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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1630)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 123 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Before we proceed, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. Please address all comments through the chair.

Before we start, I think Madame Desbiens has a statement she'd like to make.

[Translation]

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

I simply wanted to draw your attention to the fact that a few days after receiving the first report on mental health in the Quebec fisheries world, we learned of the tragic death by suicide of Gilles Legresley of Chandler, a snow crab fisherman.

My condolences to the family, loved ones and all harvesters in Quebec and Canada.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that, Madame Desbiens. I'm sure we all send our prayers to that very family at this time.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Monday, September 16, 2024, the committee is commencing its study of the mandate and current priorities of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses for the first panel.

Of course, we have the honourable Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Diane Lebouthillier. She is accompanied by Mario Pelletier, commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, and Kevin Brosseau, former associate deputy minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Thank you for taking time to appear today, Minister. You have five minutes or less for an opening statement. You have the floor.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to join you on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today to discuss my mandate and highlight some of the progress my department is making in areas of interest to the committee.

All of the work I'm about to discuss pertains to my ongoing commitment to advancing reconciliation, supporting coastal communities, addressing biodiversity loss and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Before I begin, however, I want to acknowledge two devastating incidents that occurred over the last two months.

In early August, a plane carrying three employees of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or DFO, who worked at the regional science branch in Mont-Joli, Quebec, crashed during a scientific mission to Newfoundland and Labrador. One employee was killed in the accident and two other mission members were injured. This is a major loss for the DFO family and for the scientific community as a whole.

In addition, just last month, we learned that a crew member of the Canadian Coast Guard vessel Vincent Massey was lost at sea off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As you can imagine, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard are a very close-knit family. These are heart-rending tragedies for us. My thoughts are with the families, loved ones and friends of those we lost, and, of course, with everyone in my department who knew them and worked with them.

As Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, I am responsible for supporting sustainable, stable and prosperous fisheries for the benefit of all harvesters, including Indigenous peoples, and for ensuring the safety of mariners in Canadian waters. I take these responsibilities very seriously.

Over the past year, I've made a series of decisions informed by scientists and stakeholders, which led to the opening of new commercial fisheries—whelk, sea cucumber and sea urchin—as well as the reopening of the redfish and northern cod fisheries. I also authorized a bait fishery for Atlantic mackerel for personal use.

Finally, I announced a new pilot program, which will study striped bass and its use as bait for lobster harvesters and as a potential fishery for future development.

Quite recently, I announced that personal-use sealing licences will be made available to potential sealers in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. That hunt is focused on harp and grey seals, whose populations fall within a healthy area of the application of the precautionary approach, or PA.

A limited number of new licences for personal use will be issued for 2024 to conduct this pilot activity in new areas. Each individual sealer who receives a personal use licence will be able to hunt up to six harp or grey seals.

Going forward, I encourage our partners, both at home and abroad, to open their doors to Canadian products from our sustainable commercial seal hunt.

On reconciliation, I am personally committed to working in partnership with Indigenous communities to implement the right to fish in pursuit of a moderate livelihood.

Our government is also supporting Canada's fish and seafood sector in other ways: funding repairs to critical small craft harbour infrastructure; investing in innovative technology and infrastructure; working with partners to reduce threats posed by abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear and to find solutions to reduce future gear losses; developing the first-ever conservation strategy to support and promote wild Atlantic salmon conservation policy; and prioritizing a new review of the Fisheries Act to strengthen the protection of owner-operators and protect the fishing industry for generations to come.

My department is also working closely with provinces and territories, Indigenous partners, fishing associations and affected communities to protect and rebuild Pacific salmon stocks.

Not long ago, my department signed a progressive reconciliation agreement on fisheries resources with five First Nations in British Columbia. This two-year funding agreement provides the framework for an effective and collaborative approach to fisheries resource governance, management and planning for the five First Nations.

- (1635)

Another important component of my mandate is to work with provinces, territories, Indigenous communities, industry, environmentalists and other stakeholders to protect 30% of Canada's oceans by 2030. Before 2015, less than 1% of Canada's oceans were protected. Now it's over 15%, an area roughly the size of British Columbia.

With respect to the Canadian Coast Guard, our government continues to invest in the organization's fleet, land assets, infrastructure and technology.

I'm proud to report to your committee that last August, the Coast Guard and our partners at Seaspan Shipyards launched the new oceanographic research vessel at sea. The vessel will continue to provide critical oceanographic science that will help the Government of Canada address the most pressing oceanographic issues, such as climate change. The data and samples collected on board this vessel will also support Canada's domestic and international commitments to ensure sustainable management of our oceans.

In addition to this work, the Canadian Coast Guard has signed a historic agreement with the Norwegian Coast Guard to strengthen marine safety and environmental protection. It continues to advance its commitments to reconciliation by working with Indigenous groups, who are key partners in the marine search and rescue system. It responds to environmental and marine hazards by providing them with training and funding.

The Coast Guard also unveiled the Arctic strategy. This strategy is a 10-year vision that will allow the Coast Guard, in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit and Métis, to continue to provide marine safety, security, science, sovereignty and environmental protection in an ever-changing operational environment in the North.

Finally, last year was a productive year. Many new commercial fisheries were opened, new scientific data was collected to support new fisheries to come and key Coast Guard objectives were achieved.

I am grateful on a daily basis to the officials at Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Coast Guard, as well as all partners from coast to coast to coast, for the hard work we do to deliver on the government's objectives.

I am now pleased to answer your questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for that, Minister. It was a little bit over the time, but hopefully we can catch up along the way.

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

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and her associates for appearing here today.

Minister, would you agree that the aquaculture industry is a valuable component of coastal economies, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: You're quite right. Aquaculture is indeed valuable. It's a food security issue.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: Great. That's an excellent answer. Thank you very much.

Minister, are you aware of the importance of the oyster industry, both the commercial fishery side and the aquaculture side, to the P.E.I. economy and actually their culture and the very being of Prince Edward Island?

• (1640)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Prince Edward Island's aquaculture and oyster industry does indeed support a significant economy. This year, it is experiencing particular difficulties, which are truly terrible.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: Wonderful. I'm glad to hear that you're there for the oyster industry by the sounds of what you're saying here.

It was announced this summer, on July 24, that the MSX parasite had shown up in P.E.I. in three locations. Three or four weeks later, you announced some funding to support that industry. Was it half a million dollars?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: No, it's one million dollars.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: That's over two years, yes.

I've had aquaculture industry stakeholders from the ridings of MP Casey, MP Morrissey, MP McDonald and MP MacAulay reach out to me. They're extremely concerned that the speed and the commitment from your department in addressing the MSX issue in the oyster industry of P.E.I. is lacking what they actually need.

Do you understand that this industry in Prince Edward Island could be, and more than likely will be, completely wiped out within two years?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I was in Prince Edward Island this summer, and I met with people in the industry. I was accompanied by my colleague Robert Morrissey.

I made a million-dollar funding announcement there. So we are working closely with the provincial government and with industry on research to see how we can help them, because the consequences—

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you know that this parasite completely wipes out the oyster industry wherever it shows up? It wiped it out about 20 years ago in Bras d'Or Lake, and it wiped it out up and down the eastern seaboard. It's wiped it out everywhere.

Are you aware that it will take at least three generations of oysters? How many years are in a generation of oysters?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Yes, I am aware of the consequences of this problem and of the fact that we have not yet found a solution. I know what happened at Bras d'Or, where the entire oyster population was wiped out. It has not recovered to this day.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: I'm glad to know that you're aware, but the fine folks of Prince Edward Island are quite concerned. They're expressing to me that you haven't done enough.

Now, there are some people you've done quite a bit for. Compare that to \$500,000 this year and \$500,000 next year for an industry that, including its spinoffs, contributes close to \$100 million to the economy of Prince Edward Island.

Are you familiar with a group called the Atlantic Healthy Oceans Initiative?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: No, I'm not.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: You might know them by an acronym—AHOI. Now, that's not Chips Ahoy. It's not the cookies, you know.

Are you not familiar with it?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I hope we won't be talking about cookies today. This is too important.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: Minister, they have five employees. You just dished out \$1.8 million to this AHOI group—the Atlantic Healthy Oceans Initiative. You gave \$1.8 million to them and \$500,000 to the entire oyster industry of Prince Edward Island. That's not showing me you really care.

Can you explain to me how that shows you care? You gave \$1.5 million to a staff of five people and \$500,000 to the entire oyster industry of Prince Edward Island. I can't see the logic.

• (1645)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: From what I understand, as far as the Conservatives are concerned, research and development and the work of scientists are unimportant. It was never important to you. However, I can tell you that for the oyster industry, research and development are important.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: How about some R and D for the oyster industry of P.E.I.?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Small. Your time is up.

