



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 119

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1630)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 119 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Before we proceed, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. There are no witnesses in the room.

Please address all comments through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on February 8, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of derelict and abandoned vessels.

Before we get started with witness testimony and questions, Ms. Barron spoke to me before the meeting and wondered if we could go with a different format for this particular study—because it's so important to the west coast—with five-minute rounds all the way through for the time that's allocated for each session. That would be instead of going with six and then five and two and a half. I did tell Ms. Barron that I would have to put it before the committee first, that I couldn't just simply say yes or no.

Ms. Barron, you have the floor.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you for bringing it up.

I just want to clarify for my colleagues that my intention is to see if my colleagues would be open to redistributing the timing a little bit more fairly to take into account that 30 minutes will be cut off at the end.

It doesn't have to be five minutes. I'm open to any suggestions. I know we've done this in the past in previous meetings when we've looked at a redistribution of time to take into account that 30 minutes are going to be cut off at the end, and the Bloc and I are the parties who feel that the most. Based on the fact that we have three witnesses from the west coast here today, it would be great if we could redistribute the time.

I ask for my colleagues' thoughts on that.

The Chair: Do you want to chime in?

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Chair, I would agree because, first of all, it's Ms. Barron's study, and it's primarily focused on the west coast.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

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

This has just been sprung on us right now. I'd rather we either recess for a few minutes or leave the speaking times as they are for this meeting, and we can come back to it at the beginning of the next meeting.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you for the thoughts.

Just to clarify for the members' information in case it wasn't understood, the request is for today's meeting. The change in the meeting agenda was sprung on me at the last minute, so I am trying to adapt to the fact that I have three of my witnesses here and I want to make sure that questions are asked of them appropriately.

I am requesting a one-time adaptation for today's meeting, so recessing or bringing it back at the next meeting won't resolve the issue today.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: If it's one time for today, I guess we can go with that.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, we have everybody's permission, so we'll go with five-minute slots all the way down through.

I'll go back now to our witnesses for today.

From Terra Services Inc., we have Mr. David Roberts, manager, who is online.

You have five minutes for an opening statement, sir, when you're ready, please.

Mr. David Roberts (Manager, Terra Services Inc.): My name is David Roberts, and I'm the manager of Terra Services Incorporated.

We are part of an indigenous group ourselves. It's a joint venture of Terra Services Inc. and Patey's Safety and Industrial Ltd. of Newfoundland.

We have current supply arrangements with the Government of Canada for small vessel recycling. We've been doing that for the past couple of years. We have a couple of issues that maybe we can get help with.

One of them would be the funding part. We are interested in getting more information on the funding issue, especially with the equal funding from the west and east coast. There are also some issues with obtaining clarifications on becoming eligible recipients to work with the Government of Canada and other parts of the small vessel recycling. This refers to the indigenous groups.

The current wording in the Government of Canada's business legislation is about indigenous companies and indigenous groups. I'm here today asking for that to be changed to "indigenous group/company as being registered in the Indigenous Business Directory of Canada". That would enable us to take a much greater part in the vessel recycling aspect with the Government of Canada and their efforts to get this done.

A lot of the issues we have with the Government of Canada are with the wording of a lot of these regulations we have. It may have to be tweaked a bit to enable different companies, especially the indigenous companies, to avail themselves of what's out there and what's available to us. That's my biggest concern, and we can talk about that if you like.

That is the gist of it—the funding aspect and getting our name and indigenous group qualified to take part in all of these projects that the Government of Canada has.

Thanks.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Roberts.

We'll now go to rounds of questioning. We'll start off with Mr. Small for five minutes or less, please.

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

Welcome to the witnesses today who are here to take part in this study.

Mr. Chair, I'll start off with Mr. Roberts, because that's our only choice, I guess.

Mr. Roberts, you talked about how the wording of regulations was a bit of a problem with this abandoned vessel removal program. What type of wording would you like to see that could make the program more efficient, maybe?

Mr. David Roberts: What we have here, and I'm thinking that the people I've talked to in your organizations, the Fisheries and Oceans people, is that the wording has everything to do with everything, of course.

The wording for eligible recipient criteria is "an Aboriginal group". We are a group/company, and we are registered with the Indigenous Business Directory of Canada. The Indigenous Business Directory of Canada clearly states that if you're not in this directory, you cannot avail yourself of any opportunities with the Canadian government.

We are there as Terra Services Inc. and Patey's Safety and Industrial Limited. We are in the business directory, and we need the wording changed to "indigenous group/company as being registered in the Indigenous Business Directory of Canada".

• (1640)

If that were changed, it would get rid of a lot of the red tape that we are now seeing. It would be a lot smoother sailing.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Roberts, what types of vessels have you removed? What were they made of? Were they wooden, fibreglass or steel? What types of vessels have you remediated so far since you've been in this business?

Mr. David Roberts: We've removed wooden vessels, and fibreglass, fibreglass over wood, steel, aluminum and concrete boats.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you operate mostly in Atlantic Canada, Mr. Roberts?

Mr. David Roberts: Yes, and on the west coast too. We operate in B.C., and we have had projects in Ontario and Quebec.

Mr. Clifford Small: How are you finding the recycling or repurposing of what you're removing from the environment? What challenges are you facing?

Mr. David Roberts: Well, I'll give you an example of one of the biggest challenges I have seen.

The Government of Canada established a network of marine service centres right across Canada, especially here in the Atlantic provinces. There are criteria for removing derelict boats from the marine service centres. This is one of the criteria. The criteria are there for the local harbour authority managers to look after these projects and get them removed.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Roberts, are you saying it's possible that the number of derelict vessels is way underestimated? Are there a lot more around that are not registered? Is that possible?

Mr. David Roberts: In the past six years since your program came out, there are in excess of thousands of vessels just in the marine service centres in Atlantic Canada that are still there. There has been only one vessel removed from the marine service centres in the past six years through this program.

In my hometown, there are two marine service centres. One has 14 vessels and the other has 13. Because of the restrictions that we faced, we could not put a proposal in to Fisheries and Oceans to remove those vessels. The restriction was because the eligible recipient criteria was for indigenous groups only.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Roberts. We have to move on now to the next questioner.

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

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

Obviously, my questions are for Mr. Roberts.

Mr. Roberts, could you explain clearly and paint a picture for committee members about the vessels that are in these marine centres? Are they floating or are they filled with water?

Mr. David Roberts: No, they've been pulled up into the centre.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Are they out of the water?

Mr. David Roberts: They're not in the water. They have been pulled out of the water, and they are located at each of these service centres in their lots.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: They have been pulled out of the water. Are they a marine hazard to any fish stocks?

Mr. David Roberts: No, they're not. They're not [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Robert Morrissey: From your perspective, how did they arrive at the marine centres? How did they get there? I do not know the process.

Mr. David Roberts: They were pulled up there over the years as damaged vessels. They had fire damage or were leaking. They were pulled up, and they were in such a damaged state that they couldn't be used anymore, so they were left at the marine service centres.

• (1645)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Are they not a hazard to marine shipping?

Mr. David Roberts: No, they were taken up and they were stored over there.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Roberts, is there no hazard to marine shipping or to the fishery resource, the fish stocks in the area?

Mr. David Roberts: No. They are stored there.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You expressed that you work on both coasts. Do you know of any vessels that are around the coast of maritime Canada, Newfoundland, where you're from, that are a danger to fishery resources?

