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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1105)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting 120 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 will make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Please address all comments through the chair.

Before we hear from witnesses, I would like the committee to adopt the budget in the amount of \$96,150 for the Fisheries Act statutory review. Keep in mind that we have eight meetings on that study and that a lot of people have demonstrated their interest in appearing. The travel amount for the witnesses is appropriate.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on September 16, the committee is commencing its study on the impact of the reopening of the cod fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec.

Welcome to our witnesses. From the Department of Fisheries we have Adam Burns, assistant deputy minister, programs sector; on Zoom we have William McGillivray, regional director general, Newfoundland and Labrador region; and Bernard Vigneault, director general, ecosystem sciences directorate. Thank you for taking the time to appear today. You will have five minutes or less for your opening statement.

Mr. Burns, you have the floor.

Mr. Adam Burns (Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Chair.

Good morning, everyone. My colleagues and I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee.

I begin by acknowledging that the land on which we are gathered today is the traditional territory of the Algonquin and Anishinabe people. Through generations, indigenous peoples have been stewards of the land and the water.

[Translation]

Today, we're happy to be here discussing the reopening of the northern cod fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is essential that we begin by emphasizing the importance of northern cod to Newfoundland and Labrador's economy and culture. The species is woven into the province's history and traditions.

[English]

Prior to the moratorium in 1992, the groundfish fishery dominated the industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. At that time in the province there were close to 24,000 registered fish harvesters as well as a significant offshore component, with landings of northern cod in the range of 500,000 tonnes and a landed value of about \$300 million.

[Translation]

The moratorium on the northern cod fishery has had a profound impact on all aspects of life in the province, particularly in coastal communities.

[English]

Over the years the department collaborated with industry on various initiatives, including sentinel surveys and the establishment of the stewardship fishery in 2006, in conjunction with the Fish, Food and Allied Workers-Unifor. The stewardship fishery fostered a culture of stewardship among harvesters, contributed valuable data for stock assessments and enhanced our understanding of the resource status of northern cod.

[Translation]

In October 2023, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans held a meeting of the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat to review the northern cod assessment model.

[English]

In this meeting, consensus was reached on significant improvements to the northern cod assessment model. Using this updated model, the stock was considered to be in the cautious zone of the precautionary framework. Recognizing the change in the stock status and its potential impact on management approaches, the department convened a special session of the groundfish advisory committee to discuss access and allocation for a potential reopening of the northern cod commercial fishery. This session included participation by the Newfoundland and Labrador government, harvesting and processing representatives, indigenous partners and non-governmental organizations.

[Translation]

In March 2024, a full stock assessment confirmed that the northern cod stock remained in the cautious zone.

[English]

Following the stock assessment, we reconvened the groundfish advisory committee to gather perspectives on the 2024 northern cod management approach. While northern cod has a unique legacy, it is subject to the department's robust consultation process before any management decisions are made.

The 2024 management approach for northern cod is cautious yet optimistic. It provides for a modest increase, from the roughly 13,000-tonne stewardship fishery, to an 18,000-tonne commercial fishery in the current management plan. The decision to provide a majority allocation of over 90% of the TAC to the inshore sector and indigenous groups reflects a commitment to those who have long been the custodians of the ocean. It also recognizes the Canadian offshore fleet's historical role in this fishery, with the majority of its northern cod allocation held by Newfoundland and Labrador interests. Their allocation supports operations that employ hundreds in coastal communities and helps to establish a consistent year-round supply of cod.

It is important to note that northern cod is a straddling fish stock, a portion of which is present in international waters. As a responsible fishing nation, the department is required to consider Canada's international obligations under the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization. Canada must co-operate with other countries on the sustainable management of relevant fish stocks through participation in regional fisheries management organizations. Canada has negotiated strong conservation measures to limit catches in the NAFO regulatory area outside the Canadian 200-nautical-mile limit. The department is a key contributor to comprehensive fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance programs in the NAFO regulatory area. There are specific rules to protect this stock, including strict small quotas, seasonal closure, gear requirements and minimum sizes. The limited NAFO allocation will be stringently monitored.

[Translation]

Lastly, the department's objective is to work with all its partners to support a modern and sustainable fishery through strong management measures and a shared desire to restore and sustainably manage this stock.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burns.

We now go to Mr. Small for six minutes, please.

• (1110)

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today to take part in this important study.

Mr. Chair, my first question is to Mr. Burns. Mr. Burns, in 2015 Prime Minister Trudeau promised full access, for the first 115,000 metric tons of northern cod, to the inshore fleet. Is this a promise that he could keep?

Mr. Adam Burns: As I mentioned in my opening comments, over 90% of the available quota is—

Mr. Clifford Small: Could he have kept that promise? Is that a legitimate promise to make, Mr. Burns?

Mr. Adam Burns: In taking her decision, the minister considered a number of factors—

Mr. Clifford Small: No, but would you consider it to be a legitimate promise, with your knowledge?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister, in her announcement, made clear that her objective was for a year-round fishery.

Mr. Clifford Small: No, but was the promise that was made by the Prime Minister for the first 115,000 tonnes a legitimate promise? Was that a promise that could be kept, based on your knowledge of NAFO commitments and whatnot? Could he have kept that promise or was it a fake promise?

Mr. Adam Burns: The allocation decision is one that was taken by the minister, and as was stated in the—

Mr. Clifford Small: The big controversy here, and especially from the FFAW-Unifor point of view, is that the promise was made for the 115,000 metric tons. Was that a legitimate promise? Could he have kept that promise, or did he make a promise that he knew or should have known he couldn't keep?

Mr. Adam Burns: In her June 2024 announcement regarding her decisions related to the allocation of this year's quota, the minister laid out some specific socio-economic considerations, including the importance of a year-round supply of fish, which is something that requires a variety of fleets to participate in. Obviously, as you know, there's not the ability to fish in the winter months, for example, and so those considerations were the elements that informed the minister's decision.

Mr. Clifford Small: But still, could you answer that question? Is it possible that a promise of 115,000 metric tons to the inshore fleet could be kept?

Mr. Adam Burns: I can only speak to the decisions that were taken and the rationale they were based on.

Mr. Clifford Small: Based on your knowledge—

Mr. Adam Burns: Those decisions were based on a variety of factors, specifically the socio-economic—

Mr. Clifford Small: The question is, could he have kept that promise, yes or no?

Mr. Adam Burns: The decision was taken by the minister—

Mr. Clifford Small: Could you say yes or no? Was it possible for that 115,000-tonne promise to be kept?

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The rules of the House are followed by this committee. The questioner is harassing the witness by asking him to respond to and making comments that the witness can clearly not address.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Bragdon, go ahead on that point of order.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Mr. Chair, in no way is that harassing the witness. We saw far worse that took place in committees over many years. I don't think Mr. Small has come to that level at all. He's just trying to get a clear answer from the witness.

The Chair: Go ahead.

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

I guess Mr. Burns is not going to be able to answer that question.

Mr. Burns, you were head of Canada's delegation to NAFO last year. How high could the stewardship quota have gone before the northern cod fishery would have to become classified as a commercial fishery? Is there a figure?

Mr. Adam Burns: The answer is no, there's no specific TAC that would have triggered something. In the NAFO measures it was specific to the initiation of a commercial fishery. However, to have a commercial fishery on a stock that's in the cautious zone is a very standard thing. The risk to Canada was that, were the minister to have increased the stewardship fishery by a sufficient amount anyway, it was possible that other NAFO contracting parties could have perceived that as a commercial fishery and taken the matters into their own hands.

Mr. Clifford Small: Was there any pressure placed on the Canadian delegation in those meetings, by NAFO, to classify the fishery as a commercial fishery?

Mr. Adam Burns: NAFO contracting parties paid close attention to the Canadian science and Canadian management decisions. Canada worked hard and continues to work hard to defend the fact that this is a Canadian-managed stock. There was definitely consistent interest in the level of access being provided and the nature of the stewardship fishery at the time.

• (1115)

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

“Interest”, but not pressure: You wouldn't classify it as pressure.

Mr. Adam Burns: Again, I don't know what level would have triggered other contracting parties to take an action against Canada at the commission, but I do think that were we to have increased the—

Mr. Clifford Small: Where did the pressure come from to re-classify the stewardship fishery to a commercial fishery?

What pressure were you under, Mr. Burns? What can you tell the committee about that when that decision was being made?

Mr. Adam Burns: As this committee will know, in the fall of 2023 a framework assessment was undertaken, which enabled DFO science to incorporate more historic data into the model. Based on that, the stock was deemed to be in the cautious zone, and it would

be a typical approach to fisheries management to have a commercial fishery on a stock in the cautious zone.

Mr. Clifford Small: We have court documents that tell us the minister's staff stated that a commercial reopening of this fishery would be a political win. Are you familiar with that?

Mr. Adam Burns: I can't speak to the political advice that was provided to the—

Mr. Clifford Small: Did you have any dealings with the minister's staff while this decision was being made?