I will remind members to allow questions to be answered, please.

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

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Minister, we'll go to the west coast, if you don't mind.

I want to go back 12 years to October 2012 and the Cohen commission's report on Fraser River salmon. I want to check and see whether, in fact, the following is in your mandate, or at least on your radar.

Recommendation 3 in Justice Cohen's report says:

The Government of Canada should remove from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' mandate the promotion of salmon farming as an industry and farmed salmon as a product.

This has been recognized as putting the DFO in a very difficult, conflicted situation since 2012, because there have certainly been suggestions that they have abandoned the precautionary principle in the past, in the interest of the promotion of the salmon farming industry.

I'm wondering if there has at least been any discussion, if not progress, on removing the salmon farming industry from the overview or scrutiny of the DFO, and putting it someplace where it doesn't put the DFO into a perceived conflict.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Salmon farming is an important topic. As I mentioned at the outset, there's also a food security issue. According to the latest data published, since 2022, all wildlife species on the planet are in trouble, and we've seen a major increase in the consumption of salmon farming products.

There is work to be done to strike a balance between protecting wild salmon, food security and all aspects related to aquaculture. DFO is working with its partners to achieve this balance.

[English]

Mr. Ken Hardie: On behalf of the British Columbia side we hope there's a reconsideration of the Cohen report recommendations. I think a lot of positive work has been done, but there are still gaps that I think need to be addressed. Even if it's to say "No, we're not going to do it", at least we'll know where we stand.

I read through the draft salmon aquaculture transition plan for British Columbia and it would seem that a fair bit of work was done to cover the ground to talk to a lot of the stakeholders, but what I really honestly didn't see in the transition plan was consultation with the aquaculture industry itself. I know that we've had a lot of discussions with them and they've resisted everything that we've come forward with about the problems and the difficulties that we've seen over time, but I'm wondering if, notwithstanding what may or may not be in the transition plan, there is ongoing dialogue with the industry out there about their future in British Columbia.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Yes, the dialogue is ongoing. What was tabled is not a final transition plan. We must continue our efforts to make that transition, working not only with the aquaculture industry but also with the provincial government, Indigenous communities and the federal government. Work on this transition is proceeding, while protecting Canadians' food security.

[English]

Mr. Ken Hardie: This leads basically to another question. First and foremost, the aquaculture industry finally woke up to the fact that you and your immediate predecessor were really serious about reforming that whole industry. In the work that's been done since, the new regimes being brought in are quite brave and very definitive, and I believe the west coast thanks you very much for that. But along the way we in this committee particularly took a very very close work at the science being conducted by the DFO. I think the gentlest way of putting it is that there were some gaps in our confidence in that the science being done and presented as evidence for decision-making fell short, particularly when it did come to aquaculture.

I'm wondering if you can give us the latest background on moves to add a little bit more credibility to science at the DFO. I'm concerned, for instance, that some of the studies done were funded by the aquaculture industry, and enlightened self-interest, of course, can worm its way in there. What can you tell us about the state of science at the DFO on the west coast? Are you convinced that they're doing their job?

• (1650)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: What I can tell my colleague is that the science is evolving. Across the world, when it comes to aquaculture, whether it's industry or government, people want the best possible practices to protect wildlife species.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada therefore works in collaboration with universities, environmental groups and everyone across the aquaculture sector. The department's objectives are to ensure the protection of wildlife species and to foster interactions between the two sectors. That work is ongoing, and it must continue.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We move now to the next questioner, Madame Desbiens, for six minutes or less, please.

[Translation]

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for joining us.

Good afternoon, Minister.

Before I ask my question, I want to draw your attention to a letter that was sent to you in May, so several months ago. The same letter was sent to Canada Economic Development, Transport Canada and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada from EcoMaris. EcoMaris is a training boat for people in the Coast Guard, in particular, but also for indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The letter explains that a man was the victim of a Transport Canada error, related to the certification of a vessel before and after its purchase. He is dealing with a funding deficit, and his application remains unanswered. I think it's important to look into this problem, because many young people, having dropped out, return to school to resume learning thanks to this school boat, which performs miracles.

Thank you.

Minister, we heard recently that tens of millions of dollars were invested in offshore boats several months ago. Coincidentally, the redfish fishery was then opened. Now we have the opening of the cod fishery. We asked the harvesters whether they had invested any money. They told us that they had indeed invested several million dollars.

Were these offshore harvesters, who received significant quotas, aware of the opening of these fisheries, since they invested so much money?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: With respect to opening the redfish fishery, it was very clear that money from the Canada Fisheries Fund would be set aside to help boats and businesses adapt to the reopening of a new fishery.

Whether we're talking about midshore or offshore boats, I can tell you that this initiative puts people in our regions to work in our plants.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: In essence, you're saying that things are going fairly well in Canada. However, things are not going so well in Quebec.

If there was money to support those boats, can we hope that pelagic harvesters and the dozens of shrimpers in dry docks will also receive some support and significant quotas, so they can make a living from fishing at some point?

• (1655)

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: The quotas allotted in Quebec were part of the historical quotas planned for the province. I'm very proud to be able to say that those quotas were preserved. We've even allocated a little more to Quebec fishers.

That said, fishers have applied to the Canada Fisheries Fund. I expect to approve the amounts for this fund very soon. You were right to bring it up.

Last week, we held discussions with redfish harvesters. As we said, it's a start to opening the fishery. The moratorium lasted 30 years, so we gave people two years to adapt. During our discussions last week, we talked about having a little more flexibility.

The main thing was to open the redfish fishery, but we also had to be sure to protect the bycatch. According to the latest reports, some boats went fishing around Newfoundland, and I believe they returned with 43 tonnes of redfish.

The work is being done, but it must also be understood that, after a 30-year closure, everyone is adapting. That includes processing plants as well.

As a reminder, I announced the opening of these fisheries less than a year ago.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

I'm glad to hear that. I hope that shrimpers and pelagic fishers are listening to us, as they secured the mooring lines a few months ago, if not a few years ago.

We often hear from fishers, at least fishers on the ground, that they are not consulted, that there is no predictability and that they saw nothing coming. The offshore fishers, on the other hand, seem to have seen it coming, so much so that they have invested millions of dollars.

In this context, I would like to know if there is a genuine desire to go back to the fishers and consider their expertise more closely. They have acquired important knowledge, but they don't feel heard. I'm not making this up; they're telling me this.

What do you have to say to them about that?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: First of all, I can tell you that I meet with fishers on a regular basis. They're in my region, after all.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I know. It's your riding.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I meet with them throughout the region. I also meet very regularly with associations, both in person—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I understand.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: As far as fishers are concerned, I can tell you that I have no problem wandering around the wharves in my region.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I'm glad to hear that.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I also feel completely safe everywhere.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: This is not about safety at all.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: We are really working with the fishers. The adaptation process is obviously not easy.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Have you seen the dry-dock shrimpers?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Yes, I have. I made announcements in Rivière-au-Renard. That's in my riding.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: How does that make you feel?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: A boat is more beautiful on the water.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Did the redfish fishery open too late? Has that hurt the resource?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I made a quick decision when I arrived. We will continue to work and adapt.

As the member for the riding, I can tell you that, for a number of years, shrimp fishers worked hard to keep the same quotas. That's why I made the decision to drastically reduce the total catch. Outreach work remains to be done. Will it be easy over the next few years? I don't know. One thing is certain, we will have to adapt a lot, as the gulf is warming.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I think that fishers will no longer be there to do the adapting, Ms. Lebouthillier.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

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

[Translation]

Welcome, Minister.

[English]

I'm happy that you're here today. There are lots of questions we'd like to ask you.

The first one wasn't going to be on my list today, but now I have to ask it. My colleague MP Hardie was asking about the transition from open-net fish farms, and a couple of things stuck out to me.

The first thing is I felt like you were saying there is a difference between food security and the protection of wild salmon and that they were two separate things that needed to be balanced. That's what I was hearing, but I want to point out how important it is for us to recognize that protecting wild salmon is protecting food security. The two aren't polar opposites that need to be balanced. In fact, you can look at both of them, and the transition away from open-net fish farms is part of protecting wild Pacific salmon and food security.

I appreciate the questions that were asked, but I do want to highlight one of the questions about the industry not being consulted enough. We know for a fact that the industry, between July 2022 and September 2023, was consulted 52 times by the previous minister, and I believe some of that might have included you. I can't remember the exact timeline.

