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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1630)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 125 of the House Common Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

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

Before we proceed, I want to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

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

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

Welcome to our witnesses for the first panel.

We have in the room Chief Lenora Joe, from the shíshálh Nation.

On Zoom, we have Mr. Gordon Edwards, councillor for the Snaw-naw-as First Nation.

We have Paul Macedo, communications director for the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today. You will each have five minutes for your opening statements.

Chief Joe, you will have the floor first, but I believe Mr. Arnold has something he wants to raise beforehand.

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

It's with sadness that I report—I think most members know—that we lost a former member of FOPO. We found out last Friday. It was Mr. Bob Sopuck, who served on this committee for many years as representative from Swan River—Neepawa. He was a fisheries biologist. He really knew what he was talking about and brought a lot of wisdom to this committee for many years.

I had the pleasure of serving with him for my first four years. I think Mr. McDonald, Mr. Morrissey and Mr. Hardie will recall that he was a fiery personality, but you could not get anything by him when it came to fisheries.

Could we have a moment of silence to recognize Bob?

The Chair: Yes, let's do a 30-second moment of silence.

[A moment of silence observed]

Thank you, everyone.

You're right, Mr. Arnold. Mr. Sopuck was a valued member of the committee and very knowledgeable in everything we studied when he was a member. He was well versed in many things that were necessary to know for this committee and to challenge ministers and other witnesses. He certainly knew his stuff.

Again, we pass along our regrets and our condolences to the family left behind.

We'll now go to Chief Lenora Joe for five minutes or less, please.

• (1635)

Chief Lenora Joe (shíshálh First Nation): [Witness spoke in Sechelt]

I would like to thank everybody, Mr. Chair.

My traditional name is yalxwemult. I share that with my grandmother and great-grandmother. I am the chief of the Sechelt Nation. I am the first elected woman chief of our nation. Here's a fun fact: When we were required to abandon our hereditary chiefs and go to an election process, my grandmother was the first female councillor voted in at that time. I have a bit of a legacy to live up to.

Thank you for allowing me to come to speak to you today about the derelict vessels throughout Canada. In British Columbia, the Sunshine Coast is the “land between two waters”. Our community sits between the ocean and the inlet. We are surrounded by water. The Sechelt people are known as the “salmon people”. Salmon and marine resources are integral to who we are. As Sechelt people, we are unique in our way of life. The health of our marine environment is essential. Over the last number of years, we have seen the collapse of salmon species here, as we've seen across Canada, as well. The health of our marine environment has been affected in such a way that our resources have been impacted by many things, including derelict boats. For many years, we have sought to address derelict vessels in our *swiya*. The irresponsibility of others is saddening to our community, which has the incredible responsibility of cleaning that up. It's massive.

As stewards of our land, we have always worked to protect and more recently restore our environment. We are very committed to ensuring the enhancement of our people. We are looking at ways to protect our forests, waters and lands. Our most recent partnership with B.C. was to address the dock management plan in our *swiya*. We've been very successful. Working with them to address all the areas that have impacted our way of life has been a long process.

Food security is huge in our community. The fact that we are unable to collect food in the way our ancestors did is very concerning and serious. We're trying to work on restoring all of those areas. Derelict boats in our waters are a big part of that. I am very fortunate to live on the water, but I look out of my window with my cup of coffee in the morning and see all the dead boats sitting out there. It's very sad. We've talked at length about how we can address this and what it would take to help us begin the process of restoring and removing them from our waters.

I thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me the opportunity to voice our opinion.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll move on to Mr. Edwards for five minutes or less.

Mr. Gordon Edwards (Councillor, Snaw-naw-as First Nation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Gord Edwards. I am a councillor for the Snaw-naw-as First Nation. We are located on Vancouver Island—the midsection on the west coast of the island. As the previous speaker, Chief Lenora Joe, said—and greetings, Chief Lenora Joe—our concerns are compatible.

When I was called to make some comments about derelict and abandoned boats, boats drifting in—personal, business or industrial boats—of course it was a concern. We have had our share of derelict boats—boats floating into the community beachfront, being left behind or sitting on the water for days and weeks. It took only one experience to realize that it could be a concern. The concerns are the potential of leakage, of oil dumping out onto our already limited beachfront. We have oysters, clams, Manila, seafood and sea cucumbers. We have those things that we depend on: It's our dinner table when it comes to harvesting for our community of about 200 people.

It took just that one experience of a sailboat that had been left and was crashing up along the breakwater. Of course, our first concern was the contamination that could develop. Then the second thing, of course, was about these things breaking loose and coming into our community beachhold. We have other people with boats, and there are boats coming in and crashing into each other, damaging boats. We're fortunate that none of that happened, but it made us stop and think. When Lisa Marie called and said, "Our discussion's on derelict boats," those were first things that came into our minds.

I send greetings from our chief, Chief Brent Edwards. He's not able to make it today. I am happy to appear on his behalf and to make those comments about our concerns about the limited beachfront that we have for access to seafood.

I also point this out: Where do we go, and who do we connect with if we have a derelict boat sitting there? I was looking at a picture, on the Salish Sea website, of a sailboat that was left on the beach, and part of that sail was dug into the beach because it had been there that long. It can damage a waterfront that our children enjoy, that I enjoyed as a kid, and my grandparents, and my aunts and uncles. I do not want to see that happen in our stretch that we share with so many other people from the south, say in Lantzville and Nanaimo, and north in Nanoose and Parksville. We may not have as many derelict, abandoned or damaged boats just being left by people, businesses or development, but we've had our share of them.

One major point that comes to my thoughts about what to say here is, who do we go to? Do we go to Fisheries and Oceans? Do we go to the local municipal people? Do we deal with it ourselves? Can we take the boat? I don't remember the old pirates' version of ownership, but what are the rules around it? What are the processes involved for dealing with debris, contamination and the potential damage it could do to our oyster and clam farms—which we have—and to the ability of our members to go to the beach and have a plate of seafood for dinner.

Huy ch q'u. Thank you for allowing me to come in, and I look forward to what this panel develops for us as citizens to consider.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you for that. You're right on the five-minute mark, so that's pretty good.

We now go to Mr. Macedo for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Paul Macedo (Communications Director, Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the standing committee. Thank you for having me here today. My name is Paul Macedo. I'm communications director for the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers, referred to as CANDO. Today, I'm speaking from the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh in Vancouver. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the study of derelict and abandoned vessels.

I'll give a bit of background. CANDO is a national indigenous organization that was established in 1990 by first nations economic development officers across Canada. CANDO's mission is to build capacity for economic development officers and communities by providing services, education, training and certification. CANDO has been supporting a pilot for first nations engagement with the Canadian Coast Guard, Transport Canada and Public Services and Procurement Canada regarding wrecked, abandoned and hazardous vessels, WAHV, since 2020. The current pilot involves eight southern Vancouver Island first nations working in collaboration with technology companies and the Government of Canada. The goal of the pilot is to increase opportunities for indigenous participation in the management of WAHV along the coast by supporting community engagement and understanding capacity and by supporting communities to self-determine how to participate in the processes.

