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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1125)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)): Mr. Kelloway, do you have your hand up?

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): I do.

I'd like to move a motion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

An hon. member: Mr. Small is up.

The Chair: Mr. Small is up for his motion.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay. I thought that when you went back into public—

The Chair: Go ahead, Cliff.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion, please.

The Chair: On a point of order, I have Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): We were in camera and then we came out to the public part of it. Nothing that was being conducted in camera carries automatically to the public part, does it?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Dubois-Richard): We were with Mr. Small and we returned to Mr. Small, but it's at the discretion of the chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Small, go ahead.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to present this motion:

Given that, after nine years and six fisheries ministers, Justin Trudeau's Liberal government has betrayed harvesters and made a mess of Newfoundland and Labrador's inshore fishery, the Liberal government has ignored Canadian fish harvesters and is not listening to their concerns, the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW-Unifor) has recently stated that the “federal Liberal government [has] completely and utterly failed our province and the recovery of the great Northern cod stock”, and that because Canadian fish harvesters need their voices heard so that those who are adjacent and reliant on this stock can reap the benefits of their 32 years of conservation efforts, the committee begin a study of at least four meetings into the impact of Justin Trudeau's Liberal government's betrayal of Canadian fish harvesters, and that the meetings consist of:

(a) one 2-hour meeting with the Honourable Diane LeBouthillier, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard;

(b) one 2-hour meeting with officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard;

(c) one 2-hour meeting with the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW-Unifor); and

(d) at least one meeting with stakeholders deemed relevant to the subject; and that the committee report its findings to the House.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on that motion?

Mr. Kelloway.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I would like to make some suggested amendments, if possible.

I'll start off with this. Remove “after nine years and six fisheries ministers, Justin Trudeau's Liberal government has betrayed harvesters and made a mess of Newfoundland and Labrador's inshore fishery, the Liberal government has ignored Canadian fish harvesters and is not listening to their concerns”. Remove “that...Canadian fish harvesters need their voices heard so that those who are adjacent and reliant on this stock can reap the benefits of their 32 years of conservation efforts” and replace it with “that cod is a culturally, socially and economically significant fishery that impacts many coastal communities in Newfoundland and Labrador”.

Remove “four” and replace it with “two”.

Remove the following:

Justin Trudeau's Liberal government's betrayal of Canadian harvesters, and that the meetings consist of:

(a) one 2-hour meeting with the Honourable Diane LeBouthillier, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard;

(b) one 2-hour meeting with officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard;

(c) one 2-hour meeting with the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW-Unifor); and

(d) and at least one meeting with stakeholders deemed relevant to the subject;

Replace it with “reopening of the cod fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador”, and then add “and pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee ask that the government provide a comprehensive response to the report.”

I'll read the new version. It would say:

Given that the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW-Unifor) has recently stated that the “federal Liberal government [has] completely and utterly failed our province and the recovery of the great Northern cod stock”, and that cod is a culturally, socially and economically significant fishery that impacts many coastal communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, the committee begin a study of at least two meetings into the impact of the reopening of the cod fishery on Newfoundland and Labrador, and that the committee report its finding to the House and, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee ask the government to provide a comprehensive response to the report.

• (1130)

The Chair: Is there any discussion on that motion?

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Can we suspend to review it for a moment?

The Chair: Do you need a few seconds or a few minutes?

Mr. Rick Perkins: A few minutes. A few seconds is a little short.

The Chair: We'll suspend for two minutes.

• (1130) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1135)

The Chair: Where were we?

It's on your motion. It's Ms. Barron, and then you.

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

I wanted to propose a subamendment to MP Kelloway's amendment. I'm sorry. I don't have it written out exactly, so I might need some help from the clerk.

Ultimately, at the very end of MP Kelloway's motion, at the end of the first paragraph, it says, "the committee begin a study of at least two meetings into the impact of the reopening of the cod fishery on Newfoundland and Labrador". I'd like to remove "two meetings" and replace that with "four meetings" and add after that "and that this study begin immediately, interspersed with the derelict and abandoned vessels study". That way we can have meetings on both of these topics as witnesses are available, so that they're both being taken care of, but recognizing that this is time sensitive.

The Chair: Basically instead of two meetings it would be four, and you want it to intertwine with the derelict vessels study. Is that correct?

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Do you want it to alternate from one meeting to the next?

An hon. member: It's whatever witnesses we get.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Yes. I'm flexible.

The Chair: All right. We've heard the subamendment by Ms. Barron.

Mr. Perkins, go ahead.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's nice to see everyone again.

I think that's a good compromise. We've done it before. We've done two studies simultaneously. Given that we need to find the space for witnesses in both studies, it gives the clerk some flexibility to work out which one on which day works best with regard to which witnesses are available.

This is a critical issue. We've had a fishery that has been closed essentially to commercial fishery since 1992, which is 32 years, and the main harvesting stakeholders are not happy with the decision. I know that everyone across the country, when they saw the national media stories that the commercial fishery was back—"Isn't this wonderful? The cod fishery is back," as the media reported it—were probably surprised to learn the union representing the har-

vesters and a lot of scientists and others were concerned about two aspects of this: One is the move from 13,000 to 18,000, and the other is the allowance by the government to have NAFO vessels, most likely Spanish and Portuguese, on the edge of our waters again fishing cod, which I understand are there now. These are the countries that contributed significantly to the collapse in the early 1990s.