Mr. Adam Burns: We provide briefings to the minister and her staff related to the consultations that have been undertaken, the science process, our policy framework—

Mr. Clifford Small: We understand that science did not want the decision that was made. Can you confirm that?

Mr. Adam Burns: No, I can't confirm that. I can simply refer back to the advice the department provided to the minister, which presented a series of options for the management of this fishery.

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

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Kelloway for six minutes.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Before I begin my questions, I'd like to read a motion into the record for the committee as follows. I move:

That the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans proceeds to the study on the statutory review of the Fisheries Act in order that [we] might further strengthen owner-operator rules and enforcement measures given the Conservative Party of Canada's hidden agenda to gut owner-operator on the East Coast much as they did in British Columbia when they were last in power. Furthermore, once the study begins, it shall not be interrupted by anything other than the scheduled ministerial appearance, hearings on [wrecked] and abandoned vessels, or an emergency meeting as defined by...[section] 106(4) [of the Standing Orders].

Mr. Chair, at this time, I'd like to seek unanimous consent to bypass the normal 48-hour notice period and debate this motion today.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, you had your hand up.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): No unanimous consent to continue this....

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I'm seeking unanimous consent.

The Chair: Yes, and they're saying no. There's no unanimous consent.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay. There is no unanimous consent, but before I go to my questions, I think this is highlighting a bit of a hidden agenda when it comes to what I hope is not gutting the owner-operator policy, and I would ask that this motion be considered as having gone on notice.

I'll move on to my questions.

Mr. Burns, some allegations have been made that the 19,000 tonnes is too low a number to be called a commercial fishery. I'd like to ask you how many commercial fisheries in Canada exist that have a higher TAC than 19,000 tonnes? How many are lower? Also, can you give the committee some examples of commercial fisheries with a lower TAC?

Can you table with this committee a document or spreadsheet—whatever works—that gives this committee some perspective on the sizes of Canada's various commercial fisheries and their TAC by tonnage?

Mr. Adam Burns: Mr. Chair, I don't have a list with me today of the quotas that have been assigned, the TACs that have been assigned, for all of the commercial fisheries. We'd be happy to provide that.

I can speak to a couple of management plans that are certainly lower than the almost 19,000 when you consider the NAFO stock. For example, Newfoundland capelin in NAFO division 2+3 for the current cycle is at 14,533. Greenland halibut in the Gulf of St. Lawrence is at 2,400 tonnes. Northern shrimp in area 6 off Newfoundland is 9,430. What I can tell the committee is that there are very many stocks with less than a 19,000-tonne TAC.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay. I want to go to the next question, but it seems that when it comes to 19,000 tonnes, is it safe to say...? What's the highest tonnage for a particular species? Is it redfish at the moment?

• (1120)

Mr. Adam Burns: Redfish is, off the top of my head. I wouldn't want to tell you that definitively, but certainly redfish is a much higher TAC, yes.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Right, and 19,000—you mentioned that you don't have the information in front of you—would be considered a rather large TAC in the context of other fisheries.

Mr. Adam Burns: I think that's safe to say.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay.

Mr. Burns, I understand that NAFO negotiations on the northern cod have just concluded. Can you tell this committee what sort of management measures are in place and what mechanisms are in place to prevent people from breaking the rules?

Mr. Adam Burns: In those negotiations, we had a few objectives.

The first and foremost was to defend the fact that this is a Canadian-managed stock, not a NAFO-managed stock. In doing that, we achieved a consensus decision whereby all NAFO contracting parties agreed to the Canadian rules being applied, even outside of Canada's exclusive zone. For example, a seasonal closure, which will also apply to the offshore inside Canadian waters from April 15 to June 30, is implemented in the NAFO zone.

Canadian gear requirements for cod, which had not previously been in place in other cod NAFO fisheries in 3M, are now available for use not just in 3L, but also now in 3M, which will present other fishing opportunities for Canadian interests in the NAFO zone. The Canadian minimum size for cod, which is 43 millimetres, has been

implemented in this fishery in NAFO. Previously, it was 41 millimetres within the NAFO area.

We've also implemented a measure that any vessels that do not have an observer on board, if they are found to be in violation of any of the specific flanking measures for the 3L northern cod fishery, would need to immediately return to port for inspection, which is an unprecedented aspect of the measures in NAFO. There's no other fishery that has that level of requirement.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: That's excellent.

Can you explain to this committee and those watching the differences between offshore trawling in the seventies, eighties and nineties and the offshore trawling of today and what controls are in place that were not there decades ago to help regulate the fisheries such as cod?

Mr. Adam Burns: I'm certainly not an expert on what the rules were in the 1970s related to trawling, but what I can tell you is that in our current rules, there are at-sea observers that are deployed, there are strict gear requirements, and there are dockside monitoring and ongoing quota monitoring to ensure these fishing approaches don't result in quota overruns.

All of this is predicated on a very robust scientific basis for setting the total allowable catch, which is based on robust world-class monitoring to ensure the removals that are being authorized are sustainable, and then, as I say, all of the measures that are in place to ensure those sustainable levels are adhered to.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We'll now go to Madam Desbiens for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

Naturally, I want to thank the witnesses, whose participation is always valuable to us.

The reason I insisted that Quebec be included in our discussion and reflection is that it was determined that northern cod and Gulf of St. Lawrence cod were species that intersected or intermingled in the waters around Blanc-Sablon. The reality is that the various directions the minister has taken recently, as well as future decisions on northern cod, will eventually—the day may come sooner than we think—have an effect on the cod stocks in the St. Lawrence River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Do you have any specific data on the possible consequences of the decision to restore the fishery when we are in a cautious zone? Could this have an impact on the cod stocks that we want to restore in the river and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence?

Mr. Adam Burns: I'm going to ask Mr. Vigneault to answer that question.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault (Director General, Ecosystem Science Directorate, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you for the question.

We believe the impact will be limited. As you mentioned, there's some level of interaction between the northern cod stock in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. However, according to all the scientific studies that have been done, these interactions are very limited. They don't affect the stock assessments and the management measures. These two processes are entirely separate.

The situation is somewhat different for subdivision 3Ps cod stock, located south of Newfoundland. In this case, it is a known stock with considerable migration between the various adjacent regions, including Newfoundland and Labrador. Research, tagging and genetics are under way to better quantify the interactions between these two stocks.

In summary, we don't believe that the reopening of the cod fishery will have an impact on the northern gulf, but it could have an impact on southern Newfoundland, where scientific work is under way.

• (1125)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: So in terms of what we're studying, the impact is limited or unlikely. In the south, though, work is still under way.

You mentioned genetics. Are we talking about DNA to track the fish species?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: That's right. Fish stocks are defined by a mix of biology and management. In biology, we look at the DNA profile of fish to determine subpopulations. We also take their behaviour into account. You can track cod through scientific surveys, but also through cod tagging throughout the offshore area. Sometimes they're implants with detectors that are inserted into cod in offshore areas to record fish passages. The fish can also be fitted with metal tags. Because we know where they were first caught and tagged, once they're recovered, that gives us an idea of the fish redistribution.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That way, you can get a sense of their range.

According to your recent measurements, has the status of the fish population in the Gulf of St. Lawrence improved in a tangible and encouraging way?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: The two Gulf of St. Lawrence stocks, northern and southern, are in the critical zone. So there's no directed commercial fishery in that area. Unfortunately, the most recent surveys show that in both cases the levels are still very low, even continuing to decline.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: So we can conclude from that that the main predator, the seal, is still at it. If the cod stock isn't recovering after so many years, it is certainly because the cod are being attacked by predators other than fishers.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Scientific assessments take these things into consideration, and that's the conclusion we reached for the southern gulf. After overfishing efforts that have reduced the stock's recovery capacity, grey seals seem to be the ones currently preventing the stock from recovering.

That's not the case in the northern gulf, however. Assessments are under way. Grey seals are much less present in this area. Analysis to date suggests that predation isn't the primary factor, and that environmental factors are more to blame. In the northern gulf, the cod population is doing very poorly, and current theories are that the phenomenon is related to mortality and environmental effects more so than predation.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Given the difficulties the resource is experiencing, isn't it hazardous at this time to allow or increase offshore fisheries of any kind?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: It would certainly be hazardous for the northern and southern gulf stocks.

The situation is different for the stock off the coast of Newfoundland, however. That stock has recovered over the years. Based on our new assessments and knowledge, this stock is now in the cautious zone. In this case, the practice is to allow a fishery with incremental measures, so that it increases as the stock recovers.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: So the fact that fishing is allowed, even though it's commercial, is an indicator of the state of the stocks.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: The scientific opinions we provide determine whether the stock is in the critical zone or in the cautious zone. That's the scientific component.

Then, when a stock is in the cautious zone, we have to decide whether we can reopen the fishery or increase fishing levels.

• (1130)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That's the department's responsibility.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: That is the management component. It is generally accompanied by a set of rules, and stock growth within the cautious zone needs to be taken into consideration.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Desbiens. You're little bit over, but not too much.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for six minutes, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I know I've mentioned this before, but I need to reiterate the implications of what we're talking about today.