CANDO believes that it is essential to have communities involved as early as possible in the WAHV management process. This starts with ensuring that indigenous communities, administration and members have training, skills, tools and platforms to be active on the water. Also, by understanding the government decision-making processes and requirements, indigenous communities can start to co-manage the vessels in their territories.

CANDO has considered the inclusion of traditional knowledge, understanding of the territories and culturally significant sites as a key element of the assessment process. This knowledge, along with state-of-the-art technology such as the BRNKL rapid deploy unit and indigenous-designed learning platforms from RaceRocks 3D allow communities to protect their territories while building new skills and capacity. CANDO uses the best practices for the innovative community economic development initiative, CEDI, as the basis for building stronger partnerships. CEDI creates positive relationship-building opportunities between indigenous communities and governments to work together on a mutually beneficial project.

One example is the CEDI partnership between Hupacasath and Tseshaht first nations and the City of Port Alberni involved in a joint effort in improving their harbour infrastructure.

The Haisla Nation and the District of Kitimat are also part of the CEDI partnerships and their work was recognized for a reconciliation award in 2024.

Some key take-aways are that indigenous communities have been stewards of our waters for time immemorial and have the most at stake in ensuring their territorial waters are properly managed. The local first nation is often the first to observe, report, assess and activate, for example, the *MV Leviathan II* near Ahousaht and the tugboat *Nathan E. Stewart* in Heiltsuk.

It's important to develop regional stewardship approaches to manage WAHV. This includes protecting the complete ecosystem, culturally sensitive sites, food sources, and generating economic opportunities. Using a facilitated engagement process like Stronger Together in the CEDI model helps build regional partnerships between indigenous and non-indigenous communities and levels of government. Establishing flexible monitoring and assessment contracts or programs for first nations communities can enhance the effectiveness of local efforts while ensuring timely and accurate reporting of WAHV. It will reduce the cost of monitoring vessels and

ultimately provide stronger partnerships and improve environmental stewardship. Communities can provide a layer of direct communication with vessel owners through notices placed on vessels that can have a dramatic effect on encouraging vessel owners to comply with the WAHV Act.

• (1645)

Coast Guard and Transport Canada do not have sufficient vessels and crews to conduct these communications up and down the coast. Indigenous communities can co-manage the WAHV inventory by gathering current WAHV data and inputting it directly into the Government of Canada's systems. This would ensure that indigenous communities are at the decision-making table from the beginning of the process.

I thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to our rounds of questioning.

Up first is Mr. Small for six minutes or less, please.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses as well, especially Chief Joe, for being here and making the trek across this nation.

Chief Joe, I'll start with you.

Could you explain to the committee some of the effects on your cultural and traditional way of life in your nation as a result of these wrecked and abandoned vessels in your territory?

Chief Lenora Joe: It has a huge impact.

Our people have to travel so much farther to access marine resources because of how the contamination has happened. In the inlet, when there are derelict boats, they contaminate the whole inlet, so it's affecting all of the food resources. For our community members to have access to marine resources, including clams, oysters and seagrass.... The marine environment has always been our breakfast basket. It's our food basket. We've depended on it for many years. We've come to a point that we're unable to harvest any natural food sources within the water. Anything we want to collect, we can't, so it has a huge impact on us.

We have the boats in our inlet. The contamination is...it's very difficult to have a vision of that. It's right in front of us. We see it happening. We don't know what to do about it. Also, who do we contact? We've been advised that if we want to start looking at doing any kind of cleanup.... Do we have the authority to go and clean it up? It's in our *swiya*. Do we have authority over the waters to go and remove things as we see fit? How can we clean it up? How much of a cost is that going to be?

The impacts of leaving them there are huge. Some of those vessels have been out there for years and years. Most recently, we've had a ferry boat sink in our *swiya*. It was purchased by a group of people who thought it would be a great idea to have it so that they had somewhere to go and work on developing their drugs. It was a drug boat. They were making all of the drugs on this boat. They were having parties on the boat. We were trying to figure out what we could do to stop this, and then the boat sank and it's still sitting there. Nobody knows what to do. We don't know what the impact is going to be on that area. We don't know what kinds of drugs were on that boat, let alone what's in the boat itself. What are the materials on the boat? What will the impact to the environment be just from the materials? It is huge.

We just don't have the resources to be able to go and clean them up, and we don't have the resources to restore the food in the waters so that our community members have access to it. As first nations people, there are a few things we hold on to dearly, for dear life. We hold on to our language. Our language is who we are. That's our identity. Our land is who we are. The food we gather that feeds our people in our traditional ways is who we are. We're fighting to keep our traditions in place. Every day, we're losing something. We lose some part of us. Some part of us is getting lost in the big cloud, and we are fighting to sustain it.

The biggest impact is on food security. Food security is huge for us, next to housing. If we don't have housing, we have nowhere to cook our food.

This has a huge impact to our people. Food security is huge, and we're trying to look at every avenue to see how we can address it so that we can begin that restoration for our people.

• (1650)

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Chief Joe.

I have a question for Mr. Macedo.

Do you have any commercial fish harvesting and fish harvesters whom you represent in your area?

Mr. Paul Macedo: Thank you for the question.

We don't represent fish harvesters. We represent economic development officers who work for individual first nations, as a group. Now, those economic development officers would work with individual, privately held businesses, including fish harvesters, in their regions, as well as community-owned enterprises and businesses.

Mr. Clifford Small: What's been the impact of these abandoned and derelict vessels on your community?

How could things be handled in a better way to get some of these derelict vessels removed faster?

• (1655)

The Chair: Give a short answer, please.

Mr. Paul Macedo: What we're trying to do is work with Canadian Coast Guard to develop processes whereby first nations marine teams can feed information and data directly to Coast Guard for proper assessment of the vessels of concern. We think that would expedite the process.

In turn, Coast Guard can work with first nations marine teams to do preliminary assessments and work at recovery or removal of the vessels.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

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

At our last meeting, we had an interesting discussion about what federal agency was best suited to be able to tackle this very frustrating issue of abandoned and derelict boats. I think that's why I'm so thankful today that we have indigenous witnesses and witnesses representing indigenous governments who are here to talk about how the Government of Canada can work better with indigenous people and indigenous governments to tackle this issue.

the hiwus, you mentioned in your opening remarks and in response to my colleague, Mr. Small, about some of the impact that it's having to the shishálh people. I know this is an issue that the nation has been working on for some time.

I was hoping you'd be able to explain to this committee some of the work that the nation is doing to tackle this issue.