Just to clarify the question that was asked about the industry not being consulted enough, we know that Mowi, Grieg and Cermaq have been consulted to a much larger degree than any other stakeholders. I'm wondering if you would be able to comment on the amount of consultation that has happened with industry through the process of developing a transition plan, which, in my opinion, is not happening in a timely enough manner.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: In the past year, I visited British Columbia three times. I spent almost 21 days there working with the fishing community. I met with people from the aquaculture sector and representatives of indigenous communities. I met with people who work in the processing sector and others who work in the recreational salmon fishing industry.

Major work has been done, and we are continuing in that direction. I'm not just talking about me; a whole team supports me. For example, one person on the team is responsible for dealing specifically with issues related to British Columbia.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister.

I want to move on to other questions, but can you confirm that industry has been consulted significantly through this process?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Yes, consultations have been held.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Minister, on the southern coast of Vancouver Island, we have lighthouses, too, including the light stations at Pachena Point and Carmanah Point. It is my understanding that, this week, staff members are being removed from these stations. We know the important role these light stations play along our coast, both for navigation and the safety of mariners. They help out in endless ways with search and rescue and emergency response operations.

As I hope you are fully aware, the entire NDP caucus, including the leader of the NDP, sent you a letter with the concerns being brought forward by west coasters about the removal of the lighthouse keepers from these lighthouses.

Minister, there was a report that came out in 2011 called "Seeing the Light", which is quite appropriate, and it was very clear in its recommendations.

I'm wondering if you have looked at this letter and have seen the recommendation in there that very clearly articulates that consultations are required and that consultations happen with all those impacted around the lighthouses. Has that been taken into consideration?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Whether it's on the west coast or the east coast, lighthouses—I have one in my riding—and aids to navigation are important.

I will let Mr. Pelletier tell you more about that.

Mr. Mario Pelletier (Commissioner, Canadian Coast Guard): Thank you.

[English]

Our motto at the Coast Guard is "Safety first, service always," and obviously it starts with the safety of our people so that we can deliver the service, making sure that mariners are safe.

We have a situation at those two light stations where the ground is unstable. We have a geotechnical report—

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

I so appreciate the information. I want to hear your answers. I'm wondering if we could change the order, perhaps, that I can ask you for more clarification once the second hour comes and our minister has gone.

I want to ask the minister, and perhaps you could provide some additional feedback, of course, through the chair, if the consultation has happened with the light keepers themselves, as is stated clearly in the Senate report that came out. Are they being consulted? All those impacted, are they aware of this plan? It sounds like they're being pulled out and there has been no consultation with all those impacted.

I want to get some clarification from the minister. Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Since you are talking about technical details, I will let Mr. Pelletier answer the question.

If you're asking me if I have personally consulted lightkeepers, the answer is no. If you want a more complete answer about people's concerns and safety, Mr. Pelletier will be able to answer you.

• (1705)

[*English*]

The Chair: If Mr. Pelletier is going to answer, he'll have to send it in writing because we've gone a little bit over time.

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

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

Thank you, Minister, for appearing. I appreciate the remarks you delivered last night at the Salmon Forever reception. I hope that the support you expressed in those remarks will result in meaningful actions for Pacific salmon.

Minister, the Fraser River is a major artery for Pacific salmon, which is why it's so important to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing on the Fraser system. During your tenure now as leading DFO, what has been the trend of DFO's enforcement activities on the Fraser River? Have DFO's conservation protection enforcement activities on the Fraser increased, decreased or stayed the same?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Illicit, unreported and unregulated fishing, or illegal fishing, is unacceptable to our government. We are committed to conserving fish stocks and enforcing the Fisheries Act. Targeted measures are taken on a sector-by-sector basis. It's probably not perfect, as the territory is huge, but the work is being done.

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold: Have the activities increased, decreased or stayed the same during your tenure?

Mr. Kevin Brosseau (Former Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Chair, as the minister mentioned, the enforcement operations on the Fraser River, on the west coast, are certainly a priority.

I think, to be able to categorize it as going up or down, based on the time that the minister has been the minister, it might be easier for us to provide you statistics on hours patrolled, etc. We can do that through you, Chair.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I would ask for it in writing, by year, for the committee.

Thank you.

Minister, in your last appearance, in March—I believe it was your last appearance—you told the committee, “zebra mussels are found everywhere in Canada”. That statement was clearly false and caused acute concern amongst conservationists and organizations that are fighting against aquatic invasive species in Canada.

Western Canadians are wondering how they can trust you to protect fish habitat when you believe they are already infested with the species that we must fight.

Minister, will you finally acknowledge that preventing the spread of zebra and quagga mussels in western Canada is essential and ensure western Canada receives its fair share of federal resources to prevent aquatic invasive species?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I didn't have access to the interpretation for the last part of what you said.

Could you just repeat the last part of your question?

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold: Will you finally acknowledge that preventing the spread of zebra mussels and quagga mussels in western Canada is essential, and ensure that western Canada receives its fair share of federal resources to prevent aquatic invasive species?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Our government is prioritizing its participation in the fight against all invasive species. DFO takes this work very seriously when it comes to both zebra or quagga mussels and green crab. The department is doing important work, as the presence of these invasive species seriously impacts our communities.

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I question how seriously your department takes this. I was recently provided a letter that had been sent to you from the Okanagan Basin Water Board, dated October 18, 2023. Your department responded on your behalf on October 17—one year to respond to a letter that simply had two requests. I would suggest to you that you and your ministry have failed to take the risk of aquatic invasive species as a serious threat to western Canada.

I want to move on to the next piece regarding commercial catch monitoring. Last year the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development found that DFO had failed to “collect the dependable and timely [information about fish] catch that it needs to substantially manage commercial marine fisheries and protect Canada's fish stocks” from overfishing.

Why has DFO failed so badly to monitor commercial harvests?

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I would like to go back to your first question and say that Canada is investing millions of dollars across the country to address invasive species and their impact on the environment.

With respect to fisheries monitoring, starting in 2023, Canada is investing \$30.9 million over five years, in addition to ongoing funding of \$5.1 million, to implement the fisheries monitoring policy.

The territory is huge, but the work is being done.

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold: That is not being done, according to the monitor.

Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Madame Minister, to FOPO.

Madame Minister, since it was brought up earlier, MSX, as you are well aware, exists in every oyster-growing region in North America. It's not new, and it's being dealt with.

I want to thank you for taking the time to come in and meet with the industry and me extensively when it was first detected.

The key priority at that time was to ensure continued access to the market, and the government, through its agency, stepped up and addressed that, through CFIA, to ensure the market because, at that time, our sister provinces, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, wanted to stop exports from going through until we made a determination.

I'm saying that, Madame Minister, because in P.E.I., the oyster industry is jointly managed between the P.E.I. government and the federal government. In 1987, DFO signed an agreement with the Government of P.E.I. to co-manage the oyster fishery because it's inland waters and bays. You were there when it first came about, but on October 8, P.E.I.'s Conservative minister stated that the oyster industry is “thriving”—that was two weeks ago—and that it required no assistance from the government to go on.

Our position is much different. You said very clearly that you'd be there for the industry when the industry decides what supports it needs. This is an industry that is not always on the same page, and to this date, we are still waiting to see exactly what plan will be formulated to ensure that this industry grows, but it does not wipe it

out. We're having a fall fishery this fall. It's going not badly, but there have to be steps put in place for the future. However, unlike the provincial minister, you were there for the industry and stood with it, and we're committed to going there.

I want to go to another issue. I was pleased when you announced, this morning or yesterday, that you would be authorizing personal use sealing licences for P.E.I. Could you give us a bit of a number on what you hope this harvest may do because we've heard so much in this committee about efficient harvesting of this resource, which seems to be growing in abundance. Would you care to expand on just exactly what it means?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: When it comes to licences, our objective is to promote the seal hunt economy so that people can have access to a protein source and use the entire animal. We work with indigenous communities, both domestically and internationally. We want to make it a product that contributes to tourism development and can be offered in restaurants, for example. The idea is to enable the entire population to have access to a worthwhile product. This economy must be developed with indigenous communities and the provincial government.

I was very pleased with the announcement we made yesterday. In my office, I have already been receiving calls from people who would like to have a licence. We made the announcement for Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, and we are giving Nova Scotia time to amend its regulations so that its citizens can also have access to sealing licences.

This type of activity can expand significantly, as it did in the case of the lobster fishery. For me, that's the most beautiful experience we can have. As I mentioned earlier, we have already fattened the soil of our gardens with lobster. Lobster was also served in prisons at the time.

• (1715)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Is this a first for provinces—for P.E.I., I believe it is—to have a personal use licence? Is this the first time the department has issued such a licence?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Yes, in Prince Edward Island.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes, I've received a lot of positive comments as well.

I believe my time is up, Madame Minister. Thank you for that.