Mr. David Roberts: In my area alone I can claim there are maybe 15. In Atlantic Canada, there are probably thousands, especially when you go up north in Labrador. They're in the Bay of Fundy and they're all up around Baffin Island and these kinds of places. There are boats in every second cove.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What kinds of boats are these, Mr. Roberts? Are they abandoned fishing vessels or are they transport?

Mr. David Roberts: They're abandoned fishing vessels, yes, most of them.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You referenced the restrictions that you face. Can you explain what you would do with these vessels if you were not restricted? What's your intention in dealing with these vessels?

Mr. David Roberts: The Transport Canada and fisheries and oceans acts provide a service whereby the recipients—which is what we want to be, to get rid of those boats—would take those boats to a waste disposal site and get a quote for removing those vessels. The Government of Canada would be responsible for 75% of the cost, and the recipient—like us, our company—would absorb the other 25%. That is the requirement of the Government of Canada right now.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Before that funding option was available, was there any funding option available?

Mr. David Roberts: Yes, the funding option has been available since the program's inception, I think six years.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes, but before that—I'm curious—were there any funding options available before this program?

Mr. David Roberts: Yes, there were. I'm not sure.... These past six years there was.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Have you been able to safely dispose of any derelict vessels over the past number of years?

Mr. David Roberts: It was only through our standing offer with the Government of Canada, which is different.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Can you explain the difference between the two?

Mr. David Roberts: There is a difference between the two, yes. This Oceans Protection Plan and the small craft harbours and abandoned and wrecked vessels removal program just came into effect in November 2016, and I know of only one vessel taken up under that program in Atlantic Canada.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Where would it have been? Would it have been in the ocean or in a similar marine centre, as you referenced?

Mr. David Roberts: This can be in a marine service centre or in the ocean.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No, I mean the one you referred to that was taken out. My primary concern is about abandoned vessels that may still be in the ocean as a hazard to shipping or to fishing vessels, as well as a possible danger to fish stocks.

Mr. David Roberts: We have taken up several of those vessels through our supply arrangement with the Government of Canada.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You have been removing vessels that were a danger to shipping as well as fish stocks.

Mr. David Roberts: Yes. Small craft harbours and Fisheries and Oceans and Transport Canada have a list, I think, of a couple of thousand boats across Canada that they monitor and that will eventually need to come out, but there are a lot more of them out there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

We have to move now to Madame Desbiens for five minutes or less, please.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Roberts, thank you for being here.

Your testimony is very informative and very interesting, especially since you're in the eastern part of the country.

I'm looking at the numbers. We're talking about 1,046 boats to recover in British Columbia and 180 over in Quebec.

Does that last number include the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Newfoundland, or do you also have boats that need to be recovered?

[*English*]

Mr. David Roberts: I need the interpretation opened. I don't speak French, so I have to find the interpretation.

The Chair: There should be something there that says “interpretation”. You click on that and you—

Mr. David Roberts: Okay, I just found it. It's English. We may have it now.

The Chair: Madame Desbiens will be up again so that the witness can understand what she is asking.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you, Mr. Roberts, for being with us.

I was saying there are 1,046 boats to recover in British Columbia; in any case, that is the estimated number. Over in Quebec, we're talking about 180 boats, give or take. Does that number include the Newfoundland area? If not, is there a ballpark figure to add to the 180 boats that need to be recovered in the St. Lawrence?

[*English*]

Mr. David Roberts: Yes, there would. The area we live in is Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and P.E.I. There are a lot of vessels outside of the Quebec area and the St. Lawrence River area. There are many more hundreds of boats.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: On your end, we don't have the exact number of boats to recover.

There are about 1,046 boats on the west coast and 180 in the St. Lawrence. Do you have an idea of the number of boats to be recovered in the maritime provinces?

[*English*]

Mr. David Roberts: Obviously, there is no documentation done on behalf of Transport Canada or Fisheries and Oceans in the Atlantic provinces.

I have personally documented, in Newfoundland, 700 boats around my area. I would well imagine, throughout the Atlantic provinces, with fishing industry towns all around, that we have a lot of boats that are not documented.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you for your answer.

Do you think the government is doing enough to support the recovery of these boats from coast to coast?

[*English*]

Mr. David Roberts: I think the intentions are there, but getting the intentions out into the real world....

As I explained regarding the marine service centre projects, there are maybe 1,000 boats just around that service centre alone. There are all of those centres around Canada. There is no incentive for

anybody to help get those boats removed. I think the funding is there and everything else may be in place, but getting the work done is falling short of what's needed.

This is why I'm asking you to clear up some of the paperwork we need changed, so we can change some of these things and make some things happen—get some of these boats up and out of the system.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: What are the main rules you want to see changed in your favour? Are the incentives more environmental?

• (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. David Roberts: The biggest I've seen over the past couple of years are the regulations in the small craft harbours abandoned and wrecked vessels removal program. In the application guide, they list “eligible recipients”, including “a province or agency”, “a non-profit organization”, a harbour authority and “an Aboriginal group”. That is what needs to be changed. “Aboriginal group” needs to be changed to “indigenous group/company as registered in the Indigenous Business Directory of Canada”.

Once you are in that business directory—which we are—you will be eligible to participate in any vessel removal anywhere in Canada. That alone would open up a way for other indigenous companies to move in and get some of those boats out of the water.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Roberts.

Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

I will let the committee know that for the person who couldn't get on before we'll do a sound test when we stop for the changeover of the panels.

An hon. member: Will he be in the next one?

The Chair: Yes, because there's not much time to get him in on this one.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Roberts, for being here.

It's unfortunate to hear that John Roe, from the Dead Boats Disposal Society, had some technical difficulties. I do look forward to hearing from him and the other witnesses in the next panel.

Mr. Roberts, I want to take this opportunity to be able to ask some questions specific to what's happening on the east coast. It sounds like you're doing a lot of important work to clean up vessels on the east coast. It sounds like you're facing some barriers along the way, and I want to better understand that.

One thing I've been told, and I would like to get your thoughts on it, is that on the east coast we're predominantly seeing fishing vessels being abandoned. I'm wondering if you can clarify if that's also what you're seeing. On the west coast, we're seeing predominantly recreational vessels. Can you clarify that fishing vessels are what you're predominantly seeing abandoned on the east coast?

Mr. David Roberts: I would say 90%-plus of vessels abandoned on the east coast will be fishing vessels or related to the fishing industry in some way. They may be workboats, or something like that, but, yes, they're directly involved in the fishing industry.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

You're clearly out on the water. You're seeing first-hand what's happening. Do you have any ideas as to why we're seeing such an influx of fishing vessels being abandoned along the east coast?

Mr. David Roberts: These vessels have been abandoned over a period of 20 to 30 years. They didn't just happen overnight. These vessels have been sitting there in coves and beaches. Of course, when the fishing moratorium started 30 years ago, when we lost all our fish through overfishing, it put in disarray four of the Atlantic provinces. Basically, our livelihood was taken from us at that time, and the boats couldn't go fishing, and there were so many of them parked and left for.... We never had any choice. We never had any choice except to do that.

That would be the biggest reason, because, yes, people had to move away from the fishing industry and go somewhere else to work. This was the biggest cause of the boats we see around. It didn't happen overnight; it happened over a period of time.

• (1700)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Right. Thank you, Mr. Roberts. What you're saying makes a lot of sense.

In the 1990s, of course, we saw an influx of vessels being abandoned because of the cod moratorium. Can you clarify whether now, to date, you are still seeing vessels that are being abandoned?