Chief Lenora Joe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Some things that we've done with respect to trying to work with the province on dock management.... The dock management plan was very significant for us to work on because of the number of docks in our *swiya* and inlet was having a huge impact on our food security. We had access to so many different kinds of food with respect to clams, oysters, seagrass and herring eggs; I could go on and on. We've lost that access to that. We worked on the dock management plan for over 40 years and that was only one step.

We knew that we had to address the docks, but we understood that we also have to address the derelict boats. That has not been something that's just all of a sudden occurred. Our ancestors and our predecessors have been working on it and trying to work with different levels of government on how we can address it. For the most part, we've left it to the federal government to address it. We've expressed our concerns, frustrations and how it's impacted our community, families and food security.

We're at a point where we want to work with you. How can we address this?

We've worked very hard with the Province of B.C. to address dock management. We could see that it was struggling to address it on its own, so we came in and provided assistance in that. As indigenous people, the most important part of our role is to secure all of the environmental impacts that affect our community. It goes from the water, to the land, to the forest, to the ocean, to the lakes and to the rivers. In every area, we're trying to address anything that has an impact.

Right now, one of our biggest impacts is with respect to the derelict boats and it's impacting our food security. We've been working on it diligently with DFO. We've had staff who are working with them, trying to address it and come up with solutions. I think we've kind of hit a wall where we don't know how much further we can go.

What we're saying is that we want to move forward with you. How can we help get this addressed?

We're looking at, how did this occur? What are the impacts? What can we do to fix it and how do we set up prevention?

That is the key thing here, I think. It's prevention. We need to stop what's occurring, but we also need to put something in place that looks at how we can prevent this from continuing. What kinds of things can we do together?

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Absolutely. I think it's a point well taken. Indigenous people and indigenous governments are closest to the land. They have been stewards of the lands and waters since time immemorial and are kind of the eyes and ears on what's happening.

I understand that in the past the nation has had programs working with DFO on something that I think needs to be talked about in the context of this discussion, which is the guardians program. What kind of a role do you see programs like that playing to be able to address this and some of the other issues that are impacting the marine environment?

• (1700)

Chief Lenora Joe: We did have a guardianship program. We were working with DFO. We had a program in our inlets.

Our inlet is one of the deepest in the world. It is the deepest inlet in Canada. It's very deep and it's very long. We had a guardianship program where we were working in partnership with DFO. I'm not exactly sure what happened. In talking to some of our predecessors, for whatever reason the funding was just discontinued. We've been having a lot of discussions about it. We were indicating that at this point we believe it has to be one of our priorities. We have to look at how we can fund this program. Could we proceed and move forward without DFO? That's the question. I don't believe we can. We are asking DFO to come back in and partner with us.

It is very important for our nation members to be patrolling the waters and monitoring it and letting us know when things are happening. It's very difficult right now. Our inlet is very long. I myself probably get up the inlet probably two or three times a year. Every time I go up, I'm very shocked at what I see. I see the derelict boats. I see a lot of illegal things happening. We are asking ourselves how we can monitor it and protect it.

I believe we could do it very well. We have the capacity to do that within our nation. We do want to work with DFO on that. It is very, very important. Our community members are passionate. They're diligent. They want to protect our land. They want to protect the water. They'll go out there and make sure that happens. It is in the best interest of all of us to ensure that it does happen.

We're very hopeful that we can work with DFO in readdressing this issue and getting our guardianship program back on track. I have been monitoring the guardianship programs up in the north with Haida and other nations, and they're very significant. I am so impressed with how they're working with DFO on their guardianship programs. We welcome the opportunity to be able to offer that same support.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

Before I go to Madame Desbiens, I just had a note passed to me. Mr. Edwards has to leave at 5:15 our time. If anybody has a question for Mr. Edwards, you should probably try to get it in before now and 5:15.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I would also like to thank our valued witnesses, who are contributing to our work with their knowledge.

As you know, I represent the Bloc Québécois, so my questions will focus more on the St. Lawrence River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

I'd like to know if you have any relationships, exchanges, correspondence or if you share any information with first nations peoples on the east coast.

I'd like to start with Chief Lenora Joe.

[*English*]

Chief Lenora Joe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It was a little bit difficult to hear the question, but I believe it was about the relationship we have with the indigenous communities on the east coast with respect to their having the same concerns.

Right now we don't have a relationship with anybody from the east coast other than through such indigenous groups as the SGIG and the AFN. We always bring all of our concerns forward. When we are having those discussions, we are trying to address them as a group and we all are supporting each other.

I don't have any contacts on the east coast that can assist me or help me address the situation. However, I would say that if there was a nation that could provide that and would be more than happy to collaborate with us, we would be very excited to do that.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you for your answer, Chief Joe.

I'll now turn to Mr. Macedo.

You mentioned the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers, or CANDO, an organization that provides economic development training to first nations people.

What is this organization missing in terms of ghost ship recovery expertise, or at the very least what is required to mitigate the impact of spilled hazardous materials?

What is this team missing, even in terms of training, so it can get more involved and get tangible results, so you can also see real results on your end?

Is there a lack of money or lack of support from the Canadian Coast Guard? Do you need more scientists from DFO, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or do you have everything you need on hand to make things happen?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Macedo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to put it on the record that I'm not a chief. Thank you so much. I'm just a communications director with CANDO. What is it that we would need?

We are currently receiving support from the Canadian Coast Guard to develop a pilot project in south Vancouver Island. That's fairly well supported, but it's a small pilot. What we want to do is take the lessons learned and the processes we're developing and amplify and expand them mid-island and up-island and to all of the coasts, including the St. Lawrence, where communities have identified this as an issue and where there is interest not only in applying the lessons and processes but also in looking at food security and also economic development opportunities. We're looking to scale it up.

What we found through the Canadian Coast Guard is that our training and mobilization of first nations is actually moving faster than their internal processes to deal with the results that we're finding. We're having to wait for the Coast Guard and for government to build up and speed up their processes so that they can match the speed at which communities want to move. That's a big issue.

I think training could be involved. One of the issues is safety and security on the boats and on the water and ensuring that those who are participating in the assessment and eventual removal and recovery of these vessels have the proper training and risk assessment involved to keep everyone safe while undertaking some of these tasks.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses who are here today.

Welcome, Chief Joe. It's nice to hear from you, and from Mr. Macedo.

I'm going to focus my time on Councillor Edwards today. We'll have just enough time to get my questions in before you have to leave, so this worked out just perfectly.

Councillor Edwards, and former chief Edwards, it is always such an honour to work with you and to learn from you. I'm happy that you are here today to be able to share with us some important information about the Snaw-naw-as First Nation and all those who have resided on the nation since time immemorial, of course.

You provided us with some important information. First of all, I wanted to see if you could give us some more information about the oyster and clam farms that you were talking about and the benefit that those farms bring to your community.

