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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald





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• (1655)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)):** Order. We're back in session.

I think we're having trouble connecting with that witness. I don't know if Mr. Hanley has a phone number. He can phone him and tell him to get online.

I thought that a good way to use a little bit of time would be to deal with a couple of budgets we have to approve.

The first budget, for the study of the main estimates 2024-25, was sent to members on Tuesday. Did everybody have the time to look at the budget? If so—

Go ahead, Mr. Small.

**Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC):** We're in public. Aren't we supposed to be in camera for discussing this stuff?

**The Chair:** We don't have to be.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Is it the will of the committee to adopt the budget in the amount of \$500?

**Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC):** Which study is this for?

**The Chair:** It is the one for the main estimates 2024-25.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Okay.

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Who's getting the \$500, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** That's the cost, probably, for that particular meeting.

The second one is the adoption of the budget for the study of derelict and abandoned vessels, which we're about to start soon. The budget for the study of derelict vessels was also sent to members on Tuesday. Did everybody have the time to look at the budget? Is it the will of the committee...?

Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I just have some questions, Mr. Chair. It's on the cost of the meals.

Is this the amount that's actually being spent? Is this what these snacks are costing us, or is this a high amount so that it can be adjusted up to that amount if needed?

**The Chair:** We have three meetings—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Yes.

**The Chair:** —and three meals, and snacks.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Is that a cost of \$500 for a few cans of pop and a few trays of food?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Dubois-Richard):** We're going to have three meals for the study, and other meetings will be snacks, so it's \$500 per meal.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Okay. Then is our meeting time expected to be shuffled to be at a mealtime?

**The Chair:** It might not be at a mealtime. We save money if it's not at a mealtime.

Go ahead, Mr. Hardie.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** I'm actually half doing this on Ms. Barron's behalf, because in looking at where the testimony is due to come from, I see Vancouver. There should be something from Vancouver Island.

**A voice:** [Inaudible—Editor]

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Oh, okay. That's all right if you're confident that the island is represented, because that's really ground zero.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** They are probably choosing to appear virtually.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** All right. Thank you—

**The Chair:** We're talking about the budget.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** I know we're talking about the budget, but the budget allocated a certain amount to Vancouver. If we're going to hear from the island, we will be sending over the headsets and a lot of other things.

I mean, if you're comfortable, it's all kosher. I'm happy.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Barron.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, MP Hardie.

I guess I should just clarify.

I assumed, when looking at this, that this meant that these are the people who are physically travelling here, the witnesses that we have sent out, and that there would be additional people not included in the breakdown of provinces who would be witnesses appearing virtually, who would receive the headsets, which would also be included in this budget.

That's how I interpreted it, but there are witnesses, 100%, from Vancouver Island. I'm assuming, based on these numbers, that they have all said that their preference is to attend virtually, and of course I always mention to witnesses that it is their choice to come in person or to attend virtually.

• (1700)

**The Clerk:** It's an estimate. I would rather have estimated enough people coming in and enough headsets than doing a supplementary budget at the end of the study. It doesn't mean that we will spend all that money on the study.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Just to clarify, should we be including in here, then, an estimate of some coming from Vancouver Island and not just Vancouver? Vancouver Island, of course, is an extra jump over the pond, I guess you could say, from Vancouver.

**The Clerk:** It's really an estimate. If they come from Vancouver Island and nobody's coming from Quebec, let's say, we can take that money to reimburse the ones from Vancouver Island. It's just an estimate of where people could come from. It doesn't mean that it's going to cost that money for everybody coming in person.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

I have further questions on the witness breakdown that's on the budget here.

I see three persons from Iqaluit and three from Nunavut. When we checked with the Canadian Coast Guard's inventory of wrecked, abandoned and hazardous vessels, we found that there are no abandoned or wrecked vessels listed in those territories. I'm questioning why we would have six witnesses from an area that does not have any abandoned or derelict vessels listed on the Coast Guard's list.

**The Chair:** Ms. Barron, do you guys want to answer that question?

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can answer some of this question.