I was born and raised in St. John's, Newfoundland, right downtown. As a result of the cod moratorium, my family picked up our entire lives and drove from St. John's, Newfoundland to Nanaimo, British Columbia, which we now call home.

These decisions being made have real implications on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and, quite frankly, on people across Canada, because we know that all the fishing that happens benefits Canadians across the country. It is incredibly disappointing to see the way in which this has been handled to date. I really wish that the minister were here today to see us working together for the solutions required and that we were able to ask her these exact questions.

We know that historic overfishing by offshore draggers was a primary factor that contributed to the collapse of northern cod in Newfoundland, yet we're seeing decisions being made that feel like an endless cycle of making the same decisions. Not only that—the overfishing that occurred—we had people in decision-making positions who allowed this to happen.

Mr. Burns, I'm wondering if you could please tell me if you agree with this. We've heard referenced many times today the promise that was made. I want to be very clear. The promise was that the first 115,000 metric tons of 2J3KL northern cod quota would be allocated only to inshore and indigenous groups before offshore corporate groups gained access.

That was the promise made. I know that you can't speak to the decisions made by the minister. I understand that. I won't ask you to try to do that, but would you agree that this promise that was made over and over by the Prime Minister to people in Newfoundland and Labrador was not met?

Mr. Adam Burns: In the decision in June, when the minister announced her decision, her announcement at that time made note of the fact that her objective here was to ensure year-round employment stemming from the northern cod fishery, and in order to do that, there needs to be a year-round supply—

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Burns. Just as a note on that, employment for who specifically?

Mr. Adam Burns: That is the employment related to the processing sector, the jobs in processing plants—for example, in Arnold's Cove—as well as the crews on offshore fishing vessels, who largely are individuals living in Newfoundland and Labrador and, certainly, as well, important employment and economic benefits to inshore and midshore harvesters as well.

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

The promise was to allocate only to inshore and indigenous groups. You're talking about the employment of offshore corporate groups.

Again, I understand what you're saying, but would you not agree that the promise was not met? Because we know that there are economic and historic reasons why the inshore fleet was supposed to be prioritized, what are your thoughts as to why the minister did not follow through with this promise that was made on multiple occasions to inshore and indigenous fishers in Newfoundland and Labrador?

Mr. Adam Burns: As I've noted, in the minister's announcement in June, she laid out the rationale for her decision and specifically focused on her objective of year-round economic benefits, year-round employment flowing from this fishery, and, as such, the need for year-round supply.

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

Through the chair, Mr. Burns, we heard the minister say to Radio-Canada that, “we are revitalizing this fishery carefully”.

We know what options you presented to the minister. Do you think this is in fact a careful approach, like she was quoting, when in fact it is the least careful of all the approaches that has been moved forward by the minister?

• (1135)

Mr. Adam Burns: When the department presents the minister with advice, we only present options that are viable options. The option the minister decided upon we believe to be a viable option. In fact, the science advice indicates that there is a very significant probability that the stock will remain in the cautious zone, and indeed, it is only about 1% lower probability than were the minister to have rolled over the stewardship fishery.

The difference between the commercial fishery, which is now in place, and the stewardship fishery, which was previously in place, of course is not the full 18,000 tonnes. It's only a difference of 5,000 tonnes for Canadian harvesters and, as I note, the science advice based on that is a very limited difference in the impact on the stock.

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

Could you please explain—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. There are only about six seconds left in your questioning time, so you won't get an answer if you do get a question out.

We'll move on now to Mr. Arnold for five minutes, please.

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

I'll just open by stating that I'm disappointed that Mr. Kelloway would be spreading mistruths and disinformation. I think he ought to be better spending his time focusing on the failures of his government in the nine years that it's been in power and has been delivering some of the programs he's referencing, instead of speculating on what other parties might be into.

I will start by thanking the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Burns, you mentioned the 2023 CSAS process and the decision. In that decision-making process, the science advice was looked at and considered, obviously. The stock was determined to be in the cautious zone. Was the minister made aware of the 2015 promise in the decision-making process?

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, the promise you're referring to was referenced in the stocks integrated fisheries management plan. In the decision memo, which I know you've seen as well, I have to tell you that I'm not sure if the specific reference was there, but there are a number of factors that would have been included in terms of consideration for them.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Would you not have been quite involved in that decision-making process? I'm surprised that you took a long pause to state, yes or no, whether the minister was aware of that 2015 promise in the decision-making process.

Mr. Adam Burns: It was referenced in the decision memo.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Was the minister aware?

Mr. Adam Burns: I can't speak to what she was specifically aware of or not. I can speak to what was in the materials.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Did she decide to basically ignore that promise, or was she not aware of it?

Mr. Adam Burns: As I've noted, in her June decision, she laid out the rationale for her allocation decision, which was focused on year-round employment and on the benefits that would flow from that to Newfoundland communities. I can speak to that, in terms of the rationale for her decision, which she has stated in the announcement of her decision.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

In your earlier testimony here, you mentioned the actions that would be taken by vessels that did not have observers on board and that were found to be in contravention of regulations. How would you know if a vessel was in contravention of regulations if they did not have observers on board, when we've heard that the offshore patrols have actually been, I believe, reduced by almost 50%, if not more? How would you even know if an international vessel was in contravention?

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly Canada plays an important role in monitoring, control and surveillance within the NAFO regulatory area, as does the European Union. Indeed, we, from time to time, have officers from one on the other's vessels as well. What I can say—and I did consult with the Canadian Coast Guard this morning related to this—is that it is anticipated that the situation with respect to Coast Guard vessel availability should stabilize for the 2025 fiscal year, once the Leonard Cowley returns to service upon completion of its vessel life extension work and the Coast Guard is able to return to its historic commitment of two offshore patrol vessels dedicated to the NAFO program. We anticipate having a very robust presence.

• (1140)

Mr. Mel Arnold: What does “stabilize” mean? Does that mean stabilized at the reduced level, or is that returning to a previous level of patrols?

Mr. Adam Burns: My understanding is that the Coast Guard vessels were undergoing the vessel life extension. That is expected to be completed, so it would be a return to the two vessels, which would enable a further enhancement to our presence within the NAFO regulatory area to undertake at-sea inspections.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Before I run out of time here, you also mentioned that the minister made this decision with the goal of providing year-round employment, yet the season was scheduled to close, I believe, in November. It was closed earlier. I think the announcement was Sunday, September 26. It closed that early. That's certainly not year-round employment. Can you square that circle for us?

Mr. Adam Burns: Mr. Chair, I think the member is referring to the inshore fishery.

My understanding, from the reporting that I've seen, is that the fishery was very productive with high-quality fish and high catch rates. It is true the inshore fishery did reach its quotas. There remain other quotas within the—

Mr. Mel Arnold: That's far from year-round employment, though.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

We'll now go to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

Could you, for somebody who wouldn't understand, expand on the statement you made, “robust consultation process”?

Mr. Adam Burns: Sure. This is a normal practice that we would undertake for any fishery, but clearly, given the unique nature of this particular potential reopening, we started with an atypical groundfish advisory committee, a cod advisory committee, last fall, to begin the discussion with stakeholders. It would include representatives of the FFAW, the offshore, the processing sector, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as environmental groups. We began a discussion of what their vision of a reopened commercial fishery might look like.

We had further consultations once the winter science advisory process was completed. We knew what the advice would be, so we consulted on what the tax should be, what the distribution of the quota should be.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Everybody had some sense of where this was going.

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, that's correct.

Indeed, during those consultations, the majority of views expressed—certainly not from environmental groups, which wouldn't be expected, but from the harvesting sector—were very much in line with an increase in the quotas.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You referenced that it's a travelling stock.

Mr. Adam Burns: The stock is largely present inside Canada's 200 nautical-mile-limit, but some of this stock is present in NAFO division, primarily in NAFO division 3L.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Based on that, how important is it that Canada participate in NAFO and be part of those decisions? What would be the impact if we simply packed our bags and went home?

Mr. Adam Burns: By working with NAFO, we were able to secure an international rules-based framework outside of Canada's 200 nautical-mile-limit, which is binding—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Is that very significant to the future of this key stock?

Mr. Adam Burns: It is. Were we not to have—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Was it present in the past?

Mr. Adam Burns: NAFO certainly did have those measures in place in the past as well, but not with the same level of robust “flanking measures”, as we call them, related to the very specific—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Would your negotiation process lead Canada to have an agreement with more teeth in the enforcement of it?

Mr. Adam Burns: It did, and to a very limited quota.... Indeed, other than the European Union, the other contracting parties of NAFO only have access to 19 tonnes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How does that compare if we look before...?

Mr. Adam Burns: I don't have the full quota key in front of me, but certainly, it was much more significant than those quotas. The historic catches, in particular, of Russia for example, were much higher.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Was Canada a big winner on the current negotiations that led us to where we are?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes. We believe the decisions taken by NAFO defend Canada's management of the fishery and implement very robust conservation measures for those foreign fleets.

• (1145)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Is this the same decision as before? One of my colleagues raised this. Could you outline to the committee how this decision we arrived at now compares to other decisions?

