only tool they have to regulate navigation is to limit the speed or engine power of the boats.

Should the regulatory tools be changed? Are there other ways of doing things?

At the end of the day, how can we precisely limit the effect of waves, which is often the objective, when we need to find another way of achieving this result other than through regulation?

[*English*]

Dr. Colin Rennie: I agree with that.

One possibility is to make sure that the maximum speed for all boat types is below the threshold. For example, on the Rideau, there are no-wake zones, but there could also be less-than-10-kilometre-per-hour zones. That's one possibility, I think, to make sure that the posted speed works for all the different boat types.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: We tried to do this in some places, but it led to a big outcry. After all, 10 kilometres per hour is very slow. So to introduce a similar limit for all waterways, across the whole country, becomes complex.

I imagine there would be a way to find a compromise acceptable to both biodiversity advocates and pleasure boaters.

What would that compromise be?

[*English*]

Dr. Colin Rennie: You're leading me into the policy realm, which I said I wanted to avoid. However, if I were to devise such a policy, I might look at boat size and draft. In other words, it's the displacement of the boat.

Yes, I think you could have a different speed limit for different types of boats.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Finally for today, we turn the floor over to Mr. Bachrach for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks again to our witnesses for engaging with us on these topics.

We've heard from witnesses who are primarily concerned about the impact of recreational boating on the aquatic ecosystem, shorelines and that sort of thing. We've also heard from people from the recreational boating community who are concerned about several topics, including flares, which we heard about today. We've heard about the cost of boating. We've heard about infrastructure needs and those sorts of things.

My question for Mr. Thomson and Mr. Gullick is what they make of the concerns about the impact of recreational boating on shorelines and the aquatic environment, and the idea of improving the regulation of recreational boating to minimize those impacts.

The question isn't whether there's an impact occurring; obviously, on lakes and rivers, where there's high boat traffic, there will be impacts. It's really about how you govern recreational boating effectively. What order of government is best positioned to provide regulation and enforcement, and what does that look like?

Is it embraced by the recreational boating community? I imagine some recreational boaters are travelling an hour or two for recreation on a lake or a river, and their view of the situation is probably quite different from someone who lives on the bank of that river or the shore of that lake and who boats in the local vicinity and experiences the impacts in a different way.

What do you make of this whole conversation around environmental impacts from recreational boating?

• (1820)

Mr. Brad Thomson: There's no question that there's shoreline erosion.

On impacts of recreational boating, I think the most important things that need to be looked at are speed zones and no-wake zones.

We struggle with that right here at the MacDonald Turkey Point Marina. I have four-by-eight sheets of plywood that say, "No wake, no throttle." I have probably eight of them around the facility.

Mother Nature is another problem, though. With shoreline erosion, the biggest problem is that the shoreline has to be protected, whether it's through armour stone in environmental ways or through other ways of doing it. Mother Nature and some big storms cause more destruction at this marina than any boat going up and down the channel or in our facility. I see it all the time.

Shoreline protection is definitely a big thing, and that would obviously come from the federal and provincial governments stepping in.

Mr. John Gullick: I would concur with Brad.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gullick.

Thank you, Mr. Thomson.

On behalf of all committee members, I want to thank our witnesses for giving us their time this afternoon.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.

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