One thing I do know is that there are abandoned vessels in the Arctic, which is why we've included the Arctic in the study itself. They are different. I have pictures of them. They're large freighters that have been abandoned.

That is a good question as to why they're not listed in the vessels that have been abandoned. I think those would be some good questions for us to ask when we dig into the study.

As for the breakdown of Iqaluit and Nunavik, I'm uncertain how those numbers are broken down and why they're broken down in that way. Again, I think it's just based on an estimate. I don't have any control over that piece.

Just to give you that information, MP Arnold, there are abandoned vessels in the Arctic.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thanks to MP Barron for clarifying that she believes the Coast Guard's inventory is incorrect or inadequate. It'll be interesting to see that.

I'll ask now that the clerk circulate to the rest of the committee the list that has been submitted for witnesses.

**The Chair:** I'm sure we can get that sent to all committee members.

Go ahead, Clerk.

**The Clerk:** I just want to add that I didn't receive any witnesses from the Arctic, so my estimates are really estimates. I don't really have.... I went with Iqaluit and Nunavik because they're in the Arctic, but they might be coming from somewhere else, and I didn't know where they would come from.

**The Chair:** As the clerk said, I think she just wanted to make sure that she didn't have to come back for a supplementary budget. It doesn't mean that we're going to spend that amount. We might spend more and have to come back for a supplementary budget before the study is finished, but we have to land somewhere to get it started.

Is everyone in agreement with that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay. That's agreed.

Now we have to suspend for our witness.

• (1705)

(Pause)

• (1705)

**The Chair:** We're back.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and a motion adopted on June 16, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of the population sustainability of Yukon salmon stocks.

We welcome on Zoom, from the Government of Yukon, the Honourable Nils Clarke, Minister of Environment.

Thank you for being here today, sir. You will have up to five minutes for an opening statement.

Minister, you have the floor.

**Hon. Nils Clarke (Minister of Environment, Government of Yukon):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that I'm attending virtually from Whitehorse, the Yukon's capital, and the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'an Council.

Yukon first nations have been stewards of the Yukon's natural environment since time immemorial. We recognize the tremendous impact the Yukon River salmon decline has had on Yukon first nations subsistence harvest, culture, food, security and traditional practices.

I also recognize that for years, Yukon first nations have voluntarily reduced or ceased subsistence salmon fishing to help restore the species and hopefully build a territory where salmon can be harvested by future generations.

Low returns witnessed on the Porcupine River recently prompted the Vantut Gwitchin First Nation to implement a comprehensive prohibition on the use of gillnets intended for species such as burbot, whitefish and pike. We anticipate these types of prohibitions to be implemented by other Yukon first nations in order to reduce the risk of salmon bycatch in these gillnets. If these prohibitions expand, we expect the need for subsistence harvest to shift to Yukon's freshwater lakes.

Officials in our government are responding to these developments by exploring opportunities to partner with Yukon first nations to identify alternative subsistence fisheries options in order to preserve traditional practices, culture and food security.

Since 2017, Yukon River salmon restoration and recovery has been a topic of joint advocacy by the Yukon government and the Yukon first nations during our annual Yukon Days missions to Ottawa. The importance of this joint advocacy between governments and other co-management partners continues to be a theme in the discussions I have been having with Yukon first nation governments and other partners.

At a recent Yukon Forum, a meeting of Yukon first nations and the Yukon government, the parties suggested the need for an inter-governmental strategy in order to support collaboration and alignment between Canadian co-management partners on Yukon River chinook salmon restoration. As Minister of Environment, I will be approaching my counterparts in Yukon first nation governments to develop this intergovernmental strategy. The conversation around the strategy is still in its infancy, but we are hopeful we can bring together the Yukon government and Yukon first nations leadership to consider such a strategy in the coming months.

I would like to close by welcoming the agreement recently signed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Alaskan state government regarding the recovery of chinook salmon in the Yukon River drainage. The Yukon government was pleased to see that the agreement places a priority on traditional and local knowledge to better understand the causes of low chinook salmon counts, while directing the Yukon River Panel to develop a recovery plan to guide a path forward.