Mr. Adam Burns: Are you...?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I'm referencing stock.

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly. In terms of stocks that are in the cautious zone, as this stock is, it is typical for us to have a commercial fishery. The exploitation rate, the TAC level, that would be established is based on the science advice and the management framework that's in place for a given stock. Certainly, it would be very atypical for us to not have a commercial fishery on a stock in a cautious zone.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Just in my final time, Mr. Burns, how important is the way the decision is made for year-round supply to generating the maximum employment in Newfoundland?

Mr. Adam Burns: Currently, for example, for the plant in Arnold's Cove to operate year-round, there is a requirement to have foreign fish, frozen fish, brought in, in order to enable year-round activity. The result of having a year-round supply of Canadian-caught fish will result in higher quality, lower costs and increased access to product, and thus, it will result in employment.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

We'll now go on to Madam Desbiens for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I only have two and a half minutes, but I'd like to broach a broad subject.

People on the ground are worried. Scientists both at Fisheries and Oceans Canada and elsewhere are worried. To varying degrees, everyone has sounded the alarm. Some are even talking about a historical error.

In Quebec, pelagic fisheries are being closed, the shrimp fishery is being closed, the redfish fishery is being opened too late, and suddenly this decision is being made, based on a deep desire to be ecological and protect ecosystems. Even though the word "ecological" contains the word "logical", there seems to be an inconsistency with regard to the opening of fisheries. At least, that's what we gather from a number of comments we've received.

How do you explain the fact that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans sometimes changes its core values? Does it still work on the basis of applied science? Is it possible that the minister sometimes insists that decisions be made in favour of one thing rather than another? Are your decisions always based on the same principles?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes.

About 15 years ago, we established sustainability policies to guide stock management decisions.

In terms of the pelagic fisheries, we obviously have to make decisions very early on to make sure those stocks are protected.

With respect to northern cod, the decision is the result of a review of the model that was accepted in the fall of last year. We're now able to include data since the 1950s. Now that the model has more data and has been revised, we're able to know that the stock is in the cautious zone, or the orange zone, as it is called.

It was on this basis that the minister made the decision to reopen the commercial northern cod fishery, accompanied by a very small increase in the total allowable catch from 13,000 to 18,000 tonnes for Canada. The difference in risk to the stock compared to stewardship fishery is very slight.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Do the—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Desbiens.

I know two and a half minutes is not very long.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Burns, I want to ask you to elaborate a little bit more on the question that you were just responding to Madame Desbiens about. I don't understand; I know there was a change in the model for the northern cod stock that led to this determination that northern cod has been in the cautious zone since 2016 instead of the critical zone. I heard you reference the fact that the data being used now goes back to 1954 instead of 1983, which is the number I have here. How does adding almost 30 years of data from 1954 to 1983 help us to understand the stock today and the decisions required on how to best move forward to protect the stock and ensure economic viability for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

• (1150)

Mr. Adam Burns: Mr. Chair, I'll ask my colleague, Bernard, to answer that question.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: We now have, with the research that was done and the monitoring that was done over the year, a very robust new model not only to make projections for the next few years in terms of the biomass of the stock, but also, each time there's new data in a year, to re-estimate the historical biomass along the entire period. Previously, we were just using limited data from our survey. With the additional science that was done, we have access to much larger datasets, up to the fifties—

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

If I can just clarify, because I don't have a lot of time, how does adding data from 1954 help us today? This is what I'm not understanding. We're in very different circumstances with the climate crisis, with dwindling stocks. We have the overfishing that has occurred, that we're still recovering from. How does that data help us to make sound decisions today?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: The added data helps us better understand the potential for the cod to reproduce, and we now know that they can recover. They can reproduce at a lower level than historically estimated.

The new model also takes account of environmental factors, including one of the main ones, the availability of capelin for the stock. That's another benefit of the new model that was adopted last fall.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

We'll now go to Mr. Small for five minutes, please.

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

My question is for Mr. Burns, based on the statement he made that the stewardship fishery provided valuable data. His colleague Monsieur Vigneault has just said that he only had data from surveys.

Something's not adding up with this, Mr. Chair. Also, then, they're using data that goes back to 1954.

When did you analyze the logbook data from the stewardship fishery from 2020, 2021 and 2022?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Yes, I simplified too many things. There are large sets of data that go in addition to the survey, including—

Mr. Clifford Small: You said that you only had the survey data.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: That was the main basis of the model, but I—

Mr. Clifford Small: When was the logbook data from 2020, 2021 and 2022—

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: They were assessed in the last stock assessment in March 2024.

Mr. Clifford Small: It was valuable data that you've collected since 2006, but on my order paper question last fall, which I received an answer to in December, those three years of logbook data that were provided from the stewardship fishery had not been looked at. If it's so valuable, why was it sitting there, not analyzed, for three years, when it could have led to economic opportunity for fishermen in Newfoundland and Labrador?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: I'm not aware of the details. I know that there were issues with COVID and the transition, but as I mentioned, in the last stock assessment they were analyzed, along with the data that comes from the—

Mr. Clifford Small: If that data was valuable and the stewardship fishery was so important for providing valuable data, as Mr. Burns has stated, why did it take four years to analyze 2020 logbook data?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Again—

Mr. Clifford Small: Why would it take so long to analyze valuable data?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: The data was analyzed recently, along with the sentinel survey.

As you recall, there have been some issues with the transition of vessels, so there was no stock assessment done in 2022 and 2023. In the latest stock assessment, the logbooks were used.

Mr. Clifford Small: The data is analyzed in offices at 200 Kent and on White Hills Road, not on the vessels that were out of commission. Why was the data not analyzed sooner? Also, if it was analyzed at all, what was the story of the catch rates that you got from that data?

• (1155)

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: It's exactly as you said. The catch rate trends are looked at in every stock assessment and they inform the analysis of the data, and that is part of the science advice that was published.

I don't know if my colleague, Mr. McGillivray, has additional information on the logbook information analysis in Newfoundland.

Mr. William McGillivray (Regional Director General, Newfoundland and Labrador Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): I don't have anything to add, Bernard.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

I have a specific question about an area on the Newfoundland coast, from Cape Bauld to Cape Norman, where the cod fishery was shut down in 1992. It's a part of 4R, which remained open until 1993, but scientifically, that part of the stock was considered to be northern cod.

Now, with the stewardship fishery and now this commercial fishery, harvesters who have home ports between Cape Norman and Cape Bauld aren't allowed to fish in that area. They have to go outside into a certain part of 3K.

Why can't they fish in that area between Cape Norman and Cape Bauld if that's an area that science has identified as having stock that is northern cod? Why aren't they allowed to fish that area? Why are they being pushed outside and actually driving their carbon footprint way up in having to do so?

Mr. Adam Burns: Mr. Chair, I'll ask my colleague, Mr. McGillivray, to respond to that question.

Mr. William McGillivray: This is in reference to what we call the 3K equivalent fleet that, as you said, is between Cape Bauld and that location. There are about 34 licence-holders from Newfoundland and Labrador at the present time on our conservation harvesting plan. They do have access to fish, and they fish in 3K. They're fishing northern cod in 3K.

These conservation harvesting plans are done collaboratively also with the FFAW in negotiations with them. If that changed, we'd have to have conversations with them on the way forward.

We negotiate those plans every year, if I'm not mistaken.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go on to Mr. Cormier for five minutes.

[Translation]

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

My questions are for either witness.

At the beginning of the meeting, you talked about some offshore fishing companies that will be able to start fishing cod in accordance with the new quota that has just been given to them.

Could you once again name some of these companies that will be able to take advantage of this access to cod, that is, this cod quota? I'd like some examples.

[English]

Mr. Adam Burns: Sure. For example, Ocean Choice International would have access to northern cod.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: How many employees do big companies like Ocean Choice International have, approximately?

Mr. Adam Burns: That would be in the hundreds. I don't have the exact figures. I believe that some of their executives will also be appearing before the committee in the coming weeks. They can then give you more accurate figures.

Mr. Serge Cormier: To clarify, could you repeat the percentage allocated to offshore fishing companies under the new allocation?

Mr. Adam Burns: It is 6% of the Canadian quota.

Mr. Serge Cormier: So 6% of 18,000 tonnes, which is roughly two million pounds, is that right?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Before the moratorium was put in place in 1992, those same companies probably shared in the cod quotas as well. What did these companies do after the cod fishery closed? Did they start fishing other resources? Did they continue to employ as many people?

• (1200)

Mr. Adam Burns: They do have quotas in other fisheries, such as groundfish. Many of these companies also have northern shrimp quotas. In addition to national quotas, they also have quotas in the NAFO area, the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization.

They use different combinations of quotas, but that's what they do.

Mr. Serge Cormier: So you could say that these big companies, even though they haven't had cod to process for more than 30 or 40 years, have managed to do good business, isn't that right? I think some of them are publicly traded.

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, that's right.

As I've said before, the Arnold's Cove processing plant, for example, and other plants as well, from time to time, need to buy fish from abroad to have work year-round.