I'm looking forward to meeting with you again when the oyster industry and the Government of P.E.I. decide what best steps forward we have to take.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I'll go back to what I was saying about the concern expressed by fishers. We heard comments from shrimp fishers in reports on Radio-Canada. They made a heartfelt plea to be given more consideration and listened to. They want more predictability. Mackerel fishers spent hundreds of thousands of dollars three days before the mackerel fishery opened, and then they were told, three days later, that there would be no mackerel fishery. Meanwhile, we hear that offshore fishers spent millions of dollars months before the cod fishery opened to prepare. There's something troubling here. I would like to know how you see the future in this regard.

The independent scientists at DFO consult the fishers on the ground a lot. They take into account their observations, which are the most accurate observations that can be made. Your boats conduct analyses, but fishers are on the water every morning, and they are not being listened to. That creates distress. When people are not consulted and the government decides how their lives will unfold, it is difficult for them.

Do you think things will change?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Things have already changed. I've been on the ground with them for a year. I meet with them regularly.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: In that case, why are we hearing them say the opposite and bemoan the situation on Radio-Canada?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Again, I meet with them regularly.

You are right to say that fishers have expertise, whether they are traditional fishers, people from indigenous communities or scientists.

As I mentioned, by pooling all of our expertise, we will be able to work on the fisheries of today and ensure that we have sustainable fisheries for the future and for future generations. That's how I am operating in the field.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I think that fishers are more inclined than all of us to protect this resource, since it is their livelihood.

Can we hope that there will be budgets to support fishers who have suffered enormous losses as a result of closures and who are seeing offshore boats rolling out their wide nets? We know that these boats destroyed the resource 30 years ago.

There's something terribly troubling here, Minister.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: You're confusing things. You can't call it an inshore fishery—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Desbiens, you've gone a bit over the time—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: The inshore fishery is fundamental to Quebec.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: The inshore fishery and the offshore fishery are two completely different activities.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That's true, but one impacts the other.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: It's in my region—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I understand that it's in your region, but I could drive there. I can do it.

[*English*]

The Chair: The question is done. The answer is done.

Cliff, go down and referee.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

I want to bring it back, just based on the fact that you were saying that you wanted to lead with some of the technical stuff.

I want to ask very simply if you are aware of the lighthouse keepers who are being removed at Pachena Point and Carmanah Point on Vancouver Island starting this week. Is this something you're aware of?

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Yes, I'm aware of that.

It must be said that it is increasingly difficult to find lighthouse keepers. There are also new technologies—

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister.

I'm sorry to interrupt, but I just want to clarify—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: —that are in place to help people who are using aids to navigation.

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Minister, I am asking a question. Thank you.

The question is if you are aware of these two lighthouses in particular, which the lighthouse keepers are being removed from. If you're not aware, I can't ask the follow-up questions.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I'm aware of that.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: You are familiar with it.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: That's correct.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much.

Are you aware of the impacts on coastal communities, mariners and west coasters of these lighthouse keepers being removed from these lighthouses this week?

Could you tell me a bit about those impacts that you're aware of and why this continues to be allowed to happen with those impacts?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: In my opinion, we have to consider the whole issue of lightkeeper safety. In terms of new technologies for aids to navigation, this is an evolving field. These new technologies are now safer.

Yes, I am aware of the problem, but we have to take into account the fact that the field is evolving, as well.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister.

You talked about technology. Do you feel that the new, automated navigation systems will allow people's screams to be heard when they are...? We've heard of multiple instances of people dying along the coast, who were crying for help and had their cries heard by the people who were in these lighthouses.

Do you think an automated system will be able to do the job of people who have been doing this work for generations in these lighthouses?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Even though we've operated a certain way for several generations, the world is changing. There are new technologies to provide aids to navigation. What's important to me is to ensure the safety of people navigating the waterways.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister.

Do you feel that the new technology will be able to provide the same level of security that lighthouse keepers have for generations? I would like to get that in writing, please.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming. I think you'll be surprised to learn that I'm going to ask you about your recent letter on the elvers.

In March, when you appeared before the committee as you had shut the season down, you said, "I want to assure you that the fishery will be open in 2025. There will be regulations." The statement

you were making at the time was that you couldn't have the fishery open unless you had regulations in place.

Will regulations be in place before the opening of the 2025 season?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: The elver fishery will reopen in 2025, and the rules will be clearer.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: In the recent letter you sent to the fishery, you were basically telling the 12 licence-holders—eight of whom are the commercial ones who, for 30 years, have actually created and built this industry—that you're going to expropriate 75% of their quota and give it to others without compensation. You're ignoring the willing buyer/willing seller policy your department has yet again.

If you are going to take 75% of their quota and give it to others—not for conservation, but just to give it to others—will you abide by the willing buyer/willing seller policy?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Concerning the elver fishery, I agree that access to licences should be expanded to enable economic prosperity, especially in rural regions.

I hope you also believe in the importance of this objective. We have to develop the economy and give people access to licences.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: That, actually, is not what's going to happen because those who work for the commercial elver licence-holders now make somewhere between \$60,000 to \$90,000 a year. Under your scenario they will be lucky to make \$50,000, so you will actually be impoverishing them from what they're doing. I don't know if you know those numbers.

Minister, let's say someone owns a Tim Hortons doughnut franchise, and you come along and say, "Well, I think it's unfair that you make a lot of money from that franchise, so I will take three-quarters of that business and give it to your employees. It's too bad you invested all this in the business—so sad—but I'm going to make it more equitable," in some strange socialist world.

● (1725)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I will tell you that the people who have access to the elver and who fish this resource did not have to pay for their licence.

We are also talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions of dollars. To me, that means that young people, the next generation, will have access to the resource.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: You're 100% incorrect, Minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: This is really important to me. What you're saying is not true at all.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Minister, the elver fishery was created by converting adult eel licenses at 0.84 kilograms per eel trap. That's how it was created 30 years ago, by people who had already paid for a licence and had an established business: You should learn about the history of it. The fact is, they invested and created businesses that have sustained hundreds and hundreds of people, so why do you think it would be better for people who work to earn less money than they do now?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I went to Portland, Maine, and saw how the elver fishing was happening. On the market, elvers sell for nearly \$5,000 a kilogram.

The work will be done with people in the community, and I can guarantee that—

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: The poaching that you allowed, Minister, has reduced the price considerably.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: —young people and the next generation will have access to licences, that we will be able to support families.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: You couldn't enforce the law on eight licence-holders. How are you going to enforce the law on 150 licence-holders when you couldn't do it for eight?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: There were no rules in the past in Canada, and that's why we went to see how the fishing was happening in Maine. We wanted to know what rules were put in place in that state in order to improve our own rules and provide better access to the resource.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: There have been fishery rules for 30 years.

I have one last question. How much TAC or quota will you give the eel licence-holders, the 30 that you say you can convert to elver? What will the quota be for them, and why would you take it from existing quota when that measure should produce a larger quota under conservation rules?

The Chair: Minister, if you could provide an answer in writing it would be best, because Mr Perkins went a little over.

We now go to Mr Weiler for the last five minutes in this round.

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

[Translation]

I want to thank the minister for being here today to answer questions.

[English]

I do want to pick up on some of the questions that some of my colleagues were asking about the aquaculture transition. On June 19

of this year the draft transition plan was announced, and there were a few items in it that I'd like to dig into a bit. The first one is that, effective July 1 of this year, there was a commitment made that new licences will be done for a maximum of five years, but they also come with stricter conditions to ensure improved management of sea lice, robust reporting requirements and additional monitoring of marine mammal interactions. Minister, I hope you might be able to explain to this committee here how, with these new interim licences, the conditions differ from what was there before.

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: The licences definitely have or will have stricter requirements. You identified a few with respect to reporting requirements, etc. We see this as a five-year transition period, if you will, until closed-net pens are actually required—in five years from the time of the announcement. Of course, DFO will continue to monitor, to enforce those conditions and to engage with communities...and do as we have. However, in terms of precision around additional licence requirements, we can provide additional details about what those conditions are in writing, through you, Chair.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you. That would be very much appreciated.

I'll follow up on that.

Unfortunately, media has reported that this was not a change that would come into effect, in any way, until 2029. I saw some media reporting on that, and a very viral video by William Shatner to that effect.

Minister, I was hoping you might be able to explain how this will be a phased approach. Part of the announcement was that restocking decisions would have to be made with this final band-aid of 2029 in mind.

• (1730)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: As was mentioned, it was a draft transition plan. We were well aware that the work had to continue, including working even more closely with partners, such as the provincial government, if we want to move from an on-water approach to a land-based approach.

We see what is happening right now in the provinces, especially in British Columbia. That is why, as soon as the plan is in place, we will be working with the provinces to develop a more detailed plan. At least we've established a time frame, and discussions are ongoing. It was important for the industry, at least, to know whether or not it should invest in transition plans to move to a land-based approach.