We know the agreement will not fully address the reasons for salmon decline and that our governments will continue to have a role to play in promoting salmon recovery and protecting subsistence fishing opportunities. I am hopeful that through continued collaboration of the Government of Canada, the Government of Yukon, first nations governments and other co-management partners, we can continue to lay the groundwork for a long recovery of Yukon River salmon.

Finally, I want to note that I will be in Ottawa later this month to attend the meeting of federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for conservation, wildlife and biodiversity, where conversation for the protection of species at risk, like salmon, will continue.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide opening remarks.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

We will go to our rounds of questioning.

We will start off for six minutes or less with Mr. Arnold.

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

Thank you, Mr. Clarke, for being here. I appreciate your input from right there in the territory where this is happening.

Basically, how did things get this bad? How did the numbers get so low?

Obviously, this isn't just a short-term result. How did they get this bad?

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just for clarification, how much time do I have for each answer, approximately?

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I only have six minutes total.

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Okay, you have six minutes. Thank you.

The decline of Yukon River salmon cannot be attributed to a single cause. Instead, it results from multiple factors affecting both the marine and freshwater environments.

In the marine environment, Yukon River salmon face intense competition for resources against foreign hatchery-bred salmon. Additionally, they must contend with changing ocean temperatures and bycatch mortality in the north Pacific marine fishery.

If they survive these marine challenges, they will encounter further difficulties in the freshwater environment. Beginning the longest migration in the world in a weakened state, they face threats from increasing river temperatures, Alaskan harvests, migratory barriers—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I'm going to interrupt you there, Mr. Clarke.

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Yes, sir.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** With all respect, it looks like that is a prepared response. Could I ask you to provide that to the committee in writing in the effort of saving time here and really get to the key points that you think are the reason for things getting this bad?

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chair.

The bottom line is that these are the reasons. I'm sure that you have heard that from the other witnesses who have provided answers, such as Chief Frost, Chief Nicole Tom, Tim Gerberding, Brady Mayes and Bryce Bekar. They are from various first nations, and Bryce Bekar is from the Yukon Fish and Game Association—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Okay. I'll be a little more direct, then.

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Thank you.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Has it been inaction of the Yukon territorial government, the Canadian government, the U.S. government or any government that has in part or totally led to this?

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** I mean, notwithstanding your contention that I have prepared comments, these are the reasons for the decline.

I think the biggest challenge recently has been that subsistence fishing on the American side between Eagle and Nome, basically, is interpreted as being fishing of salmon at a certain level, which has been quite significant.

Ultimately, I met with Commissioner Vincent-Lang from the state of Alaska, who's the fisheries and wildlife commissioner, and there is an agreement now to try to reach a passage level at Eagle, from Alaska into Yukon, of 70,000 fish. In 2023, 15,304 Yukon River chinook entered Canada, far short of the pre-season estimate of 26,000—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Okay, I think I get where you're going with this—

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Yes.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** There's been possibly excessive catch on the American side. Are you aware of any diplomacy between the federal fisheries minister and the U.S. counterpart to address this, or has it all been done by Yukon representatives?

• (1715)

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** I'm not aware of active discussions. I know that they are occurring between DFO and the federal government; however, there is now the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee. There is an agreement now to limit salmon catch for a full seven-year cycle to try to reach an escapement goal of 70,000 fish. I know that—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Okay, I'll ask—

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** —the Alaskans—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** We're aware of the Yukon agreement that has recently been signed.

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Okay.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Just quickly, because we have a minute left, what have you learned about the impacts or the effectiveness of the Pacific Salmon Treaty in the sustainability of Yukon River salmon, specific to the treaty and its effect on Canadian fisheries?

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** I know that a lot of funds have been dedicated for the B.C. west coast. I know that our government, both the premier and I, are advocating to the federal government to divert some of the funds that have been provided specifically for B.C. salmon restoration and divert them to the Yukon River restoration efforts, and those discussions continue. We know that it was not in-substantial funding that was provided to enable the B.C. salmon restoration.