Mr. David Roberts: Yes, there are. There are. There are vessels being abandoned every day, every month of the year, in whatever year you want to look at—

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you very much, Mr. Roberts. I just want to try to get in as many questions as I possibly can.

You were talking about the waste disposal site, and how that breaks down. Is there any recycling happening through that waste disposal site? How does that work out as far as being able to reuse any of the vessel parts is concerned?

Mr. David Roberts: When we remove a vessel that, let's say, is a wood and fibreglass boat, with an engine, transmission and all the gear in it, we would take all of the metal from the boat and bring that to a metal recycling place. The oils and lubes and that sort of thing in that vessel would be brought to another recycling place for recycling. The wood would go to another recycling place, and the fibreglass would be broken up and brought to another separate.... Some of these recycling places can look after all of this. They have all this at their site. This would come out of the ocean, come out of the water, the beach, and be brought there. It's completely recycled, and we're clean.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

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

I'd like to bring to the awareness of the committee that abandoned and derelict vessels aren't just an issue on our marine coasts. I'm aware of a situation on Shuswap Lake a few years ago. There was an abandoned houseboat that had been left over the winter. It got frozen into the ice and it sank in the spring.

It became a jurisdictional battle over who would actually be responsible for the removal of that vessel. It got tossed back and forth between Transport Canada as to whether it was a navigation hazard, DFO as to whether it was a fisheries hazard, and the ministry of environment with the province as to whether it was a pollution issue. Eventually, it was the small, regional district that actually ended up footing the bill for removing that sunken vessel from the water.

Fortunately, the costs weren't overly high, but the jurisdictional battle that takes place sometimes is inappropriate.

Mr. Roberts, in terms of the abandoned vessels you're dealing with and you're aware of, are they all of Canadian origin or are they from other countries?

Mr. David Roberts: They are all of Canadian origin.

Mr. Mel Arnold: They're all Canadian, in your case.

Are you aware of any vessels that aren't of Canadian origin on any coast?

Mr. David Roberts: I have not seen that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Traditionally, it was probably the case that wooden boats and fishing boats were allowed to return to the earth, as they decompose and don't have any environmental hazards. I assume that's not possible with the new materials that are involved.

What type of disposal is required for the various types of vessels that you mentioned? You mentioned wood. You mentioned fibreglass, fibreglass over wood, steel and aluminum.

What is required for some of the products used that aren't as easily recycled?

Mr. David Roberts: For the products that can be recycled.... Let's say it's a wooden boat. Most of the wood would go into a landfill. There's no contamination and no hazardous material there.

The wood from the bottom part of the boat, where the keel is and where your engine and all your oils are, would be contaminated with oil stains over the years and all this stuff. This would go to a hazardous waste disposal site, where they would look after it. That's what they do. They will look after all the hazardous waste.

The oils and the glues would go to another recycling facility. The metals would go to a separate site for recycling. That's how this works.

• (1705)

Mr. Mel Arnold: What happens to the hazardous materials when they get to a hazardous waste material handling site? Are they incinerated? Are they buried? Are they stockpiled?

What happens to the materials there?

Mr. David Roberts: What I see thus far is that the hazardous materials are contained at a facility. I don't know if any of them burn this. What I see here now is that it's just contained from moving anywhere else.

That's what I've been seeing.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It sounds like in time we could run into a storage space issue if there aren't methods of dealing with this hazardous material.

Mr. David Roberts: Yes.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I guess the next question is around when vessels are abandoned or when they become derelict. It appears that some vessel owners choose to just abandon a vessel rather than deal with the costs or the work of actually disposing of it.

How could vessel owners be encouraged to deal with the disposal of a vessel before they choose to abandon it?

Mr. David Roberts: I had a call just last week from a fisherman asking me the same question. He asked, "How can I get rid of my boat? I've got to bring her in. I don't know where I'm going to put her. I don't know if I can put her at the marine service centre. I'm not sure where I can put her." This guy was told that we do this type of work, and this was a question that he asked me, the same question you're asking me now. I couldn't really give him an answer.

Mr. Mel Arnold: You're—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. We've gone over.

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

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

Thanks for being with us, Mr. Roberts.

In the same vein as we were just discussing, say I have a boat, let's say a fishing boat, or on the west coast it's more likely to be a pleasure craft of some sort. What's the cost to the owner if they surrender a vessel, or do they just give it to you and away you go? Where does your money come from to cover your operation?

Mr. David Roberts: The vessels we take up now come from the Government of Canada, through Fisheries and Oceans, Transport Canada, Parks Canada or some federal agency. All federal agencies have the ability to issue a tender for derelict vessels. The cost, as I know it, is paid by the federal government.

Mr. Ken Hardie: If somebody comes to you and says that they want to surrender their vessel—they're doing the right thing, obviously—is there a cost to the vessel owner of surrendering the vessel?

Mr. David Roberts: Not as I see it. As I see it—and I'm not sure of this—in federal government programs like the one I just described to you, the small craft harbours abandoned and wrecked vessels removal program.... It says here that 75% of the cost would

be to the Government of Canada, and 25% of the cost would be borne by indigenous companies like us. It would be 25% our cost, 75% federal money and none to the boat owner. This is what—

Mr. Ken Hardie: That would be worth finding out with a bit more precision. Obviously, there must be an incentive to simply abandon the boat rather than dispose of it in a responsible manner. The only thing I could think of is that either it's the hassle of doing it or the cost of doing it that would cause somebody to just simply beach the boat or leave it tied up at a dock somewhere.

You were mentioning the release of vehicles from a marine service centre. Who has the authority to release a vessel to you for your disposal?

• (1710)

Mr. David Roberts: I have to get permission from the owner, if we can find them. The application guide from the vessel removal program for small crafts harbours describes exactly what you need to do. Ideally, you would get a letter from the owner, if we can find them.

If we can't find them, we have to go through another.... I forget the name of the route we go, but there is a route available whereby we can get that done.

The easiest way would be to find the previous owner, get him to sign off on it, and we're ready to go.

Mr. Ken Hardie: That seems to be a big deal, because vessels are abandoned, and nobody knows who owns them. In our previous session, we were talking about the lack of identification markers on the vessel that could allow us to track who owned it or who gave it up.

What would you suggest then to really make it a lot easier for everybody involved in these transactions to be able to find out who owns the vessel? What's missing here?

Mr. David Roberts: I know in other areas of the construction in there.... You are required to put a notice in your local paper that you are going to remove this vessel from this particular place. That will give 30 days for anybody in the area to respond. Outside the 30-day notice, we will be allowed to take the vessel if nobody came on board. I would go that route. That's been the route. In other areas—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes, but at the same time, the big hang-up, of course, is that you don't know who abandoned the vessel.

The nature of my question is this: What do we need to change so that we can better identify the person who most likely abandoned the vessel at wherever?

Mr. David Roberts: There is one way you could do it. We are a contractor, and we do contract work to remove the vessels. The contractor itself has the ability to find out more about a vessel than the federal government would, because the contractor doesn't work with the federal government, and we're not bound like an employee working with the federal government is bound by certain things that prevent them from doing much inquiring.

However, in our instance we have been able to find the owners of the vessels, whereas the federal government would not be able to find them.

The Chair: I have to move on now, Mr. Roberts, to Madame Desbiens for five minutes or less, please.

Go ahead, Madame Desbiens.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

I will continue by focusing on the situation in Quebec, obviously. As you know, Mr. Roberts, I represent Quebec as a member of the Bloc Québécois. Do you have any contact or communication with other indigenous groups in Quebec about abandoned boats?