Mr. Serge Cormier: If these companies have done well for all these years despite the closure of the cod fishery, why give them 6% of the quota? It's the same with the new redfish allocation; if I have time, I'll talk about that later. In the case of cod, why not give 6% of the quota to fleets that are in greater need?

Is that one of the recommendations you made? I remember that, when I was parliamentary secretary, the minister received documents that often presented three options or three scenarios from which he had to choose. These were options that you, the officials, submitted to the minister for him to make the decisions.

Did you recommend to the minister a 6% quota for offshore fishing companies, or was that not part of the recommendations?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister's decision was based on the objective of having year-long employment. It's necessary to have an offshore fleet to fish during the winter months, for example. That is why the minister made this decision, as she explained when she made her announcement in June.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Burns, every time you and your colleagues come before the committee, we talk about protecting resources, protecting biodiversity and protecting our oceans. And yet, here we are giving quotas to large companies again. It's the same thing in the redfish fishery, for example, where 60% of the quota will go to large companies.

I'd like to read an excerpt from an article that quoted what Roméo LeBlanc said in the 1970s.

[Mr. LeBlanc] sided with Canadian fishers, who claimed that foreigners [or large offshore fishing companies] were overfishing and were therefore responsible for the decline of the stocks. Consequently, in 1977, Mr. LeBlanc extended Canada's economic zone to 200 miles off the coast. "In other words, that means that we secured our fisheries' destinies for the foreseeable future", he said.

Ten years later, five years before the cod moratorium was imposed, Roméo LeBlanc, then a senator, couldn't help but note the failure of that vision. "The challenge is that biology doesn't necessarily follow the greed and appetite of those who want to empty the oceans", he said.

As a government, we are certainly responsible, but have you, as public servants, recommended to the minister that such a percentage be given to offshore fleets that, in my opinion, need it less than our regions' inshore fleets?

We've been talking about protecting oceans and biodiversity in recent years, but then, for example, 60% of the quota for redfish fisheries is allocated to large companies that have held up and continued their activities, even though other fleets have been decimated. Is it right that we still give a percentage of the quota to large companies in a context where we advocate for ocean and biodiversity protection?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

We have to go on now to Mr. Arnold for five minutes.

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

Mr. Burns, I'll carry on with the year-round employment message you say the minister was focused on as part of her decision. She wants to work towards year-round employment.

What time frame did the stewardship fishery operate under? How many weeks or months was it?

• (1205)

Mr. Adam Burns: In terms of the specific length in any given year, I can ask my colleague to speak about that, but I can tell you it was primarily a summer fishery.

Mr. Mel Arnold: How many weeks or months was it?

Mr. Adam Burns: I'll turn to Mr. McGillivray, who would have the specific details, year by year.

Mr. William McGillivray: I don't have the specific dates in front of me, but I would say it's about 11 to 15 weeks, which is a normal fishery season for the inshore.

Mr. Mel Arnold: What would the normal closing date be?

Mr. William McGillivray: This year, it was in November. It depends on 2J and 3KL. Usually, when it comes to be late October or November, weather comes into play. There's a lot less activity on the water. Few are left to fish the remaining fish.

Mr. Mel Arnold: The closure was announced on September 27 of this year. The closure was on September 29, instead of November 16—almost two months prior to the potential planned closure.

Would you say this is adding to year-round employment, or is it counter to the minister's objectives?

Mr. Adam Burns: The offshore conservation harvest plan is just being finalized, or perhaps was finalized today. We're in that time zone. In addition to that, the two indigenous allocations and the special allocation for the NunatuKavut Community Council remain available, as well. Therefore, while the inshore fishery has closed—

Mr. Mel Arnold: That's not answering my question.

Is the almost two-months-shorter season reaching the goal of providing year-round employment? As you stated, it was one of the key pieces in the minister's decision.

Mr. Adam Burns: It is typical for the inshore sector to complete in this time frame into November.

What will be able to occur this year is the offshore quota and—

Mr. Mel Arnold: This time frame is now mid-October. This was shut down in late September. That's weeks earlier than mid-October.

ber. It's certainly not year-round employment for the harvesters or, probably, for the plant workers.

Mr. Adam Burns: We anticipate that the offshore sector will begin fishing in the near term, as well as the potential for those indigenous and special allocations to be harvested over the coming weeks and months.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It's been anecdotally stated that the offshore sector could be completed in as little as two weeks with the catch rates and the potential of some of these harvesters. How does that add to year-round employment through this fishery?

Mr. Adam Burns: By having the offshore sector able to harvest quota, there will be the availability of fish at other points in the year. For example, in the winter months, the offshore sector would be able to harvest.

I know they'll be looking at their harvest plans and determining when it is most appropriate to make those efforts. Obviously, it's been a long time since they've been in these areas, so there will be a certain amount of learning they will need to undertake over the coming weeks and months in order to maximize those benefits.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I want to switch topics a bit here. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans report on the management of pinnipeds from 2024 observed the impacts of seals and their impact on capelin, which cod also prey on. What is the current assessment of the capelin stock? Do you even know?

What is the impact on the capelin stock of pinnipeds in Atlantic Canada and the territory of the northern cod?

Mr. Adam Burns: Chair, I'll ask my colleague Bernard Vigneault to answer that.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Yes, capelin is critical for the health of the northern cod stock. In terms of the stock status, if you're referring to 2J3KL, the Newfoundland cod is above critical, so it's in the cautious zone, and it's being assessed annually.

For a species like capelin, predation is important, as you know, by seals, but also by all sorts of other fish, other marine mammals, like whales, and seabirds. We don't think seal predation, per se, is the main factor for the capelin stock. The model we've developed looks at other environmental factors, like the timing of the ice, for example, which has proven very important in the growth of the capelin.

The capelin is another example of a stock where we've established an environmental approach for management. The new limit reference point we've established was developed in correlation with the northern cod, so there's a level of capelin in the ecosystem that's sufficient for the growth of cod and the other predators in the marine ecosystem that rely on capelin.

• (1210)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

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

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

My questions are for Mr. Burns.

We hear a lot about historical attachment when folks talk about fisheries decisions and lobbying around fisheries' decisions. Just from your perspective, does the offshore fleet in Newfoundland and Labrador have a historical attachment to the fishery?

Is it fair to say that when people ask that historical arrangements be respected, it also includes offshore fleets?

Mr. Adam Burns: It is true, for sure, that the offshore sector had quotas in the northern cod fishery. Absolutely.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you for that.

Mr. Chair, at this time, I'd like to table, for the committee's record, three letters from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador asking the minister to consider the interests of the offshore fleet in reopening the northern cod fishery. These documents are already public and have been referenced by the FFAW in their own press releases. I think the committee will find them very helpful in writing its own report, while considering the question of advice the minister received on this matter.

Furthermore, at this time, I'd like to table two other documents for the committee. The first is a letter from MP Small to the minister, dated May 9, in which Mr. Small lobbied for the inclusion of the offshore fleet into their northern cod fishery via a reference to the interests of the Atlantic Groundfish Council, which, of course, represents the interests of the offshore fleet.

Additionally, I am tabling a personal email from Mr. Small sent to Minister Lebouthillier, in which he again lobbies for the offshore fleet's access to the fishery, not just by referencing the matter of historical attachment, but also referencing the fact that he included a copy to a representative of the offshore fleet, and no one from the inshore fleet was included in that email.

Also, there's reference to—

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

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Clifford Small: I don't think Mr. Kelloway is putting out the full facts there.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I'd like to continue, Mr. Chair, if that's possible.

Also, there's a reference from MP Small that it's not unreasonable for the minister to ignore DFO science on cod.

It's clear to me, from our side of the room, that Mr. Small—on behalf of his leader, Mr. Poilievre—was lobbying for the interests of the offshore fleet directly with the minister while he thought the inshore fleet wasn't looking, before it became politically advantageous for him and his boss to take the other side. I think, with this

evidence before the committee, the minister was hearing from both the province and indeed the official opposition that the offshore fleet's access to the fishery was very important.

I will also note that our side will be sending out this material via press release in a few minutes.

Mr. Chair, I want to go back to the quota breakdown.

I think that, a lot of times—both in the media and around this table, in fact—there isn't a clear breakdown of the quota. I want to recite what I believe is the quota breakdown.

That is, 84% of the quota goes to inshore.

Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Burns: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Ten per cent goes to indigenous harvesters.

Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Six per cent goes to the offshore fleet.

Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay.

We talked about the offshore fleet. It's been talked about around here.

Can you talk about some of the Canadian companies, and the men and women on those vessels who work in Newfoundland and Labrador, or who work at the processing plants? Can you talk about the level of Canadian input and identity related to those particular offshore companies?

Mr. Adam Burns: I wanted to note this. Earlier, I indicated that the indigenous allocations were all still available. Indeed, the Nunatsiavut government indigenous allocation is currently being fished by inshore, fixed-gear vessels from 3KL.

In terms of Canadian companies, the companies in question are all required to be majority Canadian-owned. The companies themselves have indicated that they are either entirely or nearly entirely staffed and crewed by Canadians who are from local communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, largely, in terms of this particular fishery.