Yes, those discussions are ongoing, but just to finish—I know you are finished and thank you for your questions—we are cautiously optimistic, based on the concessions that have been made by our Alaskan friends and neighbours with respect to trying to preserve the seven-year cycle of salmon and increasing the escapement goal to 70,000.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

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

Minister Clarke, it's good to see you.

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** It's good to see you.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** It's good to see a little peek at the Yukon out the windows behind you, as well.

Building on Mr. Arnold's questions, we have certainly heard how important this seven-year, full-cycle moratorium is and how significant that is. However, many of our witnesses have expressed that this is really a beginning and not an end, and certainly not a measure in itself that will be sufficient.

I was happy to hear you talk about the intergovernmental strategy. Maybe you can tell me a bit more about what your vision is, as a minister, in terms of the Yukon government's role to protect and rebuild salmon, as well as maybe a little more about the intergovernmental strategy.

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Thank you, MP Hanley.

There are a number of possible initiatives. I believe that the Yukon government and my ministry does want to occupy the field in a more significant manner.

I do have some examples of where we're going. The Department of Environment supports the idea of a Yukon-based conservation hatchery, and we are continuing discussions with Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Yukon first nations to provide support when called upon.

Department of Environment staff have met with the Kwanlin Dun First Nation, which is the largest first nation in the Yukon and is largely an urban Whitehorse first nation. We met on September 11, 2023, in order to discuss how the department can support the development of the new Kwanlin Dun First Nation salmon stewardship centre, which will include a Kwanlin Dun First Nation-led conservation hatchery feasibility study. We will continue to work with Kwanlin Dun First Nation to support this project and look forward to the next steps as well.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Minister, thank you for that.

I'm going to pull a Mr. Arnold and ask you to submit the rest of that in writing if you could, because I want to change topics in the small amount of time I have.

• (1720)

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** We have heard from at least some witnesses—and certainly I've heard lots of concern—about the interplay between resource extraction and salmon habitat. I wonder if, as environment minister, you could comment on what your assessment is of that interaction.

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Thank you, MP Hanley.

I do have somewhat comprehensive notes on this, but I will try to provide a relatively quick summary.

The Yukon government, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and decision bodies, during the environmental assessment, review placer mining projects and their impacts on salmon and salmon habitat. Both governments consult with impacted first nations to mitigate impacts to salmon and other fisheries before projects enter the licensing stage by the Yukon Water Board.

During the licensing stage, the Yukon Water Board will consider the fish habitat management system for Yukon placer mining, as well as terms and conditions related to diversions, settling, and suspended and settleable sediment discharge standards of each creek. If a placer mining project is allowed to proceed after assessment and regulatory reviews, monitoring programs are in place under the fish habitat management system to ensure that objectives of the fish habitat management system are achieved.

The fish habitat management system aims to protect fish and fish habitat while supporting a sustainable placer industry. This management system is a requirement of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and is jointly enforced by the Yukon government's compliance, monitoring and inspections office.

Yukon remains committed to working with DFO on the ongoing administration of the fish habitat management system for Yukon placer mining.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Thank you. Maybe I have a minute or so left.

You mentioned the idea of a conservation hatchery. Again, we've heard about the potential for restoration using hatcheries. There are different interpretations and different types of hatcheries, but a conservation hatchery is certainly one thing that I know is receiving serious interest in the territory.

I wonder if you can tell me a bit more about the idea, the vision and the plans for a Yukon River conservation hatchery.

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Thank you.

Cognizant of the fact that I likely have less than a minute, I would repeat my comments about the fruitful conversations we're having with Kwanlin Dün.

The Department of the Environment officials have met with all 14 Yukon first nations. There are 11 self-governing and three non-self-governing first nations. We believe it's about 7-7 as far as support for hatcheries is concerned, but we have certainly heard loud and clear that we have to do something, because the Yukon River salmon are in danger of extirpation. That would obviously be absolutely devastating for all Yukoners, but certainly for all Yukon first nations persons, who have been here since time immemorial.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

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

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ):** Good evening, minister. It's always a pleasure to have you here.