[*English*]

Mr. David Roberts: No, we have taken up several boats in Quebec, but we are always on the lookout for partnerships with indigenous groups anywhere in Canada, especially in Quebec. I've spent some time working in Quebec, and I have a lot of good friends there. That would work really well with us—to partner up with indigenous groups in Quebec.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: During the last meeting, we had representatives from the Canadian Coast Guard tell us they spotted a certain number of boats in the St. Lawrence, but they had no idea what kinds of boats they were or what they contained. When it comes to Newfoundland and Labrador and the maritime provinces, do you have more detailed information? I'm thinking, for example, about boats containing fuel or questionable substances.

[*English*]

Mr. David Roberts: Yes, we are contractors. We are not restricted to what we can do investigation-wise. In my experience, we get much better results finding out information on the boats with a lot more clarity than is otherwise available today. We have good results there once we can find out where the boats are located.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Why do you have the potential or ability to achieve better results than the Canadian Coast Guard?

[*English*]

Mr. David Roberts: Our potential is much greater than the Coast Guard's because there are no restrictions on us to do the investigation. We can go into the town, and we can go back and find out who built the boat. We can find a lot of information that public servants would not be able to get to, and we'd be only too glad to help anybody out in that way.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: If I understand correctly, this committee could therefore recommend that the government do more for your organization so you could access funding, which would give you support and the ability to further develop your expertise.

[*English*]

Mr. David Roberts: Exactly, yes.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for, hopefully, five minutes or less, because we have some sound checks to do for the next hour.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Roberts. You've really been in the hot seat for this entire time. Thanks for your willingness to answer all our questions.

Following up on some of the questions you've responded to already, you were talking about how many of the vessels were abandoned in the 1990s as a result of the cod moratorium.

I have a quick side note. As everybody here knows, I'm from Newfoundland originally, and I moved to the west coast as a result of the cod moratorium, so I absolutely understand why we would have seen people who were not sure what to do with their vessel anymore and who were not sure how to best move forward.

My question is, in your experience, at what stage is it easier to clean up the vessel? Is it when the vessel is 20 years old? Is it when the vessel has just been abandoned? What does the cleanup look like, depending on the age of the vessel and how long the vessel has been in the water? What are the impacts around that? Can you tell us a bit more?

Mr. David Roberts: Yes, I can—the earlier, the better. The earlier, the same day as abandoned, if we can get there.... Every day it's abandoned, there are chances of other things happening, like fuel leaks.

Expect the unexpected. Anything can happen. Get to it as soon as you can. That's what you need to do.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Can you clarify and just expand on that a bit more?

When the vessel is not cleaned up right away, what do you see? Are there any examples you can provide to us of the impacts on the surrounding marine ecosystem, the seafood in the area, the stocks in the area and the coastal communities in the area?

What are those impacts when the vessel isn't cleaned up in a timely manner? For example, there's fuel leaking and there are all the other things that we know can happen.

Mr. David Roberts: Well, I can give you a good example there.

There was a steel vessel from my hometown, Fogo, that sank. It sank just north of Fogo. It sank about 30 years ago, and it leaked oil for 30 years. In that area, we were finding birds every year contaminated with oil—each year. It was non-stop. It was sickening to see the damage that vessel was causing to the environment in our pristine areas: Fogo and Twillingate and the northeast coast of Newfoundland.

You're a Newfoundlander. It was sickening to see that. That was not stopped until money was allocated to stop the leak.

Yes, if a vessel is not taken up in a timely fashion, you could be asking for major problems for the environment and for everybody.

• (1720)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you very much, and thank you for providing that example.

I'm going to be running out of time, and I think my last question for you will be around this. We know that the best approach is prevention and avoiding that the vessels are abandoned in the first place, of course, but we also know that there are accountabilities, or there should be accountabilities in place anyway....

It's actually listed in the 2019 act that it is illegal to abandon a vessel. We know that there has been only one fine on the east coast to a vessel owner who has abandoned their vessel. Are you familiar with this fine? Are you seeing any awareness of the fact that it is illegal to abandon one's vessel?

Mr. David Roberts: Well, I can comment.... I don't know, but I can comment on something that happened three years ago. I came into a harbour on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, and I couldn't believe what I was seeing: oil on both sides of the boat, three kilometres from the port. When I got in, I reported it to the Coast Guard, and ECRC, the cleanup crew, came out to help clean this up. Ten thousand litres were dumped in the harbour.

I'll never forget what the guy from ECRC said to me. He said: "David, there's nobody accountable—nobody. There are no fines given, nothing. The only fine is that the person who's responsible for the spill is responsible for the cleanup. There's never any fine, even offshore, to the oil rigs." That's what was told to me three years ago.

The Chair: I want to say thank you to Mr. Roberts for providing his knowledge to the committee for the first part of our meeting this afternoon.

Mr. Roberts, you can either stay online and listen to the other witnesses for the next hour, or you can sign off whenever you like. Thank you.

Mr. David Roberts: Thank you very much for putting up with me for the last hour.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll stop for a couple of moments now while the clerk does a couple of sound checks with our next witnesses.

• (1720)

(Pause)

• (1725)

The Chair: Okay, we're back for our second hour.

I want to welcome our witnesses. From the Georgia Strait Alliance, we have Mr. Jacob Banting, program coordinator for Clean Marine BC. Of course, we also have Benjamin Boulton, manager of the derelict vessel program from the Rugged Coast Research Society. Joining us in the second panel—we had hoped to get him on for the first one—we have Mr. John Roe, director of the Dead Boats Disposal Society.

Welcome to all three of you. You'll each have up to five minutes for an opening statement.

We'll go to Mr. Roe first for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. John Roe (Founding Director, Dead Boats Disposal Society): Welcome to B.C., beautiful British Columbia.

My name is John Roe. I'm one of the founding members of the Veins of Life Watershed Society and the Dead Boats Disposal Society. We formed as an organization almost 30 years ago in the cleanup and the restoration of the Victoria Harbour and the Gorge Waterway here in Victoria.

Our partners have always been heavy industry. We work with a company called Ralmax Group of Companies. They are in partnership with the Songhees and Esquimalt first nations in a facility where they have the equipment, which we need and which we always dreamed about, for Salish Sea Industrial Services.

I have personally removed probably.... Let's back up a little bit here. I participated in the provincial and the federal programs where we removed over 253, but over my lifetime, we removed over 500 with our partners...well over 500 and hundreds of tonnes of garbage. Our forte is source control, so we try to stop stuff from going in. That includes boats, but it's also marine pollution and things like that. Beach cleanups, restoration...we've been involved in that.

We're active. We have been working with our cohorts on the ground. We have received funding from the federal government and the provincial government on this, for which we're grateful, but there need to be changes here to make it more efficient.

If I can have the time to talk about that, for me, it's pretty simple. We've been at this for a long time. Again, I listened to the last conversation, spouting off the number of 1,600 vessels. Well, it's double if not triple that. There's no indication of what's under the water. We deal with water in the tidal areas, with 60-foot up to 80-foot boats. We do surveys and drone work of the surface, air and underwater, and I'll tell you that there's a lot more there. Our organization works from Port Renfrew all the way to the top of the tip of Alaska.

We need a different plan; let's put it that way. We need to go in and survey these areas. We need to see what's in each one of these bays and inlets, and then we need to put it out to tender for removal. We have these programs—a fishnet program, a beach cleanup program and this program—and there's no integration of all this. The monies that we're spending are way beyond reason. The monies going out are just....