● (1710)

Mr. Gordon Edwards: They are very important to us. We have an economic development group that looks after how we deal with, manage and farm our oysters, Manila clams and butter clams. We want to make sure that there's a supply that can improve our economics on our reserve and raise the level from the priority levels that we have.

They are important in two things. First is economic development, but they're also for our people. In our community, when we have a naming, when we have a death or when there's a memorial, what's provided at those as meals is seafood: oysters, clams, Manila clams—geoducks in general. We go there, we gather that, and we feed people who come to our community to acknowledge a naming or to appear for a memorial.

It's very important to us that there be no contamination of those oyster fields and the clam farming that we have there. It's important to us that we don't have huge oil spills. We've had two scares. One I mentioned earlier about the boat that washed up on the breakwater. Second was DND vessel that released all of this oil, diesel oil or something. It was a huge concern that, should that have drifted to our bay, which is referenced often on maps as Nanoose Bay, it would have been a huge concern, because we would have lost that access.

It's been there for us, as you mentioned, for time immemorial. We've been gathering for as long as I can remember, as long as my mom can remember, as long as my grandfather can remember. They are used in our practices at home, where we can help support and bond with our other family members and with our culture when it comes to longhouses and our burnings. For our elders, when we do a burning at a memorial where we feed them on the other side, seafood is on the table.

As the two previous guests, Mr. Macedo and Chief Joe, have mentioned, it's of huge importance to us economically but also as a personal, spiritual and cultural practice with our community members.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much, Councillor Edwards.

You spoke to so many of the things that I wanted you to clarify about the impacts it would have on not just these farms but also on so many other things if they were to be contaminated or impacted by debris from derelict and abandoned vessels. I so appreciate your talking about setting the table and about how all the seafood there is the table being set when the tide is out for so much of the seafood that people rely on, not just for food security but also for cultural reasons. That's so important. I also love how you talked about your family spending time there.

I will move on, because I feel like you've given us a good perspective on that.

Can you provide some thoughts on how it might be better communicated to the nation what to do when a vessel is derelict and abandoned along the coast? What do you think? You talked about some of those questions that you had. Do you have any suggestions on how that can be improved so that there's clarity around the process when it does happen?

Mr. Gordon Edwards: I think the answers that Mr. Macedo and Chief Joe have given are excellent ideas to consider. The participation of our governance structures, like our chief and council, and the governance structures of the local communities and the federal DFO in general, and DND also.... We have two DND stations just across the bay from us. That is very important.

I appreciate hearing Mr. Macedo and Chief Joe talk about that working together. What can we do to sit down?

The community in general already knows that we can ask the Internet. The Internet is general and provides the federal Government of Canada, DFO and DND information on how you can register complaints, but face-to-face contact is always much more appreciated because of the familiarity that we need with whom we need to connect with.

I think the process of information provided through the Internet is good. That always needs to be investigated, because when we access this, say with DFO, we need to make sure what DND says, what RDN says or what the feds say. We're constantly having to research it even further. Direct communication is always the best way.

• (1715)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: *Huy ch q'u*, Councillor Edwards.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

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

Mr. Edwards, if you have 60 seconds before you have to run, I'd like to touch base a little on what you stated, and then get your take on what needs to be done.

You said, "Where do we go? Who do we connect with?" It sounds like there's little information readily available out there as to how a community or anyone should react should they come across an abandoned or derelict vessel, or if one is abandoned in their territory.

Could you state what's missing, in your opinion?

Mr. Gordon Edwards: I think we do what we can as governance structures. I'm talking about our governance structure of chief and council. We do what we can to connect with the community, with our members, to provide the access necessary.

Federally, provincially and locally, there are processes always made available for people to access, but I think that when it comes to needing to sit down and meet the faces, for instance.... This is totally another issue, of course, but there's always lots of dialogue with DFO when it comes to needing to develop a process or create a program or whatever on fish stocks. When it comes to derelict boats, a lot of our community members just say, "What do we do?"

We had one community member, actually about three maybe, who just jumped on the boat, put fuel in the engine, rode it around and used it for fishing. We do what we can with the abilities that we have locally.

Chief Joe mentioned earlier—I'm sorry. Mr. Macedo, it might have been you. I cannot recall—that it's always nice to be able to have some kind of a local education program just focusing on derelict, abandoned boats and the contamination that can happen with people releasing...I don't know what they call their bathrooms on boats...hubs or hugs or whatever. I can't think what it is right now—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

My time is really limited, and thank you for staying a little longer than your predicted departure time.

Chief Joe, you mentioned that the number of docks in the area has limited your band's access to the foreshore. Can you just briefly elaborate on how much of the foreshore has been taken up by docks, and also, how many abandoned vessels do you have in your territory? Do you think that the inventory created by DFO is accurate based on what you see in your area?

Chief Lenora Joe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the dock management plan, we are working on doing an assessment and evaluation on the docks in our *swiya*. There are over 500 docks that we're trying to look at to ensure that they are up to the standard that we have created, which they have to abide by to the standard. Now we're going out and doing assessments on all the docks to see who needs to upgrade, and we're giving them time.

There's a whole process that's been put in place, and it's been quite a long time to develop this process with the province to ensure the residents in our *swiya* are able to adhere to it and are able to upgrade their docks. Of course, we had a lot of resistance, and we still have some resistance. Again, it's about the environment and about ensuring that we have the restoration of that wildlife under the water to restore that.

• (1720)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Can you give me an idea of how many wrecked and abandoned vessels there are in your area? Would you think that the DFO estimate—

Chief Lenora Joe: I think there are 50.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Are there 50 in your area alone?

Chief Lenora Joe: Yes, and I do note that I was reviewing some documentation, and I found that in 2018, Canada gave the District of Sechelt, our neighbours, \$80,000 to do an assessment on the derelict boats. When I asked them what the result of that was and if they came up with a plan on how to address it, they said no. They just did the assessment and sent the information, so I don't know where that went.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay.

I think I'm out of time.

The Chair: You have about one second left.

Mr. Mel Arnold: That's pretty good.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): I'll take Mel's second, then, and use it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ken Hardie: Chief Joe, to your knowledge, does your community have municipal status? Do you have the same powers as a municipality?

Chief Lenora Joe: We do.

Chief Lenora Joe: Okay.

There's some very good information we received from the Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society. You would have quite a bit of authority on the shoreline, even into the water, because the British Columbia government owns all of that territory. That might be worth looking into, because then you would have the opportunity to create bylaws and tighten up the system. It's worth a look.

Do you have any idea how much funding you received for that guardian program you mentioned, before it was cancelled?

Chief Lenora Joe: Unfortunately, no, I don't, because it was cancelled in the late nineties.

Chief Lenora Joe: If you have records on that, could—

Chief Lenora Joe: I could definitely find out and share that information with you.