This is a very urgent issue as the fishing is going on now, so I think MP Barron's subamendment to MP Kelloway's amendment to MP Small's motion is a valuable compromise.

• (1140)

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey, I apologize for not going to you after Ms. Barron, as I said I would.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, I wish to speak to the amendment of Mr. Kelloway. I have no problem with Ms. Barron's subamendment.

The Chair: Do you still want to speak to Mr. Kelloway's amendment?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Can we do that while there's a subamendment?

The Chair: Is it the subamendment first? Okay.

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): I just want to clarify something. I believe I heard Ms. Barron state that the study be started immediately. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes.

Go ahead, Mr. Small.

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

I think it's very important that we stick with the original motion's direction to have at least four meetings, because this northern cod fishery is extremely important to Newfoundland and Labrador. Cutting the number of meetings down from four to two would be a complete injustice to those who make their living on the water in Newfoundland and Labrador and who have been hurting.

Who knows what the future holds? The fishery's up and down every year, so we have to make sure that we're doing the right thing for this stock.

Given the track record of the foreign nation member countries of NAFO on overfishing outside of our 200-mile limit and sneaking in across.... Last year, the number of enforcement days by DFO patrol vessels was less than half of the seven-year running average. The danger is that NAFO countries will get up to their old tricks again and steal our fish as a result of this decision to move the stewardship fishery to a commercial fishery, and it puts the future recovery of our northern cod stock in great jeopardy.

To give something that is as important as this to Newfoundland and Labrador and the fishing industry only two meetings would be a great injustice, so I support Ms. Barron's subamendment to have four meetings and carry on from there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

It sounds like we're wrapping up the discussion on the subamendment, so I want to add a quick point.

First of all, there's a reason why I got right down to the meetings. I'm glad it sounds like we have everybody in agreement. We'll see if this vote moves forward in the right direction.

Honestly, what's coming forward in these motions is interesting reading. As a reminder, I grew up in Newfoundland and was there during the time the Conservatives were in government. How many years were they in power? Was it 11 years?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It was eight years.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: They were in power for eight years. I felt first-hand the impacts of the prioritization of large corporations and of putting the interests of local fishers on the back burner. I want us to really make sure that we are taking the time to have a thorough discussion and not come up with just a band-aid solution.

My family is not the only family that picked up and moved away from Newfoundland as a result of the impacts of the cod moratorium and the government's neglect, allowing overfishing to happen for generations. We knew this was coming. Now we're in the position to see the Liberal government making the same mistakes the Conservatives did before them. It is a mess.

I'd like for us to look at the bigger picture of what's happening and make sure that we get people with real, lived experience, who are out on the boats and who live in these coastal communities. Let's hear from them and implement real solutions to avoid continuing the cycle of putting local fishers' best interests last and putting corporate interests first.

I just wanted to highlight that.

I'm not overly concerned about the introduction, because as long as we're getting the right people at the table and we're putting into place long-term solutions that benefit the good people of Newfoundland and Labrador, that's the approach we need to be taking.

I really hope we look at four meetings, because two are certainly not going to give this topic the justice it requires.

• (1145)

The Chair: Mr. Kelloway, go ahead.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: It's great to see the art of compromise here. Having four meetings to focus on cod is exceptionally important. I'll grant you that, and thanks for making that overture to looking at broadening the study in terms of industry writ large over the past number of years.

The other thing I want to say—and I know we're back here and we're back into the rough-and-tumble days of a minority govern-

ment. I don't know of any MP who does not deeply appreciate how important the cod industry is and what it means not only to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians but also to these folks here in the fisheries, so let's study that. Let's also look at derelict vessels, as we suggested.

I would also say that we should keep in mind that we can't invent more time, but the review of the Fisheries Act is really important. I think that speaks to a lot of what's being talked about here—how we can collectively put forward recommendations that are going to strengthen key points. I would suggest there are some great connections between parties and what should go into recommendations, but there also might be some nuances here. On this side, we're open to looking at those as well.

I think in the next little bit, concurrently looking at the derelict vessels, the cod study and the Fisheries Act will be exceptionally important for this committee and, I dare say, for this Parliament. This is an important act that we need to strengthen, and I look forward to getting to that one too.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mrs. Desbiens.

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

I'm inclined to agree with Ms. Barron's amendments on the four meetings. I also agree with the spirit of the motion. I'd just like us to include Quebec and the St. Lawrence River, because we have cod fishing too.

Twenty-five or thirty years ago, my father predicted there would be a moratorium on cod fishing. He told me to eat cod, because he believed there would be a moratorium one day.

In my opinion, it's in our interests to include Quebec and the St. Lawrence River in our study. Consequently, we need to include Quebec in the motion, as well as the impacts of opening the fishery on stocks that will or won't be in the St. Lawrence River, depending on management by the department.

Mr. Chair, do you want me to provide the committee with the official version of my amendment or would you rather we just discussed it now?

[*English*]

The Chair: The clerk has asked me to suspend for a moment, Madame Desbiens.

We will suspend.

• (1145)

(Pause)

• (1150)

The Chair: We're back. I think what we have to do now is deal with the subamendment by Ms. Barron. Is everybody okay with the intent of Ms. Barron's motion as given? Okay. That's good.

(Subamendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Now we'll go on to Madame Desbiens' subamendment to that.

Go ahead whenever you're ready, Madame Desbiens.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Everything was quickly resolved, Mr. Chair. You were quite efficient.

My subamendment seeks to add Quebec, since there's cod in the St. Lawrence River too.

I would like the motion by my colleague Mr. Kelloway to talk about a study on the impact of reopening the cod fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec, since reopening it will have an impact on stocks in the St. Lawrence River in Quebec, and that this could happen to any other fishery elsewhere in Canada and Quebec, which could cause future harm.

[*English*]

The Chair: You've heard the substance of the subamendment. Are there any problems or issues with it?

Go ahead, Mr. Small.

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

I would like to see it so I could read it and see what it really means. We might need a couple of minutes to look at the content of that and investigate it. Could we have that, please?

The Chair: We can suspend for a couple of minutes, get it on paper and send it out to everyone.

We're suspended again.

• (1150)

(Pause)

• (1155)

The Chair: We're back.

I will ask you to read your motion again in French, and translation will translate it for anyone who wants to hear it in English. If they want to hear it in French, they can listen to it.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I move that, at the end of the first paragraph of Mr. Kelloway's motion, after “on Newfoundland and Labrador”, we add the following: “and Quebec that has repercussions on the St. Lawrence River’s fish stocks”.

I discussed it with Mr. Morrissey, and we believe that the motion could end there, quite simply because the gulf and the river go together.

[*English*]

The Chair: Everybody has now heard the subamendment.

Mr. Small, go ahead.

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

I'm not sure I could support that subamendment, because there's absolutely no connection between cod in the Gulf of St. Lawrence estuary and cod on Canada's eastern continental shelf, northern cod 2J3KL. It's technically imprudent. I think the subamendment

should stand as is, because scientifically there is no connection between the cod in that part of the St. Lawrence especially and the northern cod.

Thank you.

• (1200)

The Chair: Madame Desbiens, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That's precisely what the study could tell us or not. Personally, I think it's dangerous to claim that there is no connection. Indeed, I fished cod in the St. Lawrence in my youth.

Is it the same cod or not? Do fishing licences or factory vessel licences have an impact or not? I think the study will help us shed some light on that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Morrissey and then Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, I disagree with Mr. Small. In his original motion he keeps referencing how Canadian fish harvesters need to have their voices heard. That's all Madame Desbiens is asking for. With respect to the cod there is a difference, but this study should focus on the scientific and the data. I will speak to that more when I get my turn on the motion.

Adding a reference to cod in that particular area would not take anything from the main focus of the northern cod, but it is, to quote Mr. Small, the Canadian fish harvesters' concerns. He keeps referencing his motion about Canadian fish harvesters being ignored. That's what he's trying to do now by trying to constrain Madame Desbiens' subamendment.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. Perkins, go ahead.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate it because we have cod all around Nova Scotia, and it was impacting the lobster fishery last December as well, because they are back in larger numbers. However, it is the minister's decision that this study is about. It's about the specific move from 13,000 metric tons to 18,000 metric tons in 2J3KL—very specific cod-fishing areas—and the agreement with NAFO that stems from those areas. It's not about the decision and the prompting of the study. Of course, I'm sure government members know that everything that has been discussed in public with the FFAW and all of the processor and other industry groups has been about their concerns around the decision of the minister and her announcement on 2J3KL. It's not about the entire cod fishery all over Atlantic Canada.

I believe that's why...and I would support a broader study beyond this. It would have to be more than four meetings if we were to go to a broader cod study in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Nova Scotia and other parts. I would support that, but we would have to add more meetings to do that. The four meetings specifically, as far as I'm concerned—and the motivation for them—are about that specific decision by the minister. That's why his preamble talked about what the minister did in her announcement.

The Chair: Mr. Small.

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

With regard to Mr. Morrissey's comment about Canadian fishermen, I think that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are Canadians, so there's nothing wrong with stating “Canadian fish harvesters” in that motion. However, as my colleague, Mr. Perkins, just said, there are many cod stocks in Atlantic Canada and in Quebec. There are probably three or four different cod stocks recognized by science, but this study is to study northern cod because of the terrible decision that was made in June.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Is there anybody else?

Madame Desbiens, do you want to comment?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Whatever the decision, I reserve the right to ask questions during our study on cod. That way, I'll get different responses, which may have an impact on cod in the St. Lawrence.

I also want to say that you involve Quebec when it suits you; however, when it doesn't, you don't. It's interesting to hear that.

I still say it's not true that there's no connection. I'm sure there is one now, and there will be one in the future, depending on the decisions that will be made and the report we'll table. If I don't have the committee's consent, I'll abstain and ask the relevant questions that will be appropriate for the St. Lawrence and Quebec at the time of the study. I'll also submit names of witnesses in this regard.

I wish the committee could have recognized that cod swims in water, regardless of the province.

• (1205)

[*English*]

The Chair: I think we have a good handle on what Madame Desbiens is trying to do and the feelings on it. I think it's time to vote on the subamendment by Madame Desbiens. I'll ask the clerk to call the vote.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Can you read that out again, please—just her subamendment, one more time? I'm sorry.

The Clerk: I only have it in French.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: That's okay. I'm taking lessons.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Mrs. Desbiens moves to add the following, after “Newfoundland and Labrador”: “and Quebec that has repercussions on the St. Lawrence River’s fish stocks”.