For instance, in 2017, before the federal government got involved with the derelict and abandoned boats program, we took out 14 boats from Cadboro Bay. I seized them under my own personal name before the Dead Boats Disposal Society was formed, and we took them off for \$14,700. Today, the cost of those boats is about \$14,700 each. Everybody got paid except for me. I'm just a volunteer in all this.

We need to take a hard look at what we're doing. We need to come up with a plan here, and we need to implement it. There are just so many issues to talk about. You touched on them before. Disposal—there is no real place to dispose of it in B.C. We have a lot of land transfer stations. They don't want it in their dumps, so we end up bringing it back to the capital regional districts with our partners. Then we have to go through a solid process of testing, which is added to the cost, and I understand that. However, what is showing up are heavy metals—mercury, zinc, copper, asbestos and all that—which we knew were present before, but the data helps to prove what we're saying, which is that you have to get them out of the ocean in the first place.

I'm open to questions. We've been at it, like I say, for 30 years, and we work everywhere. Thank you.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

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

Mr. Jacob Banting (Program Coordinator, Clean Marine BC, Georgia Strait Alliance): Thank you for having me.

I am Jacob Banting. I'm with the Georgia Strait Alliance where I'm the program coordinator for Clean Marine BC.

I'll give you a little background. For nearly 35 years, Georgia Strait Alliance has stood as a leading advocate for environmental protection in the Salish Sea region. As Clean Marine BC's coordinator, I specialize in boater outreach, mostly recreational boaters. We connect with thousands of boaters per year, and we also run an eco-certification program for boatyards, marinas, yacht clubs—any boating facility on the coast here. We provide training and education, distribute resources, try to mobilize around the issues that are impacting communities, listen to folks who are reaching out to us, and ensure that our work is relevant and impactful for the health of the region.

I come from a background of managing a harbour authority where I'm from on the traditional territories of the Tla'amin people in qathet on the beautiful upper Sunshine Coast in B.C. In the harbour I was managing, I got to see, first-hand, vessel abandonment. It wasn't too often, but sometimes it was sinking due to negligence or accidental, which does happen.

However, you also see community involvement, as well as the delays and restrictions caused by the system in place. There is also the juggling of jurisdiction on vessels when there is such a gap, when a vessel could be removed and kept afloat as opposed to letting it sit for six months and then having its hull crack. The next thing you know it is chopped up and ends up in a landfill. One thing we've heard from calling around to the different groups that are actually removing these vessels is just the different insights regarding jurisdictions. A lot of municipalities don't want to take these vessels. There are so many ways to address this issue.

In B.C. alone, protecting marine biodiversity... Where I was from, the harbour authority that I was managing was right next to a shellfish bed, so food security is on the table and safeguarding human health, knowing that shellfish are absorbing all these toxins. One day it's red tide and pretty soon we'll be testing for plastics in

bivalves. That chain of toxicity is making its way up the food chain to larger fish and to marine mammals and then up to whales and seabirds. The list goes on with the detrimental effects to ecosystems and communities, and the economic impacts that can be had. The risks associated with food contamination affect us all, but it's central to indigenous food sovereignty, marine governance and even reconciliation.

Having seen it first-hand, from reporting it and then, as I mentioned, the juggling around, there is a lack of transparency and statistics. I feel like there's a lot of “we've taken out x number of vessels” from, say, Transport Canada, but there are not enough numbers on.... In our program, I always look for continual improvement with facilities and boaters, but I think part of that is seeing what's not working, giving those numbers out and then working with the groups that are actually doing the removals, as well as the local first nations, to try to find the solutions.

If we look at different states, we see that Washington state is a great example for registration. Seeing what's not working is a huge part in improving, and I don't know if enough of that is being done right now.

We're supporting Bill C-344 through our supporters, who have sent out nearly 1,600 signatures and letters to local MPs. We're reinforcing more work, and I feel like the list could go on. I think that, for me, prevention is....

I think the number that's been going out is that, for every vessel in B.C., five are added, so preventing more through better registration, licensing.... More boats are ending up in the water and then being turned away, so there is something wrong with our system there. Advocating for it, getting community support, first nations'...and more input are definitely vital to that.

• (1735)

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Benjamin Boulton (Manager, Derelict Vessel Program, Rugged Coast Research Society): Good afternoon.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to appear as a witness on the study of derelict and abandoned boats.

My name is Ben Boulton. I am the derelict vessel program manager with the Rugged Coast Research Society, located on Vancouver Island. Today I'm calling in from Yuułu?ı̨?at̓ territory in Ucluelet, B.C.

Rugged Coast has been around since 2017, focusing on “boots on the ground” action in anthropogenic stressors removal, be they shoreline cleanups or derelict vessels and aquaculture sites. That’s been our main focus. As of last year, my main focus has been removing derelict vessels from very remote, hard-to-reach nooks and crannies off Vancouver Island.

Our program runs in partnership with our host nations’ governments. We value meaningful connection with our indigenous partners in our projects. That’s been at the forefront of our operation over the last few years. Over the last year, we’ve removed 52 vessels between Ka:’yu:’k’t’h’ and Che:k’tles7et’h’ traditional territory and Hesquiaht territory. We are slated to remove another 20 vessels before the year is out. With the week I’ve had, it seems that number may be higher. I’ve been dealing with small craft harbours and the Coast Guard non-stop this week over vessels sinking up and down the west coast. We’re likely to see that number increase over the next few weeks.

Unfortunately, this last year has only been a starting point for our operations. Working with communities up and down the coast, we identified an initial 200 vessels that are not in the registry. As Mr. Roe mentioned, the number 1,046—or wherever that number stands at this point—is grossly underestimated. A good example I like to bring forward is our project in Ka:’yu:’k’t’h’ and Che:k’tles7et’h’ territory last year. When we went in, we were looking at removing 12 vessels. We ended up removing 35 vessels. That gives you a bit of context on what is known versus what is actually out there. There are many more vessels pending further subtidal analysis and survey.

Some of the challenges we’ve been experiencing over the last few years include the criteria and the costs required to dispose of a vessel in a remote community. These are extremely high. When you look at a remote community on the west coast of Vancouver Island, or anywhere up the central and north coast, having a vessel is a way of life. It’s a livelihood. It’s a necessity. When your boat becomes unusable at the end of its life, what are you going to do with it? Typically, it’s going to cost a few thousand dollars to remove it. If you are in an economically challenged area, with a lack of work or seasonal work, a couple of thousand dollars to dispose of a vessel is huge. What are you left to do?

Another piece is that we have an aging population in this country. Sickness and death are factors in a lot of the vessels we’ve been looking at. Vessel owners pass away or leave communities to seek medical aid. Then their vessels sink and become abandoned. Something that should be looked at federally, as well as provincially, is offering disposal programs for remote communities.

Right now, disposal and funding initiatives.... While there is funding, there are limitations. We have noticed that these funds are diminishing, as I am sure a lot of other organizations have—ones working under the abandoned boats program, the small craft harbours program, the “Clean Coast, Clean Waters” program and other derelict vessel initiatives. They come with a lot of different requirements. Small groups are not necessarily able to access these funds.

The permitting process around removing derelict vessels is cumbersome. If we do not have a vessel owner present, we have to go through the section 38 authorization process, which includes a 30-

day notice period. Often—especially in the summertime, when there are people out of the office—it can take up to two months to get these section 38s in-hand so we can assess and remove a vessel. Two months is a long time, especially when we’re getting into the fall season. Right now, we have five-metre seas on the west coast. We’re going to be seeing a lot more vessels going down and sinking in the next few months here.