Chief Lenora Joe: Through some of the earlier testimony, we found that one of the problems with people abandoning boats is that there are no harbourmasters present. It's kind of a free-for-all. If your guardian program was re-established, it could help pay for a harbourmaster who could keep tabs on things.

Mr. Macedo, I noticed that economic development is in your field of interest.

Are there economic development opportunities available that would allow some kind of industry to crop up around dealing with derelict boats?

Mr. Paul Macedo: Absolutely, Mr. Chair. There's tremendous opportunity in removal, recovery and so on. CANDO was approached to develop indigenous participation plans and help formulate the wording and design of request for proposals that would en-

courage participation in the removal and recovery of vessels by indigenous businesses, whether privately held or owned by a community. However, what we found was that we were too far along in the process for communities to be actively engaged. Their priorities, as stated by other witnesses, including Chief Joe, lie earlier in that process: food security, cultural preservation and environmental stewardship.

If we can gain trust and build capacity among first nations through their marine teams at that early stage, we can then also show them.... As they're developing data on vessels of concern in their territorial waters, they can start looking at that. "Well, if we're protecting our environment and food security, we can also participate in the economic opportunities involved in the removal of these vessels." It's showcasing to them what the full opportunity really is. Then they can take steps to develop skills, purchase equipment, develop training and work with ISET holders to organize the training of their youth, so they can more fully participate in the spectrum of opportunity—monitoring, assessment, removal and recovery.

Thank you.

• (1725)

Chief Lenora Joe: Thank you, Mr. Macedo.

I want to sneak one quick question to Chief Joe in here.

I actually wanted to ask this of Councillor Edwards. He mentioned the *Nathan E. Stewart*. I remember how, at the time, one of the big tipping points was the fact that indigenous knowledge wasn't considered at all when they were trying to recover the oil and deal with the *Nathan E. Stewart*.

Has that situation improved in the relationship with DFO and the Coast Guard?

Chief Lenora Joe: I am not sure.

Chief Lenora Joe: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

We will now go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Chair, I'm going to hand over my time to my colleague Ms. Barron, since the witnesses are from her riding.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, that's very nice of you to do that.

Ms. Barron, you have five minutes or less, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mrs. Desbiens. That's very kind of you.

[*English*]

I'll continue with some questions. I think my next question will be for Chief Joe.

Chief Joe, thank you for all of the thoughtful information that you've brought forward today. It's very good information for us to bring with us as we form recommendations for the government on how to best move forward.

You had spoken, Chief Joe, about your people being salmon people; that is what you were talking about. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit more about the impacts on people in the nation of human-caused pollutants like derelict and abandoned vessels. Could you expand a little bit more on the cultural impacts?

Anything further that you could add to that would be really helpful.

Chief Lenora Joe: Again, echoing Mr. Edwards' comments about the cultural impacts, our food is part of our culture. The way we collect food, the way we gather it, the way we celebrate—everything that we do depends on the food that we can gather. If we think about, as indigenous people, everything that we've lost in the last 150 years, there's very little that we have left to hold onto to secure and know what our identity is.

As indigenous people, our language, our land and our culture and traditions are all that we have, and a big part of that is food gathering and food security, and the main source of that food gathering comes from the ocean.

There are so many different kinds of food that we normally would gather on a regular basis for all of our different kinds of events that we've done, and for our daily lives. As a child, I did that with my grandparents. I went out and did food gathering with them throughout our *swiya*—all kinds of food gathering. That was part of who we were in trying to ensure that we had enough food to take us through the winter.

As a young mother, I did the same thing. We live right in the inlet, and, unfortunately, I can look out my window and see all the derelict boats. I can no longer swim in front of my house; there's a beautiful ocean there, but I can't swim there. It's contaminated by all of the boats that are there. I can't gather any food there any longer.

My son knows that I love cockles; we go digging cockles throughout the *swiya*. He decided one day he was going to go in front of our house and do that, and he brought me a big bucket of cockles. He brought it into the house, and he wanted to cook it. "Let's clean it, Mom; let's cook it and let's eat it together." I said, "We can't; it's contaminated." We had to go walk it back out to the ocean and throw it back in the ocean.

How do I explain to my 10-year-old son that we can't gather food? We have to go to other places. We have to go far up the inlet to try to gather some of our food to bring it down. It's very difficult, and not just for our elders who don't have access to the food that

they ate on a daily basis. We don't have access to that any further. The risk is huge for us that our children and grandchildren and my great-grandchildren are not going to have that opportunity or know what that is.

We're very concerned and we're very upset. We want to work on it, and we have been doing what we can. We've taken some of the boats out at our own cost because we were concerned about them. The impact is huge; we don't have the time, we don't have the staff and we don't have the funding to be able to address that to begin to restore all of those areas, so it is very difficult.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1730)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much. That's very powerful information.

I only have a little bit of time left, but I want to ask a question of Mr. Macedo.

Could you speak a little bit about your thoughts on how important it is that the vessels are cleaned up prior to their sinking, and why that might be?

Mr. Paul Macedo: Absolutely. What we've identified through the first nations we've worked with is a growing frustration that they recognize vessels that are in danger of sinking, but no action can be taken until they've sunk. The frustration is that not only the cost but also the effort and the potential damage to ecosystems are much greater on the two sides of that scale.

What we're trying to do is to work so that first nations know that when they assess or monitor and feed that data back to the Coast Guard, the data is valued and is going to create a priority for the Coast Guard to consider. There's a big difference between the number of vessels on the vessels of concern list and the number of vessels on the vessels of concern list for each first nation; those two are not the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Macedo.

Thank you, Ms. Barron.

I want to say a huge thank you to our witnesses from our first panel, Chief Joe, Paul Macedo and Mr. Edwards, though I know he's left the Zoom call. Again, thank you for sharing your knowledge with the committee as we do this particular study we're doing right now

We'll suspend for a few moments to switch out for the next panel.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1730)

(Pause)

• (1735)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Welcome to our witnesses on the second panel.

We have in the room, from the Snuneymuxw First Nation, Mr. John White, director of the marine division. On Zoom, we have elected Chief Councillor Ken Watts of the Tseshaht First Nation.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today. You will each have up to five minutes or less for your opening statement.

Mr. White, you're up first for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. John White (Director, Marine Division, Snuneymuxw First Nation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

'Uy' skweyul, everyone.

[*Witness spoke in Hul'q'imi'num'*]

[English]

My name is John White, and I'm, like you said, the marine director for Snuneymuxw First Nation.

Snuneymuxw First Nation is located in the heart of the Salish Sea on the eastern side of Vancouver Island. Since time immemorial, the Snuneymuxw *mustimuxw* have resided in the Snuneymuxw traditional territory as first peoples, sustaining our lands, resources, culture and spiritual way. Our territory encompasses one of the most resource-rich areas in the heart of the Salish Sea. I understand that I'm called as a witness. However, first nations in Canada need to be a part of the complete law-making process. I think that's important for me to bring up here today.