• (1215)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: We talked earlier about offshore and the 6%. We talked about the historical connection. I would put it out there that 6% in relation to historical attachment and the impact of offshore on the men and women of Newfoundland and Labrador.... Well, it's 6%. I wasn't the best at math, but 6% seems to be a good number to keep jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I would tend to agree with my colleague Mr. Cormier.

I imagine that pelagic fishers, including offshore shrimp fishers, who are following the proceedings of our committee are wondering why offshore vessels are being reinstated when it has been shown that this fishing technique had messed up part of the resource decades ago. Today, instead of supporting owner-operators and boosting the local or regional economy, these boats are being put back into the water, even though we know the impact that will have. How do you at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans explain this decision?

Talk to mackerel fishers or shrimp fishers who haven't been able to convert their boats in order to fish redfish. In any case, the quotas weren't worth it. Cod fishers received financial compensation at the time. Today, however, those who were impacted by the closure of the fishery aren't getting any money. What are you telling them?

Mr. Adam Burns: In terms of offshore fleet management, we have very strict measures in place to ensure that their catch is within quota. Additionally, there are several rules governing fishing gear. We want to ensure that the rules are followed in order to have a sustainable fishery.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Are the rules strict enough?

Mr. Adam Burns: Of course, a number of rules have been put in place for the northern cod fishery. The fishing plan that's in place for the offshore fleet has a number of elements to ensure the stability of the fishery.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: The minister is telling us that she is taking action to protect the resource for future generations and that she is taking into account the opinion of the fishing industry, that is, the fishers and the people who are on the water. Do you think her decision was guided by the community and the people on the ground, or do you think it was motivated by other factors?

Mr. Adam Burns: The department undertook several consultations with all affected fleets, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and environmental groups. All views were provided to the minister and incorporated into the department's advice. So we had a very good overview of all the perspectives of industry, environmental groups, and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador when we were drafting the advice and analysis that would help the minister make an informed decision.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

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

I'm still reflecting on the new information that's going to be tabled, and I look forward to reviewing those documents.

It just really highlights to me—I'm sorry to say it, but—the consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments that continue to corporatize public resources at the detriment of local people in communities like Newfoundland and Labrador.

I will be reviewing that information and will be taking it from there. I appreciate that being tabled along with any other information of further corporatization, which is exactly the theme of what it is that we're talking about today to the detriment of the good people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

With that, I don't have enough time, so I want to talk about transparency.

We know that in 2017, prior to my becoming a member of Parliament, there was a report tabled. It talked about the importance of transparency, in particular on “stock status, reference points and management measures”, and it recommended that these be included “in the annual sustainability survey for fisheries”.

I'm not seeing that transparency in this decision. Can you speak to how this process was transparent, where this information is available to the public to clearly understand the decision-making process, and if it will be included in that annual survey that's being referenced from 2017: “Newfoundland and Labrador's northern cod fishery: charting a new sustainable future”?

Thank you.

• (1220)

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, the department undertook a number of concrete actions related to that report and those recommendations.

I can say that in the case of the process that was undertaken since last fall, flowing from the framework assessment that occurred in the fall, which indicated that the northern cod stock may be in the cautious zone, the department quickly held a special advisory committee meeting to begin the discussions that would help inform the potential reopening of this fishery.

Following the CSAS advice in the winter, a subsequent advisory committee meeting was held, where the full suite of the science advice that was available was presented, and broad and open discussions were held, as I mentioned, with the FFAW, with inshore harvesting interests, with the offshore sector, with environmental groups and with the province, in order to well inform this decision.

As I noted, in the minister's announcement in June, related to the reopening of this fishery, she did lay out the basis for her decision that led to the decision that she took.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Small for five minutes, please.

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

To Mr. Kelloway's point, I'll make no bones about it. I wrote to the minister several times in support of the livelihoods of harvesters in Newfoundland and Labrador and to support a much bigger quota increase than what they got, but not to change the fishery from a stewardship fishery to a commercial fishery.

As you know, it was the other side of the House, the Liberals, who lobbied to have that fishery reopened as a commercial fishery, because it would be a political win. I wasn't looking for a win in politics in terms of what would be happening with the northern cod fishery. I was looking for a win for our harvesters, our plant workers and our coastal communities that depend on it so much.

To go back to Mr. Burns, to that statement about how the minister was seeking "year-round employment" in the fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador by this mere increase of 3,000 tonnes or 5,000 tonnes, basically I guess we could say that the 3KL portion was caught in about a dozen fishing days. They fished about a dozen days altogether because they only fished for about two days a week.

Then, for a vessel like the *Calvert*, with 6% that is shared by Ice-water, that 6% can be fished in less than a couple of weeks. You're talking about, altogether, less than 30 days of harvesting by a fraction of the people involved in the industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. How does that add up to year-round employment?

• (1225)

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly at the current quotas, the total number of harvesting days necessary to harvest that are limited. Our view, certainly, is that we've put in place a management regime that is sustainable and that will, hopefully, result in a further increasing in the biomass and enable increases in the total quota in the coming years, which will over time increase the number of harvesting days and enable even greater removals throughout the course of the year.

Mr. Clifford Small: Getting back to the first round of questioning here, I never did get an answer from you, Mr. Burns. The Prime Minister made a pretty big promise back in 2015. Was that a promise that he could have kept?

Mr. Adam Burns: Again, it's the Minister of Fisheries who makes the decisions related to the management of the fishery pursuant to the Fisheries Act. In her decision, she did, as I've noted, in her June announcement indicate that the reason she took the allocation decisions she did, including providing the vast majority to the inshore, was, however, to have some access to other fleets, recognizing that foreign offshore vessels would also be fishing outside of Canada's 200 miles and wanting to ensure there would be ongoing year-round employment from that.

Mr. Clifford Small: If you were prime minister, with your knowledge of northern cod and commitments that are already in

place, would you have made that promise for 115,000 tonnes to the inshore fleet?

Mr. Adam Burns: Again, the Fisheries Act gives that decision-making authority to the Minister of Fisheries and she did indeed indicate the basis for the decision that she took.

Mr. Clifford Small: The promise that was made was made without authority is what you're saying.

Mr. Adam Burns: I can't speak to that, to a political promise, but what I can say is that the minister's decision was based on an objective of having a robust fishery in the years to come as well and that would generate year-round employment and economic benefits for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Chair, it seems that Mr. Burns can't answer that question, so I'd like to move that the committee call the minister to come in and answer that question on if that 115,000 tonnes was a legitimate promise that could have been kept.

The Chair: She is coming.

Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

Now that it has become abundantly clear the official opposition critic was lobbying for the offshore while pretending to support the inshore, could you explain to me what the impact would be if Canada didn't arrive at a mutually agreeable decision with NAFO?

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, it is NAFO, under international law, that has jurisdiction for the waters outside of Canada's exclusive economic zone.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The fish species we're talking about are a travelling stock. If there's no mutual management of that resource as it moves off, how does that impact the inshore?

Mr. Adam Burns: Were NAFO to have not adopted the measures it did this year, or to have undertaken an approach to set quotas outside of Canada's management plan, it could have posed a conservation risk. That could have undermined the Canadian management of this stock, and Canada's ability to defend Canada's share of this fishery.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I believe history would show that a lot of the fishing that resulted in the collapse of the east coast cod fishery occurred offshore.

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, it's our view that it's very important to have robust conservation measures in place outside of the 200-mile limit.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: If we're going to have a robust inshore fishery for the benefit of the inshore fishers, is it important for Canada to be an active partner in international organizations like NAFO?

• (1230)

Mr. Adam Burns: It is a single stock. Inshore abundance moves further offshore at various points in the year. It is important, again, to have that robust management regime in the NAFO regulatory area, as well.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Has the Newfoundland fishery, by definition, always consisted of a robust inshore, as well as a robust offshore?

Mr. Adam Burns: Historically, yes, that is true.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Unlike other maritime provinces, Newfoundland's fishery has been heavily tied to exploiting the resource offshore.

Mr. Adam Burns: There are very productive fishing grounds in the offshore areas off Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Do the benefits accrue back to Newfoundland?

Mr. Adam Burns: Largely, the Canadian fleets that are fishing in those waters are from Newfoundland. Certainly, there are some from Nova Scotia, as well, but yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Again, as you pointed out earlier, are most of those vessels crewed by people from Newfoundland?

Mr. Adam Burns: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Do they supply the plants on land in Newfoundland that are staffed by residents of Newfoundland?

Mr. Adam Burns: That is correct.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Would any mismanagement of the overall resource have a direct impact on not only the offshore but the inshore?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, that's correct. We do think that we have a robust regime now in place.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you describe who is fishing the Canadian share of the offshore?

Mr. Adam Burns: The ultimate entities that will fish will depend...There are rules available to offshore companies to transfer quotas amongst themselves, based on their own individual corporate harvesting plans.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Have those been part of the management of the fishery for some time?

Mr. Adam Burns: That's a standard approach that's used for all groundfish fisheries.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: When you say standard approach, could you expand?