• (1740)

Currently, end-of-life disposal options are limited. We don’t end up recycling a lot from the vessels we remove. Sure, we get the metals, batteries, fluids and fuels. However, there isn’t a stream that exists right now for meaningful fibreglass recycling. This is something that R and D funding should focus on, in our opinion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulton. You have gone over your time. Hopefully, anything you didn’t get to say will come out in the lines of questioning.

We’ll now go to Mr. Bragdon for five minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses today for appearing and taking the time to be here, as well as for the valuable work that you provide Canadians. I have a few questions I’ll ask each of you panellists to start this off.

In your opinion, has the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act achieved its stated purpose? If so, or if not, please explain why.

Try to keep the answer fairly brief. I know that’s a wide-open question, but I have a couple of other questions I want to follow up with. We’ll start with the guy with his finger up.

It’s John Roe.

Mr. John Roe: I have had the privilege of seizing many vessels. I have become the resident expert in this province on seizures and disposals and things like that.

The system has gotten better. Is it working? Not in the slightest. As Mr. Boulton mentioned, it can take up to two months. At one time, it would take up to a year or so.

As a non-profit, we were very reluctant to go through the process of seizure ourselves because the possibility of being sued, even with a salvage licence, is very real. It takes just one lawsuit. It’s the suit that will get you. It’s not the winning or the losing of the suit.

Is the system working the way it sits? No, it’s not.

Again, we've had two fines on the west coast. With one person, personally, before this program started and the law changed, I took out nine of his boats. He got fined for another boat left in Cadboro Bay. Now he's in the process of leaving three more in just around the corner from Cadboro Bay. He's an abuser. He's one of many who take our oceans for granted.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: I think what we're finding is a lot of frustration building around this. We're hearing from testimony that there's cumbersome regulation around it, but we're also seeing the lack of a clear plan. We know what the overall objective is, but we're being strangled in the process.

What restrictions do you wish could be removed the most quickly? What are the biggest hurdles that need to be removed the most quickly to help you get to what you need to do and to implement that?

Mr. Roe, I'll start with you again.

Mr. John Roe: It's the collection of the data. The information the federal government is providing now is from a survey done in 2014 and published in 2016. I got it through an FOI request, but it wasn't actually open to the public until almost 2020. I went out in 2017 and looked for all those 1,700 boats. I found maybe 400 of them. The rest of them had either gone or disappeared. In the meantime, I found a lot more. One of the problems with the thing is a proper inventory.

This is where we non-profits can specialize. It's not so much in the disposal. I would like to leave that to heavy industry in a bidding process to break it up more equally and bring the costs down, but what we can do as a non-profit is go in and survey these bays and look for everything. We can look at stormwater. We can look at...

We need to rebuild our fisheries here in B.C. A lot of it stems from the estuaries, where the damage is. We have old, abandoned docks. We have lots of abandoned boats. Take a look from the tidal area all the way to 60-feet deep. Let's do a survey there and present it back to the federal government. The federal government will go and present it and put it out to tender. Pick a bay or an inlet or anything else—pick five of them.

The organization I work with is a big organization when it gets on the ground. It costs us about \$20,000 a day to put our barges and cranes in the water. That's expensive, but it's not when you compare it to how much we can do in a day. We went out to a job site in Burgoyne Bay in the first application, and we took out 17 boats in four days. We lost 10 days due to bad weather because it was in the wrong time of year.

The most important things are what's out there and how do we train the public to identify what is an abandoned boat and what's not an abandoned boat. What you might think is an abandoned boat and what is an abandoned boat...after working through this process, a lot of the time, it's not. It's getting that information and getting it correct, and then governments step in and ask how much it's going to cost to do this. It's going to do it in July and August. Let the big companies bid on it.

• (1745)

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you, Mr. Roe.

I think my time's expired. I just wanted to thank you for that. It was a very thorough answer, and I appreciate your passion. I think we got a lot out of what you said.

I apologize to the other witnesses. I didn't get to my questions for you, but that's all good.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Hardie now for five minutes or less, please.

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

Mr. Roe, you mentioned lawsuits. What was the nature of them? Who was suing whom and why?

Mr. John Roe: For a non-profit or anybody who seizes a boat, there's a whole procedure. If I want to grab a boat as salvage without going through section 38, I have to hold it for 30 days. I have to document everything I've done to it. There are international salvage laws. You're never going to change that.

The danger of that is that if I seize a boat as a non-profit and then go through my 30 days and I still haven't identified it—I have to put it in the paper and I have to make every notice that I can—I'm still liable for that boat. Even when I dispose of it, I'm still technically liable by law. The danger is there.

There was an example in Salt Spring Island about seven or eight years ago when the harbour authority called me up and asked for my advice. A boat had sunk at their facility. I said, "This is what you have to do." Well, they didn't do it, and they got sued. They were found liable for almost \$10,000 for a boat that was completely garbage.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Who sued them?

Mr. John Roe: It was the owner of the boat.

Mr. Ken Hardie: So the owner finally came forward and said, "Hey, that's my boat."

Mr. John Roe: Yes. I had been trying to tell them for months. They had the paperwork and they had documented everything else, but they didn't do the proper procedures for the salvage routine. That's just the salvage; that's not section 38, which is handled by Transport Canada and is a whole different matter.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We would appreciate something in writing, off-line, with some suggestions on how we can clean that up. That would be good.

Mr. John Roe: I've written something.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

Mr. Boulton, the description of your activities was quite impressive.

We've done other studies on the west coast, particularly where it involved cleaning up beaches. I know Ms. Barron launched a study into containers that were lost overboard and the stuff coming up on shore. It seems that a feature of the west coast is quite a number of small, independent volunteer organizations without a lot of coordination. I'm concerned that we're missing economies of scale. We're missing something with enough gravitas and capabilities to have the infrastructure available to do this work efficiently.

Has there been any initiative you're aware of to try to pull all of these small volunteer groups together into something bigger and more effective?

Mr. Benjamin Boulton: This seems reminiscent of the *Zim Kingston* committee meetings, describing the small volunteer organizations.

I wouldn't qualify Rugged Coast as a small volunteer organization. We've been conducting large-scale anthropogenic stressor removals up and down the coast. I don't want to dwell on this point too much, but maybe that's something we can chat about at a later date.

A couple of the organizations are actually conducting a significant portion of the removals up and down the coast. As for lumping these organizations into one, a group that goes out and does volunteer beach cleanups is very different from an organization such as ours, which conducts industrial-scale beach cleanups as well as vessel salvage and cleanup and aquaculture site removal.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Identifying the owners of vessels has been an ongoing issue that we've heard a fair bit about over time on this committee. How would you recommend cleaning up the system so it's easier to identify an owner, either in terms of the registration process or the identification of the vessel itself? What are we missing? Why is it so hard?

• (1750)

Mr. Benjamin Boulton: A big piece of that is the process that the federal government, the Coast Guard, DFO, small craft harbours and Transport Canada implement in order to find the vessel owners.

We're friends with a lot of the communities we work with. We have a rapport we've built with the community and a mutual respect. Finding and locating a vessel owner is a lot easier on our end. I can make two phone calls, whereas it will take weeks through the federal process to identify an owner.