The Snuneymuxw marine division, the Snuneymuxw nation and Canadians are facing significant challenges in dealing with derelict vessels within our traditional territory. Derelict vessels compromise Snuneymuxw peoples' food sovereignty and traditional way of life. Snuneymuxw holds stewardship of our waters and lands as our highest priority to ensure that our people and generations to follow can continue to live as our ancestors and elders have lived for thousands of generations before contact. The Snuneymuxw marine division intervention becomes crucial in safeguarding the environment and in mitigating the impacts of these hazards.

There is the environmental and ecological damage that they pose, damaging Pacific salmon stocks and damaging rearing habitat in one of British Columbia's largest estuaries, the Nanaimo River estuary. Snuneymuxw is seeing the largest decline in Pacific salmon stocks in history, specifically the Fraser River sockeye salmon run. It's a historical run of over 100 million fish, and it has declined to 500,000 as of this year. So, there's a major decline in the sockeye salmon, every other species of salmon in our area, and the listed DU 21 chinook stocks on the Nanaimo River. The Nanaimo River system has seen a decline, as I mentioned, in all Pacific salmon that call this system home. The man-made cumulative impacts have been detrimental to the survival of these Pacific salmon.

Reports from October 2021 have indicated that nearly 1,600 derelict vessels have been found on the coast of British Columbia. The Canadian government enacted the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act in July 2019. Before this act, it was legal and common for boat owners to abandon derelict vessels on the B.C. coast, causing derelict vessels to be a historic problem.

Since being legislated, the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act has given the Canadian Coast Guard and Transport

Canada some tools to deal with the future of abandoned vessels. It has shifted the responsibility of wrecked, abandoned and hazardous vessels back to owners, which is a high priority for us as first nations.

That being said, the lack of capacity and timely response is becoming more evident with the Canadian Coast Guard and Transport Canada, and the first nations' response has become ever more relevant.

Although there are some tools being created to stop future derelict vessels from posing environmental risk to our coastlines—for example, the Canadian Coast Guard's co-developing community response program, CDCR,—but more needs to be done both federally and provincially, including long-term sustainable funding to support identification and prevention.

Derelict vessels have been anchored and subsequently abandoned in the Snuneymuxw First Nation territory, presenting a multi-faceted problem for the Snuneymuxw marine division emergency response team. When an owner leaves a vessel unattended, it often falls into despair, jeopardizing the integrity of the marine environment around it. In response to such situations, the marine division takes on the responsibility of assessing and addressing the impacts of these abandoned vessels.

● (1740)

The nation works diligently with BC Parks, local ports, the Canadian Coast Guard, local residents and our Snuneymuxw community to observe and respond to the derelict vessel program. Upon identifying a derelict vessel, the Snuneymuxw marine division employs specialized equipment to monitor its condition and degradation over time. Notices are affixed to the vessel, serving as a communication tool to alert the owner of the vessel about its status. However, the reality is that in many cases the vessel is left abandoned, leading to potential environmental hazards.

The Chair: Mr. White, I have to cut you off there. You've gone over the five-minute mark for your opening remarks. Hopefully, during the rounds of questioning you can get out anything that you didn't get to here.

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

Mr. Ken Watts (Elected Chief Councillor, Tseshaht First Nation): Thank you.

[*Witness spoke in Nuuh-chah-nulth*]

[English]

My name is Ken Watts, *waamiis*, and I'm elected chief councillor of Tseshaht First Nation. We're on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Our community here is in Port Alberni, and our territory runs in the Alberni Inlet, much of Barkley Sound and offshore as well.

We have roughly 1,300 members. We have never ceded or surrendered our territory; however, we have a sacred responsibility to look after that territory we call our *ha'houlthee*. It is a gift from the creator to our hereditary chiefs. It is our responsibility as a council and a community to support them in this work in looking after *Uu-a-thluke*, as we call it, taking care and doing so with *iisaak*, respect, and recognizing that everything is one and interconnected, *hish-uk ts'a-walk*.

Thank you.

I don't have a lot of time, so I'll try to jump right to the point here.

I wish I could show you photos. I know it's not part of this, but I'd love to be able to show you some of the derelict and abandoned vessels in our territory, specifically within the Alberni Inlet and parts of Barkley Sound, but also to bring to your attention the issues of float homes and houseboats and this weird jurisdictional piece between the province and the federal government on this particular type of facility that's on the water that often becomes derelict and abandoned as well.

Again, the issue here for Tseshaht is really that these abandoned vessels that are left often become environmentally harmful to our territory and, obviously, many times end up sinking, producing oil spills within our territory.

This is why I think attention needs to be focused on prevention before things become abandoned, before they become derelict, and addressing them, because what we see right now here in Port Alberni and in our territory is that an issue comes up with a boat, it's left there, they wait for the boat owner to deal with it and then the boat sinks. Meanwhile, there are other people who are standing on standby who could help clean up those boats before they become an issue, so I'm really encouraging the federal government to focus on prevention here.

It's just like a car accident. When a car accident happens, we don't wait for the car owner to deal with the accident or wait for their insurance provider. It's dealt with. Send them the bill later. Boats should be treated the same way, and the government should step in, help clean them up right away and send the bill to the boat owner, not wait for them and their insurance provider to step in and fix it.

Again, I encourage you to look at laws to address issues before they become significant, as has happened here in our territory.

Also, Tseshaht First Nation has seen the support from the WCM-RC, the work that they have done and the west coast marine spill response team here on the west coast. They have stepped in and been on standby waiting to deal with these derelict and abandoned boats before they become an issue.

Also, groups like Coastal Restoration Society here on the west coast have done a ton of work cleaning up here within our territo-

ries, and have done it in collaboration and in partnership with first nations such as Tseshaht.

There are also federal and provincial jurisdictional issues in terms of the locations of the jurisdictions that happen here. For Tseshaht, we have the Port Alberni Port Authority, the provincial jurisdiction and foreshore responsibility in our territory. I think it often becomes muddied waters about responsibility.

Another recommendation you'll hear from me later is about really ensuring that the responsibility to consult and work with first nations isn't just passed on to the port authority, who may, sometimes, never consult with the nations about what's happening in their own backyard. At the end of the day, the Crown still has a duty to consult, accommodate and seek the consent of the first nation and, right now, that is not happening in our territory.

There's also a head lease here in Tseshaht territory that the Port Alberni Port Authority used to have from the province of B.C., but right now, that's expired.

To date, we've had little consultation and engagement about any of our waterways within our territory, from the lakes, down the rivers, down the inlet, into our harbour; however, we are working collaboratively with some of your counterparts in Parks Canada, as the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve does operate within Tseshaht unceded territory.

Again, I think some of the actions should be around improving federal responsibilities and accountability and ensuring that there's not just an off-loading of responsibility to port authorities to work with first nations. The federal government still has the underlying responsibility.