Mr. Adam Burns: The enterprise allocation approach that exists amongst offshore groundfish harvesters is such that there are regular and ongoing quota trades between licence-holders in order to enable maximum efficiency in terms of the economic output of the fishery.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: To qualify, if the minister hadn't made a small allocation to the offshore, how would that have impacted Canada?

Mr. Adam Burns: Given the stock is in the cautious zone, it's very likely that NAFO would have taken a decision to reopen a fishery.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: We're clear on the record, if the minister didn't allocate the offshore, would NAFO have used that to increase its allocation?

Mr. Adam Burns: That is possible. It would have had foreign vessels fishing in the NAFO zone without Canadian vessels present.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Arnold for five minutes.

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

I'm going to carry through a little more on Mr. Morrissey's questions.

You stated that, had Canada not provided the offshore opportunity, NAFO could have.

Did NAFO make any efforts to encourage Canada to open an offshore fishery?

Mr. Adam Burns: NAFO has paid close attention over the last several years—since 2006—to the stewardship fishery. Every year, it asks questions around the management approach in place and looks at the Canadian science advice.

We were very strong at the NAFO table to ensure we defended the fact that this was, indeed, a Canadian-managed fishery. NAFO paid close attention to how we were managing this.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Did they indicate they would be looking for an offshore NAFO fishery?

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, as soon as science advice came out that showed the stock was in the cautious zone, there was increased interest among NAFO's contracting parties. That occurred after the last annual meeting. There wasn't a meeting in which such pressure occurred specifically.

Mr. Mel Arnold: There is no official record of any NAFO request for an offshore fishery, then. These are all off-the-record requests.

Mr. Adam Burns: The NAFO measure that was in place indicated that, once there was a commercial fishery in Canada, it would open within the NAFO regulatory area. It specified some high-level quota distribution.

• (1235)

Mr. Mel Arnold: If it had remained a stewardship fishery....

Would NAFO have no claim to an offshore fishery?

Mr. Adam Burns: It would have been very unusual for there to not be a commercial fishery on a stock in the cautious zone. NAFO has jurisdiction over the waters outside of Canada's 200-mile limit and could have taken a decision to reopen that fishery in the absence of—

Mr. Mel Arnold: You said, "could have", but they gave no official indication that they would move in that direction.

Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Burns: NAFO itself—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Burns: I need to explain that NAFO itself is an organization made up of 13 contracting parties. NAFO, as an entity, wouldn't have that kind of perspective. It would be a decision taken by the 13 contracting parties.

Indeed, the European Union sought, intersessionally—outside of a regular meeting—to move a motion by email vote to reopen the commercial fishery in NAFO over the course of the summer. Canada was successful in having them withdraw that motion so it could be discussed more completely at the annual meeting.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I would like, through the chair, to request records indicating that there was NAFO pressure. From the information we have, there was no formal request from NAFO for an offshore fishery. Through the chair to you, Mr. Burns, that information about pressure from NAFO should be provided to the committee in time for this report.

Thank you.

I'll change topics again. This may go to Mr. McGillivray. I'm not sure

Can you give us an indication of the number of jobs per tonne harvested in the inshore fishery versus the offshore fishery, or the Canadian inshore fishery versus the NAFO fishery?

Mr. Adam Burns: I'll pass that to Mr. McGillivray. I think the question was to him, Mr. Chair.

Mr. William McGillivray: I don't have information with me on jobs per tonne. I will say that, in an inshore fishery, there are about 1,654 licence-holders right now, for this year.

Mr. Mel Arnold: That would, to me, be an important economic decision and a very important factor in determining year-round employment. If you don't know how many jobs there are per tonne harvested by each sector, it seems to me that the department and the minister have failed to be provided with an important piece for the decision-making process.

If NAFO took actions that could impact Canada's management of the northern cod stock, what would those impacts be?

Mr. Adam Burns: Mr. Chair, it's always difficult to answer a hypothetical question.

What I can say is that NAFO has jurisdiction over the waters outside of Canada's 200-nautical-mile limit. Had we been offside of NAFO, as it were, it could have had the authority to establish various management measures and a total allowable catch for other NAFO-contracting partners.

Mr. Mel Arnold: You don't know the potential impacts then. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, your time is up.

We'll now go to Mr. Kelloway for five minutes, please.

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

The “corporatization” of the fishery was mentioned earlier. I just want to highlight that it was the Liberal Party that enshrined owner-operator into the Fisheries Act. Something that we seem to want to

avoid is reopening the Fisheries Act and studying it here, which is a real disappointment for me and the folks where I live.

I want to look at the offshore a bit. We've talked about how this may damage the environment. Can you tell us the areas where offshore will be fishing?

Also, what kind of technology is used today, compared to 1973 or 1984 and so forth? Where are we today when it comes to the offshore, compared to those times when, oftentimes, we're comparing decades to decades?

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, the offshore sector is obviously fishing in a different zone than the inshore would. The Canadian offshore sector would be able to fish in offshore zones in 2J, 3K and 3L. The NAFO fleets and other NAFO contracting parties will only be able to fish outside of 200 miles, in area 3L specifically.

In terms of other measures that are in place, we have a very robust at-sea observers program, dockside monitoring, gear requirements, mesh size and those sorts of things that ensure, for example, that small fish are not being caught. Canada has a minimum size of 43 millimetres for cod, which is larger than NAFO's previous minimum size, and Canada was successful in having that changed for 3L cod this fall at the meeting.

We'll also have a seasonal closure that will be in place from April 15 to June 30 to help protect potential spawning activity.

There are a number of measures we've put in place to ensure that the fishing activity is done in a way that mitigates the risk, but is monitored to ensure that the quotas available are respected and not exceeded.

● (1240)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: In 2016, northern cod moved out of the critical zone and into the cautious zone. We found that out earlier this year. Are there any other fish that are in the cautious zone for which we have a stewardship fishery instead of a commercial fishery?

Mr. Adam Burns: Not that I'm aware of. My view is that the stewardship fishery was a unique fishery specific to the northern cod fishery.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: There was a lot of very interesting and compelling testimony here today, but one thing I want to go back to is the economic benefits with respect to the offshore. We talked about the season and we talked about the potential for continuing the fishery in the winter months.

I think you touched upon the number of people employed and said you have to find more data. Do we have just a general idea of how much employment this will create or sustain in the offshore?

Do we have numbers for the inshore as well? My God, they're absolutely the heartbeat and the lifeblood of the fishery, not just in Newfoundland and Labrador, but in Atlantic Canada and, I dare say, across the country. Do we have statistics on the employment from inshore to offshore that are Canadian?

Mr. Adam Burns: This year's management decision increased the available quota to the inshore sector as well, so that will have an economic benefit for it. There are hundreds of jobs associated with the offshore fishery, as well as with the processing sector, which will also benefit from the decision on the year-round commercial fishery.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: We don't have specific, hard data per se. We have general ideas of the employment it creates, say, on the west side of Newfoundland and Labrador and the east side of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have general ideas at this moment of how it would maintain and perhaps create new economic opportunities.

Mr. Adam Burns: We can provide the committee with the number of inshore groundfish licence-holders and the number who were active this year. There may be some data lag in terms of the number of active harvesters for this year.

In terms of the employment levels in processing plants, that's not direct jurisdiction for DFO, so we don't have specific data on exact numbers related to the processing sector.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Madam Desbiens for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to get a picture of the potential impacts of commercial fishery versus stewardship fishery. These two approaches have different aims.

Could you describe for me the impact on the resource going forward?

Mr. Adam Burns: The big difference is the inclusion of other participants in the fishery. I'm thinking in particular of quotas for indigenous groups, special allocations and, of course, quotas for the offshore fleet.

Management and sustainability measures are still in place for the offshore fleet; they may have even been strengthened. So there's no difference in terms of protecting stocks. Management measures continue to protect them.

As for the risks associated with the 5,000-tonne increase in the total allowable catch, there's almost no difference from the risks that existed previously for the stocks when the fishery predicted a total allowable catch of 13,000 tonnes.

• (1245)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: There are risks to the stocks, but we also have to think about the risks associated with fishing techniques. In the case of offshore fishing, the risks are known. That has certainly caused the expected results to fluctuate a bit, hasn't it?

Mr. Adam Burns: Some areas are closed to protect vulnerable species in the ocean. In addition, there are measures in place to monitor catches and ensure that total allowable catches are met. So there are a number of measures in place with respect to the offshore fleet.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: The costs that have—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Desbiens. There are only five seconds left. It's not enough time to get a question in.

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

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

This is for Mr. Burns.

I'm wondering if you can share a little bit regarding the probability that stocks will dip back into the critical zone and the department will, in fact, have to walk back on this decision. Do you have a rough estimate of the percentage of the risk that this may occur?

Mr. Adam Burns: As I noted, the difference in the risk to the stock between a rollover, if you were, of a stewardship fishery at 13,000 and the management plan that the minister has put in place is that there is almost no difference. It's a 1% difference between those two. The net effect is, essentially, the same in terms of the risk tolerance for this decision, which is certainly consistent with the fish stock provisions in the Fisheries Act.