According to some of the discussions I've had with representatives of aquaculture companies, the banks are extremely reluctant to invest in this area. It's very possible. That is why it is important to continue to hold discussions. There may be aquaculture sites that are just going to close, and then aquaculture could be done elsewhere. That's why there are discussions from west to east. In the east, aquaculture is under provincial jurisdiction, and some provinces have said they are ready to develop aquaculture on the Atlantic side.

Discussions will continue. We'll keep you posted on that. How the transition will take place is another consideration. There will be closures, but Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada will take care of that. So someone else is looking into it to see how things can be done.

We know there are jobs associated with this project. It puts people to work in a community. We know how, in the fisheries sector, any fishing closure has an impact on the community. When you impact fisheries, you're impacting people's bread and butter. This is always a very hot topic, which is why it is important to work with all stakeholders in the community.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

I understand that the minister is here for an hour. We'll suspend for a moment to allow the minister to leave, and I believe Mr. Burns will join us at the table for the last hour of questioning.

• (1730) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1735)

The Chair: I'd like to get started again.

I'd like to welcome Mr. Adam Burns and Mr. Niall O'Dea to the table.

We'll start off the first round of questioning.

Go ahead for six minutes or less, Mr. Small.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Chair, are there no opening remarks?

The Chair: There are no remarks.

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

Mr. Burns, my question is one I've been thinking about for a while.

The minister just disregarded the advice of her own scientists on reopening the commercial northern cod quota. I'm wondering if there's a chance she might reopen a commercial mackerel fishery, given that she just went against her department on northern cod.

Are we going to see a mackerel fishery in 2025?

Mr. Adam Burns (Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Chair, no decision has been taken on the 2025 mackerel fishery. That would be a decision taken in the winter or early spring period.

Mr. Clifford Small: I understand your department has been conducting some science on mackerel over the past summer.

Do you have any of those results tabulated yet? Do you have any direction? Are there any improvements in the mackerel stock, based on the science you've conducted over the last couple of years?

Mr. Adam Burns: I don't believe there is new, peer-reviewed science available yet for mackerel. I don't have the exact schedule for the CSAS process for mackerel, but we could provide the committee with the science schedule for that.

Mr. Clifford Small: I'll switch to Mr. Burns. I'll switch to unit 1 redfish, where the decision was recently made to let the 4RST vessels fish in shallower water than was originally laid out. Are they going to be able to use ground trawl beyond October 31?

Mr. Adam Burns: Part of the minister's decision to adjust some of the bycatch measures included a change to the date when mid-water trawl would become the mandatory gear type, which has been pushed out to January 1, so yes.

Mr. Clifford Small: Will you consider making that measure a permanent measure so that the redfish harvesters could use their ground trawl all year in 4RST?

Mr. Adam Burns: Following this year's fishery, we'll have a redfish advisory committee. We'll consult with the fishing industry who have participated in the fishery, and decisions for next year's fishery will be taken in due course.

Mr. Clifford Small: We'll revisit the last time you were here. You made a statement that the inshore cod grounds were different from the offshore cod grounds for northern cod. How did you come up with that idea?

Mr. Adam Burns: I'm not sure that I recall the specific statement. Certainly, fish migrate from one area of the fishing zones to another. During the summer months, the fish tend to be more inshore, and later in the year, through the winter months, they tend to be more offshore.

Mr. Clifford Small: No, you'd said that these grounds are different grounds, that basically the inshore fishers don't fish on offshore grounds. This year, the inshore harvesters have fished out to the edge of the continental shelf. They couldn't go any farther. Given that fact, those grounds are basically the same grounds, I was a little bit troubled to hear that.

What kind of knowledge does your department have on where inshore harvesters fish? Did you analyze the locations, the logbook data, that's submitted by the inshore fishery? If you did, you would have known that they were fishing the same grounds.

• (1740)

Mr. Adam Burns: To repeat what my colleague from DFO science said at the last meeting, the logbook data was indeed used and analyzed in the peer review process that generated the science that was the underpinning of the minister's decision.

Mr. Clifford Small: Right on.

I have to go back and ask you again, because I've had quite a few people from back home who have brought this up to me, the fact that you said that the minister had reopened the commercial northern cod fishery because she wanted year-round employment from it. Basically, the inshore portion of that quota was taken in seven weeks. The offshore portion will be taken in a couple of weeks, and the number of people who have taken part in that harvesting and will take part in the offshore harvesting is relatively small.

How does that equate to year-round employment?

Mr. Adam Burns: In the minister's decision and in her statement related to that, when she spoke of year-round employment, it certainly is true that with the quota that it is right now, it does get fished at a relatively quick pace. Over time, with sustainable management, the hope would be that the biomass increases, increasing the quotas available to all fleets, which would further increase the employment and economic benefits to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Burns, where did you guys find that data from 1954 that you brought into the stock assessment? Did you find that on microfiche somewhere, or did you do an archaeological dig to dig it up?

Mr. Adam Burns: That would have to be a question answered by DFO science. I'm not a DFO scientist, so I don't have the specifics on that, but we can commit to getting back to you with further information.

Mr. Clifford Small: As you know, one of my favourite things to do is to ask you about those logbooks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Pelletier, I want to begin by thanking you for the work you did last year to open the fishery. There was less ice than usual in the winter, but I know your teams were ready, and the contracts were signed. Fishers were very pleased with the results of their collaboration with the Coast Guard and your team.

I just want to make sure that we're ready again this year for the opening of the fishery. The ice may be a little thicker this winter.

Are you ready? Have the contracts been planned? Is everything planned so there can be an early opening again this year?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: Yes, we're ready. The mechanisms that were put in place last year are still in place this year.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you.

Mr. Burns, if I understand correctly, a meeting was held recently between the government and industry representatives regarding what the minister said following what happened in my region, when they wanted to close the fisheries for two weeks during the last fishing season. A whale had moved into waters that were less than 20 fathoms deep.

Did that meeting take place a few weeks ago?

Mr. Adam Burns: There was a technical committee meeting. There will be an advisory committee meeting with all industry stakeholders early in November.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Burns, what happened in the last fishing season had a very damaging effect on the region, not only for the fishers, but also for the entire community.

You've seen the comments I made at that time. They were very hard on you, they were very hard on department officials, and they were very hard on the minister. These measures to protect whales have been in place for seven years, but minor changes that wouldn't harm our markets can't even be considered. These changes would prevent people from having to deal with the closure of a fishing area for two weeks.

I've been invited to attend some meetings on this. People have said that the landed value to the fishery is \$3 billion, so a two-week closure and a loss of \$24 million would not have a devastating impact on the region. If you or other officials have such thoughts, you won't be able to have the trust of the communities and people in the industry.

Will you introduce more flexible measures without compromising the protection of right whales?

Are you going to listen to people in the industry and take into account the data presented to you by experts? You said earlier that you weren't a scientist, but scientists came to this committee, and they said that the tools currently available could make it possible to implement relaxed measures. This would avoid stress on the industry and would no longer penalize fishers, plant workers and regions.

Will you consider relaxing measures to prevent such situations from happening again?

In addition, the Government of Canada used three different charts showing the depth of the waters to determine where the whale was. This is totally unacceptable to me, as an elected official, and to the industry community and the community. We looked like a bunch of idiots—pardon me for using that term—and I hope there will be changes.

Will there be any changes to the protection of right whales?

• (1745)

Mr. Adam Burns: The 10 to 20-fathom water protocols were put in place to reflect the industry perspective. These measures were aimed at reducing the impact on the lobster fishery.

The water depth protocols definitely need to be reviewed to make sure that our data is accurate. We'll listen to the industry's opinions, of course. We're aware of the effect that the closure of the fishery last spring had on the fishing community. The minister will take all of this into account when she makes decisions on the protection measures that will be put in place for 2025.

Mr. Serge Cormier: That's perfect.

In March, shrimp fishers came to meet with the minister and officials to propose an assistance plan. I'm told there's been no follow-up since then.

Are you aware of these fishers' request for the assistance plan? They want to know whether or not you agree with this assistance plan.

Have you met with them about this?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister is aware of the request, of course. We're working with people in that industry, and the officials responsible for the Quebec region are working closely with them.

The minister granted allocations to redfish and shrimp fishers. There have been a number of redfish landings in recent weeks.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I have very little time left, and I'd like to ask you one last question.

Announcements were recently made about the small craft harbours program.

All port associations find the process for obtaining digging, construction and environmental permits to be an administrative burden. It's the same thing when it comes to tendering.

Wouldn't there be a way, in 2024, to simplify this process in order to speed up the implementation of projects?