Mr. Ken Hardie: What can the vessel manufacturers do? In particular, we get the notion that many of the abandoned vessels on the west coast are pleasure craft, so what can the pleasure craft industry do to basically improve the situation when their product gets to the end of life?

The Chair: I would ask for that answer to be sent in writing, because Mr. Hardie's time has expired. I'm trying to get through the round so that everybody gets to ask questions.

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

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Chair, I would like to give the witness the chance to finish his answer.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead with your answer, Mr. Boulton.

Mr. Benjamin Boulton: Pardon me. My translation was not turned on. Was that directed at me?

The Chair: Yes.

Go ahead with your answer to the question from Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Benjamin Boulton: Mr. Hardie, could you please repeat your question?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes. Ms. Desbiens was giving you the opportunity to answer the question that I asked, and that is, what can the vessel manufacturers do to make the whole process more effective and efficient, especially in terms of identifying who owns a vessel?

Mr. Benjamin Boulton: That might be difficult, especially if you're dealing with older community members who aren't necessarily registering their vessels, but identifiers.... Typically, all vessels are required to have a hull identifier number. Now, over time, that number tends to be removed by wear and tear. That would be something that the federal government could look into: mandating some sort of a tracking device, if you will, or a more robust hull identifier number, in order to locate those vessels.

I would disagree that the majority of the vessels we find on the west coast are pleasure craft. About half of the vessels we are removing are ex-commercial fisheries and other commercial vessels on the west coast of Vancouver Island. I'm sure that Mr. Roe and Mr. Banting can speak to that as well.

On the east side, I do know that there are quite a lot of abandoned sailboats. Maybe Mr. Roe can field that question and provide that answer.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I will continue with you, Mr. Boulton.

I keep coming back to the same question. I represent Quebec, obviously, because I am part of the Bloc Québécois.

Do you communicate with groups similar to yours over in Quebec?

[*English*]

Mr. Benjamin Boulton: At this moment, we do not. We are focused on boots-on-the-ground removals, and we are in the peak of the field season right now. If we can find extra time, I'd love to, but unfortunately my days are packed.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Is there a witness who might have any kind of contact with representatives in Quebec on this issue?

[*English*]

Mr. John Roe: No, not at the moment.

To speak to that subject and that sort of thing, I just got back from a trip for a couple of weeks on the Rideau River. When I was out there, I got pulled over by the RCMP, the OPP and their natural resources people. In Ontario, as in Quebec, the licensing of pleasure craft is managed by the province itself. If I did not have the certification of the vessel and my driver's licence.... Insurance is not mandatory, but they do ask for it if you want to pull into a marina.

In B.C., I've been trying to lobby our provincial government to take that responsibility, just for pleasure craft, to where it's more easily managed. If you're going to get your driver's licence, you register your boat at the same time, and whatever procedures we need to put in to do safety checks.... In Washington state, before a vessel goes in the water and gets insured and plated, it has to pass a safety inspection, and that's done by voluntary groups down in Washington state.

• (1755)

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That means we are somewhat ahead in Quebec when it comes to this.

[English]

Mr. John Roe: They're always way ahead, yes.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That is good news.

I have only a few seconds left. I would like to know what Mr. Banting has to say; we have not heard from him.

Do you have any information on Quebec regarding this matter, Mr. Banting?

[English]

Mr. Jacob Banting: With Quebec, no, I have nothing there.

I would reiterate what John was saying, to follow suit in how they're doing it down in Washington state. One thing is that we could have better registration and stamps on hulls—whether or not you have to get a new sticker annually—but we also have to think about enforcement. Whether those boats are actually being checked while they're on the water is a whole other game there.

I'm sorry. That doesn't really answer the question about Quebec.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We now go to Ms. Barron for five minutes or less, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

My biggest task in this question period is getting all of the incredible wealth of information that we have from the three witnesses in a short period of time.

Thank you and welcome to the witnesses who are here. I'm so happy that my colleagues are hearing from you today all the information that you have to provide.

My first question is for Mr. Banting. You mentioned the certification program Clean Marine BC. Can you tell us a little more about what that looks like?

Mr. Jacob Banting: It's a voluntary eco-certification program. Currently, we have 44 certified facilities, from harbour authorities to yacht clubs, marinas and boatyards. It's a three-year audit process based on an anchor rating system, just to see where the facilities' environmental best practices are at. We give them a score every three years and they hold that certification. We check everything from dock materials to waste conception and energy, and then we help these facilities build their goals and reach those goals. It can be little things, such as "Our goal is to remove creosote pilings within the next five years," all the way down to lighting systems. It's a vast program, which we're looking to expand and to have those facilities help educate boaters as well.

One of our facilities has a unique recycling program, at Shelter Island Marina & Boatyard on the Fraser River. Their boat recycling is completely contained, and they do their best to recycle all the materials coming out. Any water that's washing down into their drainage system is contained, filtered and then reused for power washing there.

It's about finding more incentives for facilities and, hopefully, promoting what they have to other boatyards and continuing that work, but it's also speaking to them about what's working or not working. We're hearing that, say, 10 boaters per week call to have their boat recycled, and when they hear the cost maybe three of them recycle it. Depending on the materials, it can range from \$100 to \$1,000 per foot, so the list...it grows there on the cost.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Banting.

Can you tell us a bit more about Washington state? You used that as an example for us to look at, an example of doing things properly or an example of how things are going well. Can you tell us a bit more about that, please?

Mr. Jacob Banting: Compared to the vessel remediation fund, where it's every five years, in Washington state it is every year. I can't remember the exact number that you'd pay, on top, into their boat disposal, but Washington state has boat turn-in programs every year. We don't have as many here—not that I'm aware of—or we may have had them in the past. I think that John or Benjamin could answer that a little better than I could.

Implementing that and enforcing that.... Right now, who's patrolling the waters daily and checking registration on vessels? I've been on boats for many years, and I was never actually checked for registration. I know many people who have second and third boats that aren't registered. They're there just as a backup boat.

Benjamin mentioned before that boating is vital in many communities, so it's hard to check. I've had vessels come in that are from the States, with no numbers on them or anything. When you ask for the registration, they can just say, "I'm not giving that to you." There's no name on the boat, no way to identify it. You can call the RCMP—

• (1800)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much.

I'll move to Mr. Boulton.

Mr. Boulton, you gave us some really great examples of some of the compounding issues of individuals being economically challenged and being vessel owners and what that looks like. This may be a bit of a challenging question for me to ask you, but I'm wondering whether you have any thoughts around what would be a best practice. It shouldn't be easier for vessel owners to abandon their vessel than to clean it up properly. What are your thoughts around what could be put into place to avoid this continuing to happen, taking into account boat owners' unique circumstances?

Mr. Benjamin Boulton: It's incentivizing disposal, and creating disposal for remote communities specifically, and at the federal level looking at the implementation of legislation with those small communities in mind, with proper consultation. I'll leave it at that: funding for removals, funding for disposal, with a focus on small communities.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Ms. Barron. You're right on time.

We'll now go to Mr. Arnold for five minutes or less, and I understand he's sharing his time with Mr. Stewart.

I'll leave that up to you, Mr. Arnold.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for providing your information today.

I asked this question of a previous panellist, and I'll ask it again of all three of you. I'll start out with—I'll do a reverse order here—Mr. Boulton first.

What could be done to incentivize vessel owners to take their vessels for disposal rather than abandoning them somewhere else so that someone else has to deal with the disposal?

Mr. Boulton.