I'll jump right to my recommendations and suggestions for the path forward.

One is investing in prevention of derelict and abandoned boats and vessels in the first place. Let's not wait until things become really bad and these boats sink and become environmental disasters in our backyard, but rather let's partner, as mentioned earlier by some other presenters, with the first nations guardian program. We have a beach keeper program here that has operated for a number of years in collaboration with Parks Canada. We have staff who are the first ones out there when something goes wrong. They're the first people who see when guests arrive at our shores and they are obviously able to provide some much-needed support in communications and training.

● (1745)

The second piece of that is providing training for those guardian programs to be able to deal with some of these abandoned and derelict boats.

More funds also—

The Chair: I have to cut you off there, Mr. Watts. We've gone a little bit over time. Hopefully anything you didn't get to say will come out in the rounds of questioning.

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

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

My question will be for Mr. Watts. I see here that you have a marine division and an environmental division.

How could the government's abandoned vessel removal program work better, while utilizing the knowledge that your nation has gained by being a part of abandoned and derelict vessel removals?

How can you make the program better?

Mr. Ken Watts: I think you've heard before of the traditional knowledge and understanding of the waterways. We're out there more than anybody else. Our fishers are out there. Our beach keepers are out there. I think that utilizing traditional knowledge is key.

Also, I think that collaboration.... First nations are already working with organizations that are helping to clean up those shores and the federal government needs to support those organizations. I think that should actually be a requirement. I think you've done that already as a federal government in terms of beach clean-up and other portions. You've made it a standard that those companies need to work with nations.

I think that continued investment into those organizations that work collaboratively with us is one of the key pieces. You have that within your authority to create those types of conditions under funding programs.

Again, I could sit here and keep saying "more money, more money", but I think it's about also supporting those groups that are supporting us and working with us. This is our territory and we want to work with everybody to make sure we prevent these disasters.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

I'd like to ask Mr. White the same question.

Mr. John White: Thank you.

Currently, we have an emergency response division within our marine division. We have programs with the Coast Guard and Transport Canada. Long-term, sustainable funding has to be.... I know the funding with the CDCR program is running out and we don't know the longevity of where that program is going to be. That's important work we have been undertaking with the Canadian Coast Guard, to develop capacity for the Snuneymuxw marine division to get on the water and start taking action against derelict vessels.

That being said, long-term, sustainable funding to continue our programs is a main priority.

Regarding our continued partnership with the Canadian Coast Guard in the CDCR and the CPIIR, we're developing a communications portal with the Canadian Coast Guard to develop a response regime where first nations, DFO and the Canadian Coast Guard can respond in a timely way to incidents along the coast and along the east coast of Vancouver Island. To continue those partnerships as well as developing capacity within for us....

We have boats, gear, ROVs, drones and equipment. We have a whole list of equipment. We have CTD water quality management, so we can look at microparticles that entering the system. It's just having that longevity to develop those programs and that capacity.

We've been ongoing for two years with the Canadian Coast Guard with these programs, but they're two-year and one-year programs. We don't know if we can continue to support our community to advance within these and an important part of the process is that development.

• (1750)

Mr. Clifford Small: If the people who are responsible for these abandoned and derelict vessels were actually paying for their crime, could you generate an economic opportunity?

Does it necessarily have to be funded by the federal government? Shouldn't the people who own these vessels and their insurance companies and whatnot...?

It looks like there could be a perfect industry here that is basically private sector-funded for your nation to get the job done and get it cleaned up, if the people who are responsible were held to account.

What do you think of that?

Mr. John White: Absolutely. I'm absolutely in favour of that.

You map it out and you tell us how you're going to make these people be accountable when you license that boat and the registration is so lax that you can't even contact the right owner. You're looking back on boats that have been transferred amongst five or six different people where you can't even find the right owner of that vessel. So looking at a change, absolutely, in the way that you legislate, the way that you enforce, is going to be the step forward to what you're talking about. You can't hold someone accountable if you don't know who they are.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you feel that the federal government should be responsible for cleaning up someone else's junk?

Mr. John White: I absolutely do not think that the federal government should be, but like I mentioned.... Sorry, I tried to throw a whole bunch of information at the committee that was relevant and important, but it's a historical problem. They're cleaning up vessels that have been there for over 30 years. We have an ongoing problem of vessels that have been left derelict for decades that are still there, like in the foreshore of a provincial park, Satsutshun Island.

I agree with you, but how do you find the path forward? We can do it ongoing now, and just as Chief Watts said, it should be like insuring your vehicle. You have to pay a deductible if your boat has an accident or it's left there.

Absolutely, I agree with you.

Mr. Clifford Small: The federal government shouldn't be responsible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

We have to go now to Mr. Weiler for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank both of our witnesses for being here by video conference and in person as well.

I would like to start with Mr. White.

Maybe before I ask my question, I know you had part of your opening statement you were concluding and I want to make sure I give you the opportunity to finish off with some of the last things that you were saying, if you'd like.

• (1755)

Mr. John White: Right, I kind of cut out there. Yes, absolutely, sorry. Like I said, I was trying to rush through a pile of relevant information and didn't want to miss anything that was important to us.

Absolutely, I was talking about recommendations.

One is long-term sustainable funding for first nations to continue or start work, because we are the residents, we live on the water and we're usually the first responders when any incident happens. We're the first ones there. We live there, right, so we're still going out. If a boat goes down, we report it, we wrap some boom around it, we contain it and we phone the Coast Guard. They're asking us now, Snuneymuxw First Nation, to send pictures, to send information, update us, tell us what's going on.

So relevancy is finding a path forward. Just like our friend there said, we need to develop different parts of that process, like the historical. The federal government is one of the regulating bodies that collects money from the things that happen in the marine environment. So historically, there is that responsibility, as well as ongoing.

So yes, my recommendations are that we start developing laws together as first nations and on a nation-to-nation level where we can find that path forward. We need to be part of the process too, right? Not every first nation is where we are, but let's get them to that point.

Thank you.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: I'm very impressed in hearing about all the different programming and capacity that the nation has there.

I want to pick up on one thing you mentioned, the working relationship that you have with the Canadian Coast Guard. I was hoping you might be able to expand a little bit on that because it sounds like you have a very strong working relationship. You're obviously being relied upon to be first responders, it sounds like, in some cases. So when there is a problem vessel that's out there, what is that

process like with the Coast Guard? I know sometimes it takes some time to get the authority to be able to move and get that authority to do that with those boats that are out there.

Mr. John White: Right now our guys are basically observing, recording and reporting. In some instances, as I made mention of in my speaking notes, we will move vessels. The relationship with them is such that every time we see something, I'll get the guys on the phone at VOC. When we respond to something, we'll push. I'll push. If it doesn't move, then I'll phone them. I'll push and ask for meetings.