[*English*]

The Chair: I now ask the clerk to do the vote.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: There you go. All right, so that will be part of it.

Now it's on the motion as amended. Did we not vote on the amendment made by Mr. Kelloway?

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. Can I just get clarification?

The subamendment that I brought forward has been passed. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Okay. Thank you.

Now we're moving on to MP Kelloway's amendment.

The Chair: Yes, it's on Mr. Kelloway's amendment as amended by various persons along the way.

Go ahead, Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: My request is to speak on the amendment by Mr. Kelloway. Can I do that now?

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

Chair, I want to speak to my colleague's subamendment, because when I go back to the main motion, I hope this committee will focus on how fishers are impacted by the decisions of the department and various ministers.

Everybody knows what John Crosbie said. I don't have to repeat the famous quote of then-minister John Crosbie when he said something like, “I did not take your fish”. He was more explicit than that.

What we have, over the years.... The question should be on the government and the scientific bureaucracy of the department and why it has failed the fishing industry. I'll be candid. The tone of this, to me, appears to simply be playing politics with the visceral wording of the motion. I would prefer for this committee to focus on who should be the object of any study—it is the fishers. They have every right to demand more from collective governments. We could reference nine years and six fisheries ministers. I could reference eight years and one and a half ministers. Their records would probably be spotty and questionable as well.

That's why I support Mr. Kelloway's amendment to focus on whom we should be pointing fingers at. Again, Mr. Crosbie said this, and he was right. He was not the person who made the decisions that led to the decision he had to make. It was simply politicians, in a lot of cases, playing games and being more interested in political posturing than in getting to the issue. I hope the committee will focus on what the issue should be, which is the decisions and the degree and substance of the data the department is charged to get as it provides advice to a minister on the management of the fishery.

We know, and it is clear—I've represented fishers for a long time—that the pressure on every natural resource on both coasts is more than the natural resource can sustain. It appears that we increasingly advance the sophistication of our fishing fleet while still not looking clearly at what is happening with the stock.

Nothing in here talks about something the official opposition glosses over, which is climate change and its impacts. I'm dealing with a situation now in my riding with oysters. Everybody is pointing to the warming water that has caused MSX to explode in the inland bays of Prince Edward Island.

With the wording of Mr. Small's motion as it is, I will not support it, simply because it's political grandstanding. The focus should be on the fish harvesters who, in a lot of cases....

I do not have direct experience with the issue of northern cod, but I take it at face value that there were some legitimate questions about some of the decisions made around it. That's why, Mr. Chair, I will support the motion as amended and subamended a number of times. It's because it will allow the committee to focus on what it should be doing, the management of the stock and the decisions that are being made.

• (1210)

Simply throwing everything in and referencing the particular government.... We could replace Justin Trudeau with Stephen Harper, Jean Chrétien and Brian Mulroney. What a host. You might want to go back to Diefenbaker, but the reality is that, from where we are sitting, I would hope that a government and a collective Parliament would actually be focused on the challenges that will continue to grow as they relate to the natural wild harvest on all coasts. Again technology is equipping an industry with a fishing capacity that we don't know the stock, through its natural growth, can sustain.

We've done a number of studies here, Mr. Chair. It's questionable whether some of these fishers in certain areas may ever fish again in our lifetimes, so the intent of studying the decision around northern cod is a valid one. It's one I agree with. This committee should put a decision like that under the scope of a public committee.

Mr. Clifford Small: I have a point of order, Chair.

With all due respect to Mr. Morrissey, he referenced visceral. There's no visceral intent. Mr. Kelloway's motion removed, I think, what Mr. Morrissey would be framing as visceral. I think we should get to the vote on this. It's very important—

The Chair: We will very shortly, sir. I'm trying to—

• (1215)

Mr. Clifford Small: —to me, as a former fisherman who was fishing when the moratorium was called. My family and many friends and relatives right throughout the province were fishing in 1992. It is very offensive to them to see this motion being watered down and debated. Let's get it to a vote and get our study going so that we can bring in the stakeholders and the people who were involved in making this decision to turn the stewardship fishery into a commercial fishery. Get them before this committee so we can get to the bottom of how this decision was made.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

We'll now go to the vote.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

I could repeat all my comments that were made. They still speak to what should be the focus of this committee, which is the impact that the decisions made by government had on specific fisheries. That I agree with. It was the blatant political tone of the motion that really didn't do anything. Again I, as a committee member, have the right to question what the objective was here. I want to focus on the actual issue before us, which is the future of the cod fishery on the east coast, primarily to the north. That was identified. Madame Desbiens wanted to expand it, which is fine. They're complementary.

That's why, Mr. Chair, I can support the motion, which is a valid motion, and I would be interested in having witnesses appear. The way it would be amended by Mr. Kelloway, the only focus would be on the issue at hand, which is the stock and the impact on the fishers. I could not support the original motion as it was worded, because I for one in this committee simply feel that the interests of the fishers were not put foremost when the original motion was produced.

The Chair: Seeing no other hands up, I'll ask the clerk to call the vote.

(Amendment as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Now the motion as amended has to be voted on, so I'll ask the clerk—

An hon. member: I thought we just did that.

The Chair: That was on the amendment. Now we have to do the main motion as amended. I'll ask the clerk to....