Since I'm from Quebec and I represent the province's interests in fisheries, I want to know whether you and your Quebec counterpart

have been in contact to discuss the fishery and the issues concerning Quebec salmon.

[English]

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Thank you so much for that question, Madame Vice-Chair Desbiens.

I am certainly open to sharing the opportunity to receive the experiences of my Quebec counterparts. I must say that I have not had a lot of meetings with the Quebec counterparts, but I and our department are open to sharing experiences and possible solutions to move forward on the path to restoration. I'm cognizant of the fact that Quebec may very well have similar circumstances.

Thank you very much for that suggestion. Of course, it's important to receive, process and, hopefully, use some of the experiences of our friends and colleagues from across this country.

• (1725)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Thank you.

Your comments on this topic are quite insightful.

We don't necessarily have the same issues in Quebec. The fishery is different, but we certainly share some common ground that we can explore together.

Other witnesses spoke of stepping up efforts to work with the United States on implementing a more effective and vigorous system to address both climate change and the impact of overfishing. There are indeed issues related to overfishing and bycatch. History seems to be repeating itself.

Are you keeping in touch with the United States? Have any steps been taken recently in this area?

[English]

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** I think it was in my response to Vice-Chair Arnold that I provided a fair bit of information on that.

I can confirm that in February, Governor Michael Dunleavy, the Governor of Alaska, attended Whitehorse with three of his commissioners. The transportation commissioner and the fish and game commissioner were there. That was the first in-person meeting that had occurred between Alaska and Yukon in a number of years.

We had conversations on infrastructure, on Yukon River salmon and on a number of topics. That's when, in speaking to Commissioner Vincent-Lang at that time, he advised that notwithstanding the concerns and the push-back he had received from Alaskan first nations villages between Eagle and Nome, which I talked about previously, they were very much opposed to those restrictions. It was deemed to be contrary to indigenous harvesting rights in Alaska, but they are of the view that we must proceed with this agreement to try to reach 70,000 fish passing Eagle, Alaska. This last summer, it was only 15,000.

Therefore, the answer to your question is yes, we are having meetings with our Alaskan counterparts. I've met some by Zoom. I've met in person with Commissioner Vincent-Lang, and I meet with other commissioners as well. This is because, notwithstanding that we have an international relationship with Alaska, it's an incredibly important partner. We believe that the more in-person and Zoom dialogue we have with Alaska, the greater the likelihood we'll have of success in avoiding the extirpation of the Yukon River salmon.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** I gather that the United States is showing some interest in this topic. You're taking a proactive approach and looking for a solution.

Is that right?

[English]

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** I'm sorry. I didn't have the translation.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** I'll start again.

I gather that you're in solution mode and that you're taking a proactive approach with regard to the United States. You aren't looking for courtesy or diplomacy. You're really looking for a concrete solution.

Is that right?

[English]

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Absolutely.

As I said, the three commissioners and the Governor of Alaska came to Whitehorse in February. I plan to return the visit. I'll be in Juneau, Fairbanks or Anchorage and meet with my counterparts there to continue the advocacy to advance this file. Speaking for myself, I am cautiously optimistic that we are moving in a positive direction.

The answer is yes, we're having positive discussions with our Alaskan friends and the Yukon government on a number of topics involving wildlife and wildlife preservation. That's why we want to have a role. I know MP Hanley is passionate on this topic as well, having travelled to Washington with a Yukon delegation within the last year.

Yes, we recognize that concrete discussions have to occur with Alaska.

• (1730)

**The Chair:** Thank you for that, Madame Desbiens.

Before I go to Miss Barron, we're on the 5:30 mark. I need unanimous consent to go beyond that time. We're good to go until 5:50. We'll have almost another 10 minutes with Minister Clarke, and then 10 minutes of drafting instructions, if everybody is in agreement.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay. That's agreed.

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

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Minister Clarke. Thank you for being here.