We do have a good working relationship with them in some of the funding initiatives we have, but it's a big working organization, that Canadian Coast Guard, so we deal with a whole bunch of different levels. Within my position, I have the experience where I work with all different levels. If it doesn't get brought up to the level that we need, I'll bring it to another level. We'll push to have those vessels removed from our territory.

We're developing that relationship. We have staff and we're reaching out to every different sector within that regime of the Canadian Coast Guard.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: I just want to say thanks for stepping up and doing that work.

Councillor Watts, you mentioned, as part of your recommendations, investing in prevention. I think this has to be the biggest priority. As much as we can do to prevent these types of occurrences from happening, it's so much cheaper than having to clean up boats when they've sunk to the bottom of the water or they've started leaking oil or whatever the case may be.

You were mentioning that one of the ways to do that is through partnering with nations. I was hoping you might be able to expand on that with this committee, particularly with what you were saying about how to better deal with licensing so that we're able to make sure that the polluters pay, in this case.

• (1800)

Mr. Ken Watts: Awesome. Yes.

For the Tseshaht here, we're the first people out there to respond within Pacific Rim National Park Reserve in particular. We have guardians out there when an incident happens. From the prevention standpoint, a lot of our nations already have people out on the water, whether it's doing monitoring, as was mentioned earlier from John, or other work that's happening on the territories. Our people are already out there. If there's already an opportunity to collaborate and actually start documenting—again, observing and reporting, as was mentioned—and collecting that data of boats that may look like they would be incidents, that's one simple way of utilizing the people who are already out on the water.

To the other piece you mentioned, I think there's a bit of an issue there. We wait for something really bad to happen and then we clean it up after, as opposed to what I just shared with the car accident. We don't sit there and wait for somebody else to come and clean it up. Somebody else is sent the bill after. I think that's what we need to do. This is our environment out here. This is the water right here. This river feeds our community. We also bring \$2 million to \$8 million into the local economy through our economic fishery. I don't think we can wait for the environment and wait for some insurance provider to give the okay to fix something. I think that needs to be streamlined. There's already a federal matter called Jordan's principle. Figure out who pays for it later. Just address the issue right now and get the other group to reimburse you, whether it's the province or the feds—or, in this case, whether it's the individual boater or their insurance provider. Clean it up and worry about who pays for it later. Our fish and our species and the things that are going through our territory can't wait.

I'm sorry. I didn't have a lot of time, so I tried to be quick.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses as well. I'm delighted to hear from them.

Obviously, since I represent the Bloc Québécois, I'm more focused on the east coast, the St. Lawrence River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The Canadian Coast Guard and other witnesses have told us that there are problems in the St. Lawrence that are just as serious as yours. Clearly, there's a lack of expertise.

The St. Lawrence is an extremely deep river, with many reefs and highly complex cross-currents, leading to a number of shipwrecks. As a result, stranded ships are involuntarily left behind in the gulf. For our part, we don't understand why the Canadian Coast Guard can't find a way to locate these vessels, some of which are in the very deep waters of the St. Lawrence River. We also don't know what's in them.

Do you have the same problems on the west coast, Mr. White, or other challenges? Is the increasing number of abandoned vessels the issue, or the complexity in locating them?

[*English*]

Mr. John White: Thank you for the question.

It's money. It's expensive. For one derelict vessel to be removed, it's around \$15,000. To go after one in the deep sea, through our marine division.... We have ROVs that go down 400 metres so we can inspect them. It's about setting up and getting a history of the vessel. If it's historical, as we just talked about, we're going to have to spend some time, energy and money to inspect it via ROV and figure out a way. I think the cost of dealing with some of those bigger vessels, and floating them, is probably going to be in the millions.

It's finding the ways and technologies. We're in a world of technology now, so there should be nothing holding us back from sal-

vaging this. We do it with ghost gear. We salvage and clean up ghost gear all along the west coast of Vancouver Island, so we should be able to do it with wrecked-in-pieces derelict vessels. They're not staying intact when they've been down there for that long, so there will be a lot of pieces of vessel to clean up.

Thank you for the question.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you for your very enlightening answer.

I think we're facing the same problems. Since 2016, \$2.2 billion have been spent on finding abandoned vessels and recovering the equipment. That's a lot of money.

Have you seen these billions of dollars? We're still looking for them. Maybe they're in a treasure chest buried under the ocean.

[*English*]

Mr. John White: That's a tough question. Oh, oh!

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John White: Absolutely.

Chief Watts made mention of WCMRC and how they're heavily outfitted. They have tons of money to buy massive ships and all of this extraordinary equipment, in order to go out and respond to vessels of concern. They're being funded by big industry...responsibility for ship sinking.

One thing about WCMRC, we partner with them to do work, since they're a contractor. They're contracted out by a person or company. They have to get a PO before they can respond to a vessel of concern or anything. They're not part of the government's plan. Rather, they may be, but they're not part of the government when they go out and equip that. They're a prime example of what you're talking about. They have the money, systems and structure. That's where we need to be in order to respond to that sort of stuff.

In terms of money, yes, there's opportunity. A lot of the funding I'm utilizing right now to manage our programs is coming from TMX accommodations—preparing for massive oil spills. There is prevention happening. There's some sort of funding that goes to setting up for the inevitable spill, you could say.

Yes, there's opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I'm very grateful for the witnesses who are here today.

Mr. Chair, I'm just going to take the first 20 seconds of my time to orally table a motion for discussion at a future meeting. The clerk is going to circulate it now.

The motion reads:

That, given that the House of Commons Administration serves only farmed salmon in its food and catering services, and that open net pen fish farms pollute our waters and spread diseases in the surrounding marine ecosystem, and that the government has committed to a transition away from open net pen salmon farms, the committee write a letter to the Speaker of the House of Commons calling for the House of Commons Administration to end the practice of purchasing farmed salmon from open net pen salmon farms.

With that, I'll move on.

Again, thank you so much to the witnesses. It is so nice to see you here. Your testimony that you've provided has been very important.

The first question that I have is for you, Mr. White.

I was so honoured to be able to go out on a boat with the Snuneymuxw marine division and take a look first-hand at the boats that are left to sink along the waters along the coast of the Snuneymuxw First Nation.

You spoke about the number of vessels that are being abandoned along the coast of British Columbia, but I'm wondering if you can give us an image of what we see when we go out on the water along the coast of the Snuneymuxw First Nation. How many vessels are there? How many are being left to sink? Give us some images to hold on to.

Mr. John White: Just the other day, we responded to two—and that's within a week, to give you an idea. We had a windstorm.

We have probably three main anchorages within the Snuneymuxw territory where people—I want to go on this big tangent about housing right now, but that's for another time—are choosing to live aboard their vessels. We have a high volume of people who live aboard these vessels in front of the Saysutshun provincial park. When they decide that these vessels no longer suit their needs