Go ahead, Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Can you please read out what we're voting on this time?

The Clerk: We're voting on the main motion by Mr. Small as amended.

Mr. Mel Arnold: His amendment amended the whole motion.

The Chair: The motion as amended by Mr. Kelloway is what we're voting on now.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, do you have your hand up?

• (1220)

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

I'd like to move the following motion:

That the committee request the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to appear before the committee for no less than two hours, within 14 days of the adoption of this motion, in relation to her mandate and current priorities for fisheries, oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

The Chair: We've all heard the motion. Is there any discussion?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Can we have a moment?

The Chair: Yes. We'll suspend for a moment. Make it short.

• (1220)

(Pause)

• (1220)

The Chair: We're back.

We've all heard the motion as presented by Mr. Arnold. Is there any discussion?

Mr. Kelloway.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I didn't say that it's great to see everyone back after the summer.

I was going to put forward a motion with respect to this as well. The minister is available on October 9, and I'd like to put that forward. Maybe there's a way to meld what has been put forward here and look at October 9. With regard to the two hours, I know that she's committed to coming for an hour, but we can certainly go back and look to see whether she's available for two.

I just wanted to put that out there.

I'll yield the floor, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

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

Thank you, Mr. Kelloway. I hadn't seen your motion. We would be willing to accept October 9 as a date for the minister to appear, but we would absolutely request that it be for two hours.

If we need to amend the motion, it would be that the minister would appear on October 9 instead of "within 14 days".

The Chair: Is everybody okay with that amendment?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The motion is carried that the minister will appear for two hours on October 9.

Mr. Perkins.

• (1225)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a motion. We are in committee business, but since I didn't give advance notice, I'll read it out. The clerk can circulate it to everyone, and perhaps you guys want to take a few minutes to consider it after I read it.

My motion is that—

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm sorry, Rick. We are in public. We're not in committee business. In public, you need to give a notice of motion.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Actually, we are in committee business. It's just public committee business.

What have we been doing publicly with motions other than—

Mr. Ken Hardie: I just needed some clarification on that. Carry on.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. I'll start again.

The following is being circulated, I think by email:

That, with regard to media reports that the former Minister of Fisheries and Oceans ignored a peace on the water accord between the Sipekne'katik First Nation and commercial fishermen in Saint Mary's Bay, and given that in the years following:

(i) organized crime has profited and flourished off the trade of unlicensed lobster harvests; and

(ii) Acadian and first nation communities have been routinely terrorized around the Clare area through arson and violence,

the committee therefore agrees to hold two meetings to investigate why the minister ignored this agreement, and that the committee agree to invite the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, her officials, former chief of the Sipekne'katik First Nation Mike Sack and president of the United Fisheries Conservation Alliance Colin Sproul, and that these meetings begin following the completion of the cod study.

The Chair: When you say "the cod study", do you mean the cod and the derelict vessels one?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, once that's done.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Could I speak to it for a moment?

There were reports in the Chronicle Herald—and I have spoken to the fishing groups, who also confirmed that the reports were correct—that in 2022, on the initiative of then-chief Mike Sack, he reached out to the fishing groups in southwest Nova Scotia to see if they could come to an accommodation, and they did. Some of those details were published in the report that went up to the Minister of Fisheries then—Minister of Fisheries number five—who rejected the deal.

We had peace on the water agreed to at the initiative of first nations and signed off by first nations, and the minister rejected it. I think we need to have a hearing to find out why that happened when all of what we've been talking about for the last year or so here, whether it's the elver fishery, the illegal lobster fishery or some of the motions we've done today, are the outcomes of not signing that agreement for peace on the water between the two nations.

We propose that we have a study and invite those witnesses, the signatories to that agreement, and departmental officials.

The Chair: Has that been circulated? Does everybody have a copy?

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Could we have another moment to suspend, if possible, just to...?

The Chair: All right. Suspension seems to be the word of the day.

- (1225) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Morrissey, go ahead.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

A lot of this I agree with. It's been ignored for too long, but there are a couple of areas on which I'm not sure this current minister could speak regarding the decision of a former minister. I would like to see whether this agreement is real or not real. It is an alleged agreement. I would like to see if it actually exists. Who do we address for that?

The other part that keeps getting swept under the rug here, Mr. Chair, with respect to cash and illegal activity is the regulatory role of the provinces that license buyers and processors. It's very difficult to have cash or illegal activity if the buyer is actually following the rules regarding who they should be buying from. They should be buying from authorized licensed fisheries who attach a slip, and everybody knows the process. Perhaps we can weave that into Mr. Perkins' motion. There's a lot of good in here. I think we do have to examine it. We have in this committee, ad nauseam, referenced the cash, illegal and unreported activity going on. We've had excellent witness testimony on a number of areas. On all of that I agree with where Mr. Perkins is going, but there are two parts to it.

I'm not sure the current minister would be the person to speak to on a decision that was made a couple of years ago. The other part is that, as it relates to that, I would want to extend an invitation to the relevant ministry of the Government of Nova Scotia, so that this committee could ask what they're doing to control this within their scope of legislative authority, which is on the shore. Most of the illegal activity we're referring to here does not occur on the water but rather when the product comes ashore and is then sold and moved into the marketplace in an illegal, unauthorized and unlicensed form. That's what we're getting to here.