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

Can you confirm that the decision will not negatively impact the ability of northern cod to reach a healthy population level? Is this something that you can reassure Newfoundlanders and people across Canada?

Mr. Adam Burns: My colleague Bernard Vigneault will speak to that.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Just for the record, it's a 2% difference, but it's the same point; it's not very significant. Yes, the issue for the probability of growth is that, even with no fishing, including the stewardship fishery, there is a fairly high probability of decline. That's why the additional probability difference with the increased fisheries is not very significant. Again, we're talking about a 2% difference between the probability with the stewardship fishery and with the TAC that was announced.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much to the witnesses.

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

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

I know we're in the middle of a very important emergency study on northern cod, and Mr. Kelloway continues to say that, on this side of the table, we're trying to dodge the Fisheries Act, but just for the record, Mr. Chair, Mr. Morrissey's motion was made in February 2024. It was to conduct the study of the Fisheries Act following the abandoned and wrecked vessels study. Therefore, Mr. Kelloway needs to take that up with Mr. Morrissey because Mr. Morrissey's motion indicated that that side wanted to have that study after the wrecked and abandoned vessels study. It will happen.

To Mr. Burns, getting back to where we were a little earlier in the meeting about a stewardship fishery and at what point a stewardship fishery is actually a commercial fishery or how much longer we could have pushed our stewardship fishery and to what level before we had serious push-back from NAFO, is there anything that states that offshore vessels wouldn't be able to take part in a scientific research fishery inside the parameters of a stewardship fishery?

• (1250)

Mr. Adam Burns: There is no specific policy that defines what a stewardship fishery is. It was a unique approach that was applied specifically to the 2J3KL northern cod fishery. That said, it would be very atypical to not have a commercial fishery on a stock in a cautious zone, and indeed, at the NAFO annual meeting this fall, those comments were made around the table by some contracting parties related to the management of other stocks where there was debate about a moratorium, but the stock was in the cautious zone, so a similar debate was had on a stock that was entirely NAFO managed.

Mr. Clifford Small: You stated earlier that a typical fishery for northern cod, back in the day, was around 500,000 tonnes. Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Burns: I think that it was one of the higher levels. I don't know that it would be necessarily typical, but it was as much as 500,000 tonnes. That's correct.

Mr. Clifford Small: That was basically what you said in your opening statement. The difference between 18,000 tonnes and 500,000 tonnes is quite a difference.

How far into the cautious zone are we? Are we still close to the critical zone, or are we closer to the healthy zone?

Mr. Adam Burns: My colleague Bernard Vigneault can speak to that as well—

Mr. Clifford Small: You can speak to that, Mr. Burns.

Mr. Adam Burns: —but I can tell you that we don't have an upper stock reference point for this stock. There is no healthy zone defined at this time for the stock, so it's not really possible to say where in the cautious zone the stock is.

Mr. Clifford Small: Would you say we've come a long way from the critical zone, at this point?

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, the framework assessment that was done in the fall adjusted the limit reference point. It essentially lowered the limit reference point based, as my colleague noted, on further evidence about the level from which the stocks continue to have productivity to rebuild, and the stock has been stable since 2016. Certainly, we continue to have concern about the stock, which is why we have put in place strong measures to protect the stock within the Canadian fishery, and that's also why we have negotiated those strong measures at NAFO to continue protecting the stock, to ensure that it will continue to grow in the coming years and to further increase the economic benefits that would flow to the harvesting sector.

Mr. Clifford Small: We talked earlier about the pressure from NAFO, which was basically non-existent, to flip this fishery from a stewardship fishery to a commercial fishery. It seems a bit hypothetical—the response that you gave to Mr. Morrissey—that we'd

be faced with having to cough up the 5% to NAFO. Why would you think that NAFO would automatically jump in and say, “We're going to have that 5% whether you give it to us or not”? That's basically how you put it.

Mr. Adam Burns: NAFO decisions are taken by the 13 contracting parties. What I can tell you is that it would be very atypical to not have a commercial fishery on a stock in the cautious zone, like northern cod. NAFO would have the jurisdiction to establish whatever harvesting levels it wanted to, were Canada not co-operating at the table and negotiating strong measures.

That was our objective: ensuring the NAFO measures in place are robust, in terms of limiting the harvesting potential of other contracting parties, and ensuring that the conservation measures in place are consistent with Canadian measures, as the manager of this stock.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small. You're a little more than a minute over, but I'll get that back at the next meeting.

Mr. Morrissey, you have five minutes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

After listening to all of the testimony given today, I have a question.

Would we have been able to achieve, with NAFO, a reduced size of commercial cod without disagreement?

Mr. Adam Burns: No. Without Canada negotiating with contracting parties, the measures that were achieved would not have been—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You reduced the size.

Mr. Adam Burns: We increased the minimum size.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You increased the minimize size.

Mr. Adam Burns: That's correct.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Tell us about the impact of putting a seasonal closure on it. What do those two measures do for the overall resource?

Mr. Adam Burns: Canada succeeded in having Canadian conservation measures implemented within the NAFO regulatory area, and that—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Is that the first time for this particular species, in this particular zone?

Mr. Adam Burns: I believe so. I wasn't at the table 30 years ago when it was last managed by NAFO. Certainly, however, this was a successful experience. We succeeded in having those Canadian measures implemented.

Without Canada's participation in that discussion and negotiation, minimum size, gear requirements and fishery closure, which are all based on the best available data.... It is based on data from the previous commercial fishery in the nineties, but it is intended to close an area we believe to be a sensitive one, from a conservation perspective. Contracting parties have agreed on that closure being applied in the NAFO zone, as well.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How long will this be in place?

Mr. Adam Burns: The closure is from April 15 to June 30.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No. What is the particular agreement on this new increased size and the seasonal closures?

Mr. Adam Burns: Knowing exactly when these closures should apply will be discussed each year as data improves.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Is it fair to say that it will be on the basis of future discussions, going forward?

Mr. Adam Burns: That's correct.

A similar closure is in place for 3M cod at NAFO. It, too, is renewed each year. That is a routine element of any decision to renew it. Now that it's in place, it obviously makes it easier to maintain.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I watch it for the inshore, but looking at the offshore, I would come to the conclusion that the minister negotiated very well on behalf of the Canadian fishery, as it relates to a difficult environment dealing with international partners. To use your words, Canada secured a number of "significant" wins in the overall global management of this key resource off Canada's east coast. That tells me, then, that the ministry and the minister negotiated very well on behalf of Canadian fishers.

You referenced the increased quota to the inshore. Is that correct? Could you elaborate on that a bit more?

Mr. Adam Burns: The inshore quota for this year is 83.73%, which is—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How does that compare to last year?

Mr. Adam Burns: It's 15,000 and change. That's about 2,000 tonnes more than what was available last year in the 13,000-tonne stewardship fishery.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Was that paramount to the whole decision around the management of this important resource, going forward?

Mr. Adam Burns: I'm not sure I follow that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It's what we've been discussing. How was this arrived at? The impression that was left is that Canada gave more access to the offshore, which is not the case.

Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Burns: The quota for the offshore is 6%, but, certainly, the available quota, the quantum of fish available to the inshore this year, is about 2,000 tonnes higher than it was last year.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Is that significant for the inshore above the offshore?

Mr. Adam Burns: I understand your question. The quantum of fish available to the offshore this year is just over 1,000 tonnes, and the increase to the inshore is, I believe, just over 2,000 tonnes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The decision was weighed heavily towards the inshore. At the same time, the decision and the data that went into the decision-making process secured significant key wins for the overall management of this northeastern resource off Newfoundland for Canada.

Thank you for your very good testimony today, Mr. Burns.

I believe my time is up.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

That concludes the meeting.

I want to thank Mr. Burns, Mr. Vigneault, and, of course, Mr. McGillivray for joining us online, and sharing their knowledge of this particular study that the committee has undertaken.

If members have a minute, I'd like to have a moment to say something when our witnesses are gone. I know we all have somewhere to be, but I'll be quick.

I want to comment on the way the committee is behaving, when doing various studies. I've been on this committee now for almost nine years. There are other members here who have been here, as well. However, it seems now that it's gotten to a point where there are political jabs back and forth. Instead of dealing with the study at hand, and getting the information we need to be able to present a good report back to the House of Commons, it's smack for smack, I suppose. Whether it's the Liberals taking a smack at the Conservatives, or the Conservatives taking a smack at the Liberals—

Mr. Mel Arnold: The NDP take its share, too.

The Chair: It's not as bad. You're the best.

I just think it takes away—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Come to the Bloc.

The Chair: —from what we're trying to do. When there are witnesses in the room, they must sit back and think, "Geez, they're like youngsters singing out at one another. It's like kindergarten."

I would like members to take that under advisement, to try and leave the political part of this outside these two doors, if we can. It will make the committee run, I think, a lot better, and a lot more smoothly. We can then give a better report back to the House at the end of the day.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's very fair, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I want to thank our clerk, our analyst and everyone who made this meeting a success today.

The meeting is adjourned.

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