Some fishers die because no digging is done. Wharves are falling into ruin. Everyone says they know it's not the government that's the problem, but the public service is so cumbersome that nothing is moving forward.

Can you not do anything to move projects forward?

Mr. Adam Burns: The permits you're talking about aren't issued through the small craft harbours program, but they have to be received through the small craft harbours program.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Don't you talk to each other as departments?

Mr. Adam Burns: Of course we talk to each other as departments. However, what you're talking about doesn't come under the small craft harbours program.

We're working with port authorities and communities to get projects up and running as quickly as possible.

• (1750)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'm going to start with Mr. Pelletier.

Mr. Pelletier, have you been able to remedy the problem of unreasonable delays in processing harassment and intimidation complaints, particularly in the Quebec City area?

Have you also been able to restore the Coast Guard's ability to communicate in French?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: I'll start with the first question.

The backlog of grievances or complaints has been significantly reduced across the department, and even more so within the Coast Guard. Efforts have been made to solve the problem. I don't have specific numbers on that, but the data shows a marked improvement.

As for communication in French, I think all Quebec City employees have access to services in French. I haven't been made aware of any issues.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Apparently, a superintendent was hired who did not speak French, among other things.

Mr. Mario Pelletier: The superintendent in Sarnia is assisted by a deputy superintendent who works in Quebec City and is responsible for the deployment of measures in that city.

The directives make it possible to offer training to newly appointed individuals, and the deputy superintendent of Quebec is actively taking her training.

To address the problem, a person directly connected to the Quebec City office can perform these duties.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Okay.

We hope that the situation will continue to improve.

Last week, we heard from a witness who made some very interesting comments. He was an economist who served as a deputy minister in Newfoundland and Labrador. He told us that decisions concerning the protection of the resource, particularly those concerning fisheries management, should not be political. According to the witness, they should instead favour a co-management mechanism that would bring together people on the ground and a number of stakeholders other than political ones.

What do you think of that idea?

We've heard that the minister made decisions that were contrary to her department's directives, and we're wondering what the best way to protect the resource would be for the future.

Mr. Niall O'Dea (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you for your question.

Decisions are always made in collaboration and consultation with stakeholders and partners, including the provinces that participate in the advisory processes.

We believe that this is how we can inform our minister of the views of all those stakeholders and partners in order to support the best possible decision, that is, a decision based on scientific data, socio-economic facts and other points of view.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: After all, the minister has the last word.

Is that correct?

Mr. Niall O'Dea: That's correct.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I know I'm going to ask an awkward question, but I'll try to make it as painless as possible.

Couldn't the opinion of scientists, the one resulting from your readings, opinions of people in the field, environmentalists and an environmental mediator prevail over a final, political decision that goes against scientists?

Wouldn't mediation be a better avenue to consider in certain contexts?

Mr. Adam Burns: That's not what the Fisheries Act says. According to the act, the minister makes the final decision.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That's why the Fisheries Act will soon be revised.

We heard about the success of Norway and Finland. An expert, who has conducted studies on many subjects, including right whales, told us that most knowledge comes from the field. She also told us that the successes of Norway and Finland go far beyond those of Canada, because those countries aren't subject to a federal regime.

Doesn't this kind of overlap between the federal and provincial governments create a kind of efficiency bottleneck, as Mr. Cormier was saying earlier?

Shouldn't Canada decentralize fisheries management?

• (1755)

Mr. Niall O'Dea: We have a pretty good system. Every year, dozens of fisheries-related decisions are made, and that's done on the basis of scientific data or a consultation process. We also follow up with people at other consultation tables, which helps to facilitate the decision-making process.

Obviously, the fishery is changing quite rapidly. In that context, the federal government's involvement is very important if we want to have management on a larger scale.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: In a context of a fundamental crisis where certain biomasses are collapsing, how can we explain that fishers are calling for the redfish fishery to be opened, citing the fact that it would be the loss of shrimp biomass if Canada didn't react?

I've been on this committee for a couple of years, and I've heard this for at least four years. Apparently, the problem is even older than that.

How do you explain the fact that Canada can't react more quickly to such a situation and solve the problem related to the collapse of the shrimp biomass?

Mr. Adam Burns: The decision that was made was based on evidence that the size of the redfish was sufficient to get a sufficiently high price in the market and to make it a viable fishery. If there were no benefits to fishing this resource, fishers wouldn't do it.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair, and welcome.

My first question is for you, Mr. Burns.

In the 2023 report by the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, which, as we know, this committee studied, we heard that, overall, Fisheries and Oceans Canada remains unable to collect the dependable and timely catch data that it needs to sustainably manage commercial marine fisheries and protect Canada's fish stocks. We know that the report takes note of an internal DFO briefing note from 2020 stressing the need to improve data collection and indicating that e-logs would be mandatory by 2023. We know that that has not happened. We know that harvesters are still continuing to use paper logs, and I was hoping you could clarify for us today if that commitment remains to mandate the introduction of national e-logs for the 2025 season across Canada.

Mr. Adam Burns: Thanks.

To answer those questions, I can note that in the beginning of last year, in 2023, the government made an investment of \$30.9 million over five years to implement the fisheries monitoring policy. That work is now under way across all fisheries—looking at the various data needs and approaches in order to collect that necessary data to support the management, the enforcement, the science basis of these fisheries.

In terms of e-logs, we're working with third party providers to develop the necessary applications. Several of those are now ready and in some instances have been deployed in fisheries. We anticipate that several other fisheries will have these e-logs deployed next year.

I can also note that we are piloting some electronic monitoring tools, for example, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence redfish fishery, and those are also obviously used in other fisheries in Canada.

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

That's a lot of good information. Perhaps I can ask for some further clarification at our next meeting, because I only have another few minutes left.

I have so many questions I want to ask, and it is a little frustrating that I have to focus on these questions in particular about lighthouse keepers being removed. However, I'm getting endless concerns expressed about the safety implications for coastal communities and mariners, so I want to dig into these issues a little more.

I apologize, Mr. Pelletier, for cutting you off earlier. I wanted to hear from the minister directly.

A geo-hazard risk assessment report from 2024 cites reports from 2018 that outlined risks to structures at the Pachena Point and Carmanah Point light stations.

I'm wondering when these reports were made available to the public and the lighthouse keepers.

• (1800)

Mr. Mario Pelletier: The lighthouse keepers and the union have the report. They've had it for a number of weeks now.

As soon as we received the 2024 report, which identified a high risk to the occupants of the infrastructure, we had a responsibility to act promptly and discuss the safety risk with the light keepers and the union. That's an obligation under the Labour Code. We had to take action to protect them, and that's what we're doing right now.

After that, we'll look at potential solutions. Right now, it's about protecting the safety of the light keepers.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you. I can appreciate how that is very important.

When were the 2018 reports that are referenced made available to the lighthouse keepers—the ones that talked about the safety concerns at these two light stations?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: I wasn't aware of the 2018 reports until just before the 2024 report, so I'm not sure how broadly...but we can get back to you.

I know there was an action plan to try to see what was in the realm of possibility in terms of protecting the infrastructure. It got delayed and was very costly, so we had to look at reinvestment. Meanwhile, because of the potential high risk to the occupants, we asked for the geo-hazard assessment.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: The reason I'm asking these questions is that concerns were brought to my attention about risks associated with these light stations. They were available in 2018, but they were only made available to them in the last few weeks. They're questioning whether their safety was being put at the forefront, since these reports were sat on for six years. Now, suddenly, they're being moved on. There are some questions being asked around that. Was the Labour Code followed? Why weren't they made aware for six years, if there were safety implications?

Perhaps you could provide some additional information in writing about that. If you would like to know what reports I'm talking about specifically, we can continue that conversation.

Do you have any comment about the concerns that were brought to my attention?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: Like I said, the people in charge of all infrastructure at DFO looked at what could be done to remediate that. The first thing was the geotechnical assessment, not the geo-hazard assessment. Basically, we had knowledge in our hands that there was some instability in the ground, and they looked at a potential solution. When it started taking too long, I asked for the second report to be produced, in order to make sure we address the hazards to the occupants of the buildings.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

If these two light stations are being de-staffed, what is the plan to ensure the safety of coastal communities?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: Right now, the plan is to make sure they are safe. That's going to happen in the next couple of weeks. It

takes a lot of logistics, because that's their home. After that, we'll sit down with our team in real property and look at what's possible to do. Is it possible to move the infrastructure?

To ensure the safety of navigators, the light itself has to be moved, because it's very unstable. It will be the priority, because that light is directly serving the mariners.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. You've gone over by a bit, but that's fine.

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

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

Thank you to the three who are here to testify today. I appreciate it.

I especially thank you, Mr. Pelletier, and all of your Coast Guard members so bravely serving to protect our coastline. I want to pass on my expression of gratitude for their work.