There are two components. The federal government regulates the fishery on the water by and large, but as it relates to the buyer and to the processor, it is the province. We heard that here as well. I agree with where you're going, but I would like to have before this committee all of the relevant jurisdictions that have authority to find out what they're doing to regulate here.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, go ahead.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that.

I will start with the first part. The current minister is the sixth fisheries minister from this Liberal government. I agree, but she has to answer for everything the department has done during that time, not just during her time in that role. If she as fisheries minister doesn't feel comfortable enough to defend everything her government has done in that job, then why don't we add former minister number five, Joyce Murray, to the list? I'm more than willing to have both of them here.

With regard to the province, the province didn't negotiate the agreement. It was negotiated for peace on the water, for the division of licences and for how the federal government would approach supporting first nations going forward in the fishery with regard to licences, boats, training and fishing in a DFO-regulated season. That's the agreement. The province was not at the table for that. That was between the first nations and commercial fishermen and the Minister of Fisheries who rejected the proposal. The province had nothing to do with analyzing whether or not Sipekne'katik should get more licences, how they would get more licences or what support they would get. That was solely at the discretion of former minister of fisheries number five. If minister number six isn't comfortable defending minister number five, then let's have both of them.

- (1235)

The Chair: Ms. Barron, go ahead.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I was just rereading all of the information around this. We have to keep up with a lot of things happening across the country here. Thank you to MP Perkins for bringing forward this important discussion.

If we do this study, I look forward to hearing more. It's clearly complex. I'm reading through all of the moving pieces on it, and it sounds as though some resolutions definitely need to be implemented. It's always a good opportunity to hear from those who are impacted and to be able to recognize what those solutions are and to actually see them move forward.

I want to ask whether, in the motion MP Perkins brought forward, we could incorporate at the end, after "after the cod study", the derelict vessel study that will be happening at the same time to ensure it's clear to all members of this committee the order of these studies.

I propose a subamendment to add, in addition to the cod study, "the derelict and abandoned vessels study". It's a minor edit...or addition to the motion, I should say.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I have one question. The committee has a mandate to study the Fisheries Act, which is really the whole reason the committee exists. The Fisheries Act is the primary piece of legislation that governs everything we do. It's up for review and has to come back. We had agreed to study it, so where does it go in all of this? The Fisheries Act is paramount to everything we're talking about. If we're going to keep pushing it and pushing it.... We don't know the timeline on this particular Parliament.

I feel it's extremely important that the Fisheries Act is scheduled in to be reviewed because now, after five years, there is some tweaking, requested by fishers, that can be done to that act. That's my only question. We're putting a lot in, and where does the Fisheries Act sit in that?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I believe what is written in the act is that it be reviewed. It does not have to be this committee—it could be a Senate committee—that does the review of the Fisheries Act. Earlier, I believe it was the clerk or the analyst who stated that the review of the act is not immediate, so we have time to provide witnesses.

What we see here, which I began to experience only as time progressed during my nine years now on this committee, is that we have more and more urgent, emergency or crisis situations happening, and items come up that we need to study immediately on behalf of the fish harvesters and for the conservation of fish stocks. It's becoming a more recurrent theme that there's an urgent issue that hasn't been dealt with. After nine years on this committee I haven't tallied up how many reports we did, and the government responses to and action on those reports were not respectful of the knowledge around this committee table nor of the witnesses and harvesters who came in and testified.

What we're seeing here is an urgent issue. It's a growing issue that Mr. Perkins raised. The Fisheries Act will continue, but there are, I believe, more pressing issues affecting our fish harvesters right now.

• (1240)

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Desbiens.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I want to ask two questions, Mr. Chair.

Did you estimate the time required for the study on the Fisheries Act review, given what has happened in the past? Could we get an idea?

What my colleague said is, in fact, true: There are major crises and challenges we need to focus on. That said, that's never going to change. While we're reviewing the Fisheries Act, there will be other crises and challenges. Furthermore, we'll need to use Standing Order 106(4). We're dealing with an extremely serious situation. Alarm bells are ringing everywhere, meaning wherever there's water and fish to harvest.

I'd just like to know how we could have a short, medium and long-term perspective. I'm thinking of recreational fishing and small craft harbours, which are also on our list.

How could we move forward in that respect? How will we do that in our review of the Fisheries Act? Will we react as emergencies arise? Will we find solutions during our legislative review? Sometimes, rapid action is required.

I agree that the reports we table don't get a quick response. What we're hearing on the ground is that it's disastrous. I know because I spent the summer in the field. The shrimp boats are in dry dock, and everyone is in dire straits.

How should the committee proceed to ensure maximum efficiency and to best respond to alerts in Canada and Quebec?

Here's my question: What's our timeline for reviewing the Fisheries Act? How long will it take, considering the emergencies we also want to deal with? Could we reach consensus on an agenda that would allow us to insert some very urgent studies while at the same time moving forward on our study on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing? I anticipate the use of Standing Orders 106(4) and 108(2), among others.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Barron, did you have your hand up? Please go ahead.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

There are a couple of things.

First of all, when I was bringing forward the addition to this motion, the point around adding the derelict and abandoned vessels to the completion of the cod study, if I could be honest, I was maybe taking it a little bit too literally. It says it would begin following the completion of those studies. In my mind, we would have an additional discussion around how that works out in the timeline. I didn't see it as immediately following the completion, so whether it should be immediately following or not, I'm still not 100% sure, to be honest. The reason is due to the many questions that my colleague Madame Desbiens was just asking.