Mr. Benjamin Boulton: It would be a well-known program in a community. If folks are aware.... Whenever we're working in a community, we get a lot of questions, and oftentimes, people say, I have a boat, and we can sign it over to you guys if you can do the removals. That tends to work out.

If there's a federally backed program where folks can sign their vessels over to certified contractors to remove the vessels before

they become abandoned, that would be of great aid to these communities and these individuals.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Mr. Banting.

Mr. Jacob Banting: I agree, it would be higher incentives for boaters to want to. Especially with the cost of living here in B.C., it's not easy to go and recycle your own boat when you hear those costs. Yes, I agree with Mr. Boulton that there needs to be more funding for programs like that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Roe.

Mr. John Roe: I can share with you a document that I wrote for Jean Chrétien, Mr. Harper and now our current Prime Minister, Justin. We need a program in B.C. to where.... We had a very similar program here back in the eighties, for the disposal of cars. I happened to be in Ontario at the time. I got appointed from the company I was working with to come out and work here, so it was interesting.

You had an abandoned car program that still continues on in B.C. We need the same sort of program for boats in B.C., where we'll come out and pick a particular port and say, come out on the May 24 weekend. Our barge and crane and everything will be there. You pre-register your vessel. We go through the proper paperwork, and then we dispose of it correctly. You have to get rid of the.... You have to have source control. You have to stop it from going in before we can deal with what we have. We're not catching up to the game, as they say.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

It sounds more like preventative work than after-the-fact work. If we can get the vessels contained or managed before they become abandoned, that would be a more efficient use of energy and resources and time. Is that correct?

Mr. John Roe: Exactly. We collect a huge amount of data. We have a Facebook page. We also have our website, and people file with it. They file with it before they file with government most of the time. We have a pretty large database of what's happening out there, and people continually contact us. We need to stop it.

What I've observed, because we do a lot of drone work, is that we're getting an increase of vessels because people see it as a freebie without going through any legal aspects, so they're just dropping their boats off in the water. In urban areas like Victoria, we kind of cured that, but where I live in Salt Spring, through the Gulf Islands, up towards Sechart and all that, there are more boats being left just because there's this program here. Nobody knows who owns them, and people say, "It's not my problem," you know?

• (1805)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay, thank you.

I'll go back to Mr. Boulton now, if I can.

It looks like someone can purchase an almost dead vessel and use it as a home in a harbour somewhere with relatively low moorage fees compared to purchasing a typical home on land. There are no taxes to pay and so on.

With the cost of living increases that we've seen and the difficulty in home ownership or even home rental, I can see where people are maybe choosing a vessel as their home, and as they continue to move deeper into poverty and are not able to maintain it, they have to abandon that vessel or it becomes derelict.

Identifying an owner may be effective for an owner who is solvent, who has assets, but what happens when an owner has no assets to go after when they've abandoned a vessel?

Describe that situation, Mr. Boulton.

Mr. Benjamin Boulton: We have not encountered that situation. That would be more in Mr. Roe's jurisdiction, with the proximity of his organization to the southern Gulf Islands. We do see a lot of people who are financially disabled in terms of owning old industry boats and disposing of them. I can only speak to that.

Perhaps Mr. Roe can speak to that a bit further.

Mr. John Roe: Thank you. I will—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Roe. Mr. Arnold's time has run out. If you have anything on that particular question, please submit it to the clerk and we'll include it in our testimony.

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

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for the work they do and for their advocacy on an issue that's a really, really important one locally.

I'll do one better than to give Mr. Roe the opportunity to submit something in writing. I'd be very interested to hear the answer to that question.

What do you do in those cases where the owner of a vessel doesn't have those types of assets or the wherewithal? What do you do in those kinds of situations?

Mr. John Roe: We deal a lot with live-aboards. Our policy is that we don't really ask questions. Really, the highest percentage of the live-aboards who actually abandon their stuff is maybe 2% or 3% of the total volume of boats. We have a standard, and we have for the last 30 years. We offer them services. If you're in a struggling time, we will find the monies to help you get rid of your garbage, dispose of your boats, get rid of your docks and things like that.

It's just the general concept of people leaving their boats. I know that the government and everybody says to make the owner pay. Well, the problem is that we can't find the owners. We need to take that initial money, and if it's 2,000 boats or 2,500 boats or 3,000 boats, we need to spend the resources to get rid of those and then deal with licensing the newer boats so that we can make people accountable for what they own.

Does that make sense?

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Very much so, Mr. Roe. It kind of gets to my next point, because I think as much as possible, we want to make sure that we can prevent the boats from sinking in the first place.

I know that a big frustration I have, or that many folks in my riding have, is that we have these programs for once the boat actually sinks, but it's extremely expensive. It also has a major cost to the environment. I think we need to do as much as we can to prevent that.

I have a couple of questions, maybe first to you, Mr. Banting. You mentioned the interest in having better registration and licensing. Right now, Transport Canada is developing regulations to modernize pleasure craft licensing. I'm wondering if you might have feedback for this committee about that process and just more generally about how we can ensure through licensing, both through new vessels but also through existing vessels, so that we can hold boat owners accountable. In many cases, instead of disposing of those boats, they may find a way of selling them off in a way to not have that accountability.

I'm very curious about your thoughts on the registration and licensing as a way of mitigating that risk.

Mr. Jacob Banting: Yes, definitely for prevention I think it's... Knowing right now how many fines have been handed out since 2019, it's not going to deter that many people from wanting to go ahead with it. I haven't seen the number of registered vessels annually, or how many people are actually going out and registering their boats, so it's hard for me to answer on whether there is a vast number of boaters. I'm not sure if any of the other witnesses has an answer to that.

As I said, looking at where it's working, such as Washington state, it's definitely vital. People don't want to pay more; that's the thing. It's about finding ways to give them the incentives to go out and register their boat. In terms of the chain of ownership, yes, there are those legacy vessels that don't have owners. That's a very hard one to touch on.

• (1810)

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Absolutely. I think we have a fairly good system in B.C. with oil tanks that are left within residential properties and tying that back to the existing owner. I wonder if there might be something similar that we could look at in this regard as well, to ensure that we can tie it back to somebody who does have those resources.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Roe. I think he had an intervention he wanted to make.

Mr. John Roe: Again, it goes back to trying to register a boat now. It's almost impossible. I took a boat the society owns and donated it to another society. It was a six-month process to change that ownership. It was just insane.

Again, in B.C., we'd be farther ahead getting it as a pleasure craft and having ICBC take care of it for a yearly fee. For my whole life, I have been against insuring a vessel that was registered, but now I'm in this industry more. The only way to pay for it is through insurance. Get it done. I insist that, if you're going to get a boat on the water, you're going to need insurance on it. It's one of those things we have to rethink.

People are unaware that the enforcement of ownership of these vessels is not done by Transport Canada. It's the RCMP in B.C., but they do not have any funds. I deal with the RCMP. Because we're in a border area, I deal with customs, immigration and things like that. The RCMP are the ones who are supposed to come up to your boat and say, "Give me your ownership documents. Give me your licence. Give me your this and that." They don't have the resources or the time. That's another thing that has to change. The RCMP has

to get resources to get boats, then train people to go out and inspect them. I get pulled over because I have a big fishing boat, but that's about it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Roe, Mr. Banting and Mr. Boulton.

Thank you, everyone, for appearing—albeit by video conference—for our committee work today.

We will suspend for a moment now as we move in camera to do a bit of committee business like approving a couple of budgets.

Again, thank you, one and all, for your participation.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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