I'll start with Mr. Burns, if I may.

Mr. Burns, how long have you been in the position of ADM at the department?

Mr. Adam Burns: It's a little over two years.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Over two years, so you should be quite well-versed on activities within the department and work being done.

Mr. Adam Burns: Sure. Yes.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Yes? Okay.

In the December 2021 mandate letter to the minister, which is still referred to on the Government of Canada's DFO website, it included instructions to work to introduce Canada's first-ever aquaculture act. That mandate letter was from December 2021. That's almost three years ago now. What progress has been made towards that goal?

• (1805)

Mr. Niall O'Dea: If I might, Chair, I can help to address the question.

There has been work with provincial and territorial counterparts on advancing work with respect to the aquaculture act, including, in particular, in the context of CCFAM, the Canadian Committee of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers. That has been a work of collaboration amongst them. Policy development continues within the department and stakeholders, with work ongoing on the aquaculture transition plan and others. That work has been appropriately prioritized against the active work on the transition plan and other activities.

Mr. Mel Arnold: How close would you think we are to seeing a plan? Will it happen before we head to an election, which could be any day now, given the dumpster fires that this government is dealing with on a daily basis?

Mr. Niall O'Dea: That work is ongoing. I couldn't speak to whether it would be available before the election or not.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Also in that mandate letter were basically directions to modernize the Oceans Act to explicitly consider climate change impacts and so on. What progress has been made towards that goal, to modernize that act? It would be something that would need to go through the legislative process in the House of Commons and then eventually come to this committee. Time is ticking. Are we ever going to see it?

Mr. Niall O'Dea: Work remains ongoing with respect to amendments to the Oceans Act. I can assure members that the legislative framework, as we have it, allows us to take into consideration climate change in the design of marine protected areas and other conservation tools. The amendments to the act would provide greater precision to that, and that work continues.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I'll go back to you, Mr. Burns, right now, because you should have quite detailed information on this question.

Earlier, in the minister's testimony, she stated that there were no rules in reference to the elver fishery, and that's why they had to close it down or why it's been so chaotic. Would you agree with that statement that there were no rules? Were there no regulations regarding the elver fishery?

Mr. Adam Burns: What we've been working on to get the elver fishery in a place that, we believe, it could operate more effectively are regulations related to the possession and transport of elvers, as well as a traceability regime, and those elements did not exist.

Mr. Mel Arnold: The question was about the minister's statement that there were no rules. That's a quote. I wrote it down when she said it because I couldn't believe she said it. Was that a correct statement, that there were no rules?

Mr. Adam Burns: It is true that there were no rules related to the possession and traceability of elvers, which we believe are necessary in order to effectively manage this fishery.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Were there rules around licensing?

Mr. Adam Burns: Indeed. The fishery is a licensed fishery, and in those licences, there are several conditions of licence.

Mr. Mel Arnold: So there were rules.

Mr. Adam Burns: There are rules that govern every fishery. What wasn't in place, and what we are working on putting in place now, are those measures related to possession and traceability.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Then the minister basically misled this committee by stating there were no rules.

Mr. Adam Burns: I don't have the exact quote in front of me—

Mr. Mel Arnold: I do.

Mr. Adam Burns: —but she would have been referring to the absence of rules related to possession and traceability.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

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

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you, Chair.

I will turn my time over to Mr. Cormier, who I believe has at least a question to ask here.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

I just have one more question.

Mr. Burns, at DFO offices in my region in Atlantic Canada and elsewhere in Canada, fishermen can just go, call or knock on doors and sometimes have a meeting with officials. A woman who was working at a lower level in one of those offices called me. What she told me was very disturbing. She said that if I wanted to meet with her and get information on a particular project, or whatever I wanted, she needed to sign a document, ask if she could meet with me and then report back what was said in that meeting. I'm an elected official. She said she needs to sign a form and everything. My first comment to her was this: "Are we in Russia here or what?"

Does such a document exist? What she told me is that this doesn't come from a minister or a government decision. It comes from the higher deputy levels at 200 Kent Street. They need to sign a form that says which MP they met with and what the purpose of the meeting was, and then report that back to the deputy minister's office.

Does such a document exist, yes or no?

• (1810)

Mr. Adam Burns: The public service is a non-partisan institution, so there are reporting requirements when there are interactions with politicians. That's a reporting requirement so that the department and the minister are aware of those conversations. It's not a prohibition on those conversations.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Are you the only department in the government that is doing that?

Mr. Adam Burns: I'm not aware of that.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you.

I'm going to give my time back to Mr. Weiler now.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today and answering our questions.

I want to touch on a program that actually is a big priority for British Columbians and something that I long advocated for along with many other MPs from British Columbia. That's the Pacific salmon strategy initiative, which, to my knowledge, is the largest recovery package for any species in Canadian history. This was announced in 2021, and there are several components of it.

I was hoping you might be able to give us an update on how this program is rolling out, particularly if you can give some metrics and statistics on things like areas of habitat restoration and some of the other outcomes that we can point to from this program.

Mr. Niall O'Dea: I would underline that there has been, thus far, a \$201.5 million investment in targeted actions to address Pacific salmon declines under the Pacific salmon strategy initiative, and a good \$90.9 million of that was delivered in partnership with others, which is a very important aspect of the program's work.

So far in fiscal year 2024-25, the department has spent \$26 million, \$11.1 million of which was, again, spent with partners. I'm happy to provide specific details of outcomes in writing, but some of the key activities that we have been engaged in include working to rebuild those key salmon stocks to support innovative indigenous harvesting practices; support licence retirements for commercial fish harvesters where that's required; address severe drought impacts where they are increasingly affecting Pacific salmon populations; and provide an ongoing response to the Chilcotin River landslide, which we know is having effects on upstream migration of chinook salmon.

I'm certainly happy to provide further detail on outcomes in writing.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: That would be much appreciated.

I want to pick up on that last point, because there was the landslide in the Chilcotin, and there was actually one in my riding at the Birkenhead River.

When we have one of these emergency situations that comes forward, how are we able to respond to that? Is there funding to direct to emergency responses that we know are going to become more and more frequent with a more variable climate?

Mr. Niall O'Dea: Certainly, we've seen those emergency situations arise at Big Bar and we've seen them in Chilcotin. I appreciate the reference you've just made to a further landslide. These are natural circumstances, but also ones that can be accelerated in the context of extreme weather events and climate change.

We work immediately with partners both in the province and in first nations and others to identify what response measures are required. There is no dedicated emergency response fund, but typically we will look to existing funding resources, including initiatives like the Pacific salmon initiative, that are focused on these matters to see what funding can be provided and where those needs exceed what the department is able to bear within its own mandates. We, of course, will chat with colleagues at the centre about what might further be required.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Weiler.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I'm going to come back to the issue of offshore vessels being allocated historic quota shares, while the fishing economy is dying in Quebec.

Of course, lobster fishing is doing well. Lobsters, like other species, are moving north, and we don't know how long that will last. I see a certain lethargy setting in when it comes to support for Quebec's inshore fisheries. Canada is not proactive.

There's a real problem. I said it earlier, and I repeated it to the minister. There have also been television reports on the matter. Fishers have other things to do than take part in TV reports. If they do, it's because they've reached that point.

How do you intend to support the inshore fisheries, be it the shrimp fishery or the pelagic fishery? How are you going to support these fisheries so that they continue to exist and there's a next generation with the necessary skills?

What are you going to do to prevent coastal villages from dying in Quebec? That's what your decisions are causing, whether or not they're your own decisions or those of the minister.

How can we stop this and start moving in the right direction?

Are you looking at solutions? If so, have you proposed them to the minister, and are they being considered?

● (1815)

Mr. Adam Burns: As you mentioned, some fishing sectors are doing well, such as lobster fishing. The minister has made some decisions in that regard, so we're in the process of setting up consultations on a few lobster fishing areas in Quebec.

The minister also granted access to licences to help shrimp fleets and the redfish fishery. She's allocated enough redfish licences to support fishers, although it probably doesn't help all fishers. She's working on that. She's very aware of the need to find other examples where her decisions can help fishers and the industry.

That said, climate change is changing the distribution and quantity of biomass. Decisions must continue to be made to respond to these changes in the environment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Through you, Chair, to Mr. Pelletier, can you please confirm that you'll be moving forward with the de-staffing of lighthouses at Carmanah Point and Pachena Bay starting this Friday?

Can you please confirm that?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: It is within a number of days or weeks. It's not in a month from now because we want to have the people out before the winter season. Whether it's this Friday or next Friday, I can't confirm, but they are moving.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Can you please confirm if you've received emails, correspondence, phone calls or letters from members of the community asking to halt this removal of staff from the lighthouses?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: I didn't personally receive emails. I was aware that our office did receive a few letters to date.