What I don't understand are some of the pieces that I'm going to be doing some further research and having conversations around, and they are around this act. When we're reviewing it, how much time is required in order for us to actually see the implementation of the recommendations that come forward? How does that work as a committee to see that this work is going to be used effectively and actually carried through?

None of us know when an election is going to happen, but we certainly know it's going to happen within a year, so do we even have enough time, if we go to the full term of what is possible, to complete this?

The other thing is that I agree with my colleague Mr. Arnold that there have been many things coming forward that are urgent in nature. How can you disagree with how important so many of the things coming forward at this committee are?

We need to be taking a moment to look at this act and whether it's effective for us to do that in this timeline that we have, because it's interconnected with many of these issues. We have an outdated Fisheries Act. We're going to see the trickle of impacts of that coming through in many of these emergency motions.

I do prefer, as a committee, that we take a moment to recognize the bigger picture here and recognize that many of the things we're talking about can be talked about when we're reviewing the act as well, because there are many components that are linked.

What I need to understand is, if we study the act, will we actually see that work being carried forward into fruition within the timeline we have remaining? Once I have that information, then I can provide my input on the timeline of how these studies will move forward.

• (1245)

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, go ahead.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a small amendment in consideration of what MP Barron has said so that the end of the motion would read "and that these meetings begin immediately following the cod and derelict vessels study." It would remove the words "the completion", because otherwise we would have to wait until the report is completely finished to begin. We could do it while we're waiting for version one or version two.

Does everyone understand that? It would read "and that these meetings begin immediately following the cod and derelict vessels study."

The Chair: Is this for the Fisheries Act?

Mr. Mel Arnold: No. I'm speaking to Mr. Perkins' motion.

The Chair: Okay. There's a timetable for the Fisheries Act to be done as well.

Mr. Kelloway, go ahead, followed by Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Yes, I'm going to entertain Mel's sub-amendment in a second.

With respect to the two studies, it's clear to me how that's going to unfold. I really do think that the study of the Fisheries Act is really critical. There's no question that over the last number of years there have been very many challenges with respect to the fishery on both coasts, and there are a lot of reasons for that. Some of it is environmental, and some of it transcends in other ways.

For me, the Fisheries Act and having the ability for all members and all parties to come to strengthen the Fisheries Act—which would hopefully triage some of the challenges we have and turn them into, hopefully, opportunities, but at least provide some solace on the water and on the ground—are really important.

I want to transition from that to some of the other things that were mentioned.

With respect to MP Perkins' motion, the spirit of it I agree with. Mr. Perkins put it very succinctly that the province wasn't involved in a potential agreement, but I do think that we need to do more around this committee with regard to bringing in.... I think we've done this with Newfoundland and Labrador to a degree, but I think we need to bring in the province on a lot of these items.

That's not to say that the federal government has zero responsibility. It has a major responsibility as the steward of the fishery, but the province has as well. A lot of the challenges we have.... It's easy to look at it as simply political, which we all do, but we also need to look at it as practical. There is a huge connection to the provincial governments in terms of cash sales, as Mr. Morrissey mentioned. I think we need to incorporate that in a lot of our motions going further.

The third thing is around Sipekne'katik. I do feel somewhat uncomfortable not including the current chief and council in any discussions with respect to a potential study. I think that's really important. I think there's a process and protocol that we need to be mindful of, and we should look at that as well.

I'll just sum up by saying this: I know that we can't, once again, invent more time, but we do also have a subcommittee. We may want to have that subcommittee look at how we parse out a schedule that really takes into account, as Mr. Perkins said, the most immediate challenges with the fishery and at the same time looks at the Fisheries Act. The Fisheries Act is a huge tool, and it's a huge opportunity for us to strengthen what is happening on the water.

I'll leave it at that, but I'm very concerned that we're seemingly pushing the Fisheries Act down the road and kicking the can. I do think that, yes, the Senate can review it and most likely will. However, I think we would be negligent if we don't do it ourselves. I think it would be wrong. We are the elected officials here.

Thank you.

• (1250)

The Chair: Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's interesting absorbing all of the nuances coming across in the various commentaries.

The Fisheries Act is like a political football in some respects. It gets kicked around a lot. If you had a picture of it, it would be covered with band-aids because over nine years, we've looked at this issue, then this issue and then this issue. It would appear that everything from major policy right through to how the DFO allocates its time needs a good shaking-out.

I don't think this is the sort of thing that we should leave to the Senate. I honestly don't think it's a good thing to leave to any future Parliament. There's a lot of corporate learning here, and some of it isn't going to be here the next time around.

I think it's time we go back. I forget who said this, but a couple of people made the point that we've had some really good studies here. I am among those—probably most of us—who are overwhelmed by the kind of action we've seen from the DFO. Yes, it's always going to be something, as Gilda Radner would say, but we need to really get down to the foundation of this thing and start to build something that's going to be much more proactively involved in dealing with a very changing landscape, be it fish stocks, climate change behind the fish stocks, all of the social and cultural issues we're running into or the fact that our fishery on the west coast has basically collapsed. It used to be the source of such community pride, cultural identity and everything else.