For my first question, Minister, I heard you speaking to this a bit already, but we have already heard witnesses to date—the chiefs, first nations representatives and so on—talking about the serious hardship and strain that the lack of access to salmon places on their communities, culturally and traditionally, on their language and on food security. There are many ways in which the lack of access to salmon is impacting these communities.

You spoke about this in the Whitehorse Daily Star article, which I have with me today. You talked about “the great sacrifice of Yukon First Nations”.

I know you spoke a bit about what the Yukon government is doing. Perhaps you might want to add a piece or two to that. I'm wondering if you can share what you feel the federal Liberal government needs to be doing to ensure that first nations are not disproportionately impacted by this agreement.

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Thank you, MP Barron, for the question.

What did I say in the Whitehorse Star? In any event, hopefully, they were reasonable things.

Yukon first nations, over the course of the last 30 years now—and it has occurred over the last 30 years—have absolutely made the ultimate sacrifice with respect to subsistence harvesting. What I would say is that Yukon first nation governments and citizens have already paid the so-called ultimate price or have made the most significant sacrifice. That's why it has been incredibly important for us to dialogue with Alaska, because we want to have Alaska first nation villages and first nation governments and beneficiaries and Yukon first nation persons to have the benefit.

Absolutely, it is culture. You have heard from the prior witnesses. It's the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. It's the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, where they had a commercial salmon fishery. There are pictures from the 1930s, the 1940s, the 1950s and even into the 1960s of really substantial fishing camps on the Yukon River, the Pelly River and the Stewart River, which are not occurring.

As I think I said in my prior comments, yes, as far as the general Pacific salmon restoration theory goes, we will continue to lobby the federal government to provide resources for Yukon to continue with our work—solid work—for restoration. The answer to your question, MP Barron, is that the Yukon first nation governments and their citizens have borne the price and the responsibility, starting 30 years ago. The fishery just got smaller and smaller and essentially became non-existent.

That's why I, as the Minister of Environment for the Yukon, and our government want to play an important role.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Minister.

I feel that there were some important points that you made there.

Minister, there was a brief presented to us as a committee from the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee. It said:



The Government of Yukon asserts that the Government of Canada is responsible for salmon, and accordingly takes little action to protect salmon in the regulation of Yukon land uses like mining. The Government of Canada defers to the Government of Yukon when it comes to decisions over land use in Yukon. The result is that salmon habitat in Yukon is not well protected, with neither Government actively taking responsibility.

I'm wondering what your thoughts are on that submission and the critique that the Government of Yukon is not actively taking responsibility for protecting salmon habitat.

• (1735)

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Thank you for that question.

As I've stated a few times today, in my time in this ministry, I have no time for and I have no intention of continuing to just say that the federal government is the only responsible party, but they are the senior level of government and they do have that responsibility. It is easy for the Yukon government to say "we will defer" and "we will not do anything", but I think I've provided some insight as to what we are doing.

We are working with Yukon first nations to address some of the concerns, including improving fish passage across Yukon hydro-electric projects; building relationships to discuss the feasibility of conservation hatcheries, which you've heard about from me over the course of my testimony here; protecting areas of cultural importance in our fish habitat management program; and working with all our partners to develop a Yukon River salmon rebuilding plan.

As I said, I have no interest in just having the simple answer that that Department of Fisheries and Ocean and the federal government are the only parties that can come up with reasonable solutions.

Just to repeat myself, I believe it has been incredibly important to open those lines of dialogue with the great state of Alaska with in-person meetings and maintaining those lines of communication, because that's probably how the biggest headway has been made in the last number of years.

I accept some of the criticism, but absolutely want to move forward and occupy more of the space for all Yukon first nation governments and for all Yukoners.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

Our time in public has now come to an end. We will have to suspend in a moment and go in camera for drafting instructions.

I want to thank Minister Clarke for his time here today and for sharing his knowledge of the Yukon salmon and the pros and cons and the ups and downs of what's happening in that particular stock in their area.

I'll allow Minister Clarke to leave at his leisure.

**Hon. Nils Clarke:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak and to provide testimony to the committee. I wish all the best to all the MPs as you finish this spring and summer session.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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