That being said, the safety of our employees is my first priority. In order to protect their safety, I had to remove them from there.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

What consultation has occurred with those you are referencing—those whose safety you are worried about?

What consultation has happened to speak with them about their concerns and how to best move forward?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: It has been ongoing since we received the 2024 report. We sat down with the employees and made sure that we were able to find them work somewhere else and provide them with...how the transition would be made.

Once they are removed from the hazard, then we'll look at the next steps.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

I've also heard that a light station review committee has been established.

Is this true? Who's on this committee?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: In the Senate report from 2011 that you quoted, it also asked to review this on an ongoing basis. That's something we haven't done systematically.

Light stations are part of the broader aids to navigation system. We have a requirement that every five years we review all the systems. Light stations are part of that.

• (1820)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: This is the last question I want to get in.

There was money that was allocated specifically to the Pachena Bay... I believe there's a duplex there that money was supposed to be allocated to for the mitigation of the concerns that you were talking about. I'm being told that money was never used, that those mitigations were not made. Are you familiar with this?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: I think the mitigation, there's a—

The Chair: I would ask for an answer in writing, please. Ms. Barron has gone over time. I have to get to another couple of questions.

We'll move on now to Mr. Perkins for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr Chair.

Thank you, witnesses.

My first question is for the commissioner of the Coast Guard.

The polar class 1 icebreakers announced in 2007 at a cost of \$700 million, the first vote, still do not have, all these years later, a design approved. The Parliamentary Budget Officer put out a report in 2021 and updated it this year.

When you were here last time, before we had the update, you agreed that the cost estimates were right there, but you said that we would be on time and on budget. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has updated that and actually says at the current estimate now, it's actually \$1.2 billion more than it was just a year ago, and that it

will be \$260 million in additional costs for every year before steel is cut.

Do you agree with that assessment and that what was said to the committee a year or so ago was incorrect in that it won't be on time and on budget since it's already yet again not on time and not on budget?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: A year ago, I communicated the information we had.

We continue to work with the shipyards to make sure we have timely delivery of ships and reasonable costs. This is an ongoing process.

As for the PBO report, we've already publicly said that we agree with their findings.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You said that the first ship would be in the water by 2030, but that's clearly not going to be the case now. In 2030, that will be over 20 years to get this done. Isn't that a little excessive?

Mr. Mario Pelletier: There have been some delays in shipbuilding and to put in place the NSS. That one was announced before the NSS was put in place. There's the NSS and now the negotiation with the shipyard, providing the time for the shipyard to ramp up their capability. Other priority vessels were put ahead as well, too, such as the science vessel. They were built ahead of time.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

This is for Mr. Burns or whoever is appropriate.

In 2022, the B.C. Supreme Court in the Mowi aquaculture case ruled that the minister could not make decisions that didn't come up as one of the policy recommendations from the department. Did the department comply, or did the minister comply, with that court ruling in making the elver fishery decision that she made recently? In other words, did the department recommend this as one of the options?

Mr. Adam Burns: Specifically, which of the decisions are you referring to? The consultations that are—

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's the consultation letter to take away 75% of the quota from licence-holders.

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, those consultations are under way. They're the result of a minister's decision.

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, I didn't ask if they're under way.

Did the recommendation from the department include that as a recommendation? The court requires that to happen for the minister to be legally doing this.

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister's decision is certainly a legal one to undertake these consultations. I can assure you of that. In terms of the results of these consultations, decisions for 2025 haven't been taken.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, I don't know how it would be legal since the court also ruled that reasons had to be provided, legitimate policy reasons, in the consultation. This letter that went out contains no reasons. There's not one reason about why it's being done. That's your consultation: in writing, a one-page letter, "We're considering doing this. Tell us in two weeks what you think." That's not a real consultation. It doesn't say anywhere in that letter the reasons, so you're, once again, on that level in breach of the B.C. Supreme Court ruling.

• (1825)

Mr. Adam Burns: Again, this is a consultation, and the minister's decisions for 2025 will be taken subsequent to the consultations and informed by the various views that will be brought forward.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The court-required consultations have reasons. You're not providing the reasons, and therefore it's not a legal letter.

I will move on. How much TAC or how much quota will you be giving each of the 30 individual eel licence-holders? Will that be new TAC, as it was when this was created, or will that be coming again from the existing licence-holders?

Mr. Adam Burns: Those decisions haven't been taken yet. They will be taken following the consultations. I can't answer that question, because the decision hasn't been taken at this time.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Are you aware that there are only two buyers in the current licence-holders? How are these individuals with only...? The department has told people. It's not in the letter. The amount of 15 kilograms is what you'll give to the employees. How are they supposed to run that business, sell it and keep it alive when there are only two buyers with that facility? Do you actually think they can make a living? They're not going to get the kind of money they're getting now, because they'll be in between now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins. I hope Mr. Burns can provide an answer in writing. You have gone a little bit over time.

I want to slot in Mr. Kelloway for his questions now.

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

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): I have five minutes or less. Does anybody ever do less?

The Chair: Very seldom.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay. Well, I'm not going to today.

I want to talk a little bit about conservation and protection. The work that these men and women do in the various regions has certainly gotten more complex and more dangerous. I'm wondering if you could talk to us a little bit about what we're doing to assist these men and women to do their jobs effectively. I know that there have been requests and different types of activities and discussions around equipment and things of that nature. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that, because I think that's important. That's my first question.

My second question is just around the general enforcement. I won't ask you to break down enforcement in every single region in Canada, but I would like you to kind of walk us through and maybe

give us a specific example of something in the south shore with respect to what's been happening in terms of enforcement and the different activities around processors being investigated.

I know that you can't tell us everything, but whatever you can tell us to a certain extent would be very helpful.

Mr. Adam Burns: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The conservation and protection officers have a multitude of responsibilities in their functions that include certainly law enforcement-type activities but also various other activities, such as marine mammal response, the Canadian shellfish sanitation program and habitat enforcement. The role of a C and P officer is diverse and broad.

Specifically related to the concerns we've heard recently from some C and P officers related to dangers that may be present in their working environment, we are working with Labour Canada, with our officers themselves and with other advisers in order to put in place a variety of additional tools that will increase the safety of the officers' activities as well as other training elements to further mitigate the risks that are inherent in what those officers are doing.

Your other question was related to enforcement, in particular in southwest Nova Scotia. As is the case anywhere, there is a period of time when there's an enhanced focus on on-the-ground enforcement activities. We certainly deploy the local resources in a manner that prioritizes that specific issue or enforcement activity. In addition to that, we do work with C and P divisions in other parts of the country to reassign officers temporarily in order to augment the presence. That's something we've done again this year and have done in previous years as well.

We also work with other government agencies, including the Canada Revenue Agency, RCMP, FINTRAC and others, in order to use the resources across the federal family, as well as in partnership with the province. The provinces, of course, have responsibility on the processing sector side and in the enforcement, licensing and permitting capacity there as well. Our objective is to work in concert with all those other enforcement agencies so that we interrupt the overall process of unauthorized activity from the water to the marketplace in order to reduce the benefits that illegal activity can provide to those who are engaged in it.

• (1830)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair: You have less than a minute.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: With less than a minute, let's just finish it off with a bit of science, if we can pivot from conservation and protection to science.

Just very quickly, during my time as parliamentary secretary I've heard a lot from inshore, offshore and NGOs around the importance of working with DFO in terms of the analysis and the synthesis of science.

I know we have a particular model of how we engage those groups, but I'm wondering, are we looking at other ways to further engage them in those aspects of science—the retrieval of science, the understanding of science and the synthesis of science—in terms of making a broader collaboration deeper?

Mr. Niall O'Dea: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

Certainly, it is the department's ongoing and intended to be enhanced program to work actively with partners in further scientific research. Seal science is an example of where we've worked actively with FFAW and other seal industry partners to advance our particular understanding of those various seal stocks. We do likewise in the broader fisheries context and intend to do more in the future.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

That closes off our second hour of committee business. I want to thank Mr. O'Dea, Mr. Burns and especially Mr. Pelletier.

Could you, Mr. Pelletier, pass along a message to the local Coast Guard in Newfoundland on the work they did in saving “The Lucky 7”, as they're known? That could have ended much worse than it did. It was good to see all of them make it back safely to shore. Again, thank you to your staff for the great job they did and the great effort they made in bringing them back to shore. Thank you.

On Monday, we will resume our study of derelict and abandoned vessels, with testimony from witnesses.

I want to thank everybody—the clerk, our analysts and the translation team—for helping to make this meeting a success today.

The meeting is adjourned.

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