The Fisheries Act needs a good shaking-out. Sure, the current one is absolutely worthy, but it's an example of yet another band-aid being put on a football. It's leaking air like crazy, and with one more good kick, the thing is going to pop.

Let's not lose sight of the responsibility that we have—especially people like me and Mel, who have invested nine years in this thing—to come out of this Parliament with a Fisheries Act that's far more in tune with the challenges we have now and, especially, the ones that are coming.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, I agree with my colleague. This is the committee that's designated under the legislation to review the Fisheries Act. There's reference to the Senate as well, but to have this elected, appointed committee not review the act, I think we would be sidestepping our responsibility as a committee.

I agree with the studies that have been put forward. In fact, the last one we discussed here, on the motion by Mr. Perkins, is very timely. If we're simply going to keep delaying the Fisheries Act and run out of time as a committee, I will be disappointed. You, Mr. Arnold, Mr. Hardie and I were the original members of the committee that reviewed the current act. It was extensive. It was in the early days. I've forgotten the exact timeline on it.

To do the act justice, it should come back to the committee to seek input from fishers on both sides on changes that can be made, because a lot of the issues we're dealing with are governed through and by the act. We had this discussion this spring, I believe, or some time ago, when I made the motion to bring the Fisheries Act to the committee for review. It was sometime last winter, I believe, or last spring, and it kept getting delayed.

Each one of these is a valid issue and motion that should be discussed. In fact, I'm very interested in all of them, but I'm confused about where we're going in relation to the Fisheries Act at this moment. Maybe we accept the position put forward by Mr. Kelloway to have the subcommittee take a look at what's on it. Yes, we could reduce it. Am I correct?

Could the clerk inform the committee how many days were attached to the fisheries study?

• (1255)

The Clerk: It was eight meetings.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It was eight.

I'm sure we could, if we got together, move some of them now. The one part that I didn't fully understand, and Ms. Barron may be able to speak to it, was the relationship between derelict vessels and the fishery. I know what it is from a transport perspective, but—

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It's the derelict vessels study. It's the relation of derelict vessels to the fishery.

Mr. Rick Perkins: On a point of order, that's not relevant to the motion before us.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's fine, Mr. Chair. I will go back. I just wasn't sure on that.

The Fisheries Act is the one that is very relevant to this particular committee. I would like to know where we're going—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order.

I realize that we have only four minutes left and we're going over the same ground again. I understand that the government doesn't want to hear from first nations about why they rejected their study, but can we get on with it?

This is two meetings. Somehow, government members are confused that this will delay some magical study of the Fisheries Act. Why don't they want to hear from first nations about why the government rejected peace on the water? Let's get on with it and vote.

The Chair: Mr. Kelloway.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: That's a hard act to follow, so I won't try.

Look, I think we need to look at some practical ways of moving forward. Again, I think we met once, maybe, as a subcommittee. I don't know if you see value in that in terms of trying to find some common ground here with respect to several studies that are very important.

I want to go back and say, though, because I think it bears repeating, that I know back home—

Mr. Rick Perkins: There are two minutes left.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

Is that the two-minute warning? Thank you very much.

I know that my folks back home, those who are in the fishery, are very eager to present to this committee in terms of the Fisheries Act and to strengthen it where it needs to be strengthened. I suspect it's the same for all of you. While there are, at the same time, as MP Arnold mentioned, many challenges that pop up on a given day, let alone week or month, I look at the Fisheries Act to some degree as an engine that can help in terms of addressing the long-term challenges and maybe even the mid-term challenges of what we face.

Again, in relation to this committee, I've been here for three years now. I know that MP Arnold and MP Hardie and MP Morrissey have been on this committee for nine years. I think we've done a really good job, as a committee, of not really going down the ideological partisan road. If we're looking at—

The Chair: We have a point of order by Mr. Small.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Chair, Mr. Kelloway is misled in thinking that Conservatives don't want to study the failed 2019 Fisheries Act. We're not trying to not study it. We simply want a couple of meetings to study the opportunity that was laid out before his government, his NDP-Liberal government, to try to get peace on the water. It was an agreement between commercial and indigenous fishers to have an agreement that his former boss denied them.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Can I continue?

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay.

With all due respect, Mr. Small, you don't know what Mike Kelloway is thinking, but thanks. Nice try.

I believe that you and all of you—I said this, if you look at the transcript—want to focus on the Fisheries Act. It's this partisan style of approach that doesn't help anybody one damn bit.

• (1300)

The Chair: That pretty much brings us to the end of our two hours for today.

The subcommittee was mentioned a couple of times, and I just want to make a comment as the chair about getting the subcommittee together. We've done that in the past. We come back here and it gets butchered. It doesn't work.

As far as I'm concerned, we'll do it as it was sent to us by the House, if it's something that has to be dealt with by the committee, or through motions made by individual members to study certain topics.

All I will say on the prospect of the subcommittee is that everyone on that committee agreed to do derelict vessels next, and it keeps getting shoved down the road. Even when we recessed for the summer, the commitment was that we would do derelict vessels when we got back in the fall. It gets pushed down. I think that's wrong.

An hon. member: You studied [*Inaudible—Editor*] it took three parliaments to get there.

The Chair: Yes, that was another one, but we got to it and we got it done.

On the derelict vessels, though, a number of members here agreed with Ms. Barron and committed to it being the first item of business to be done when we came back in the fall. Look at it now.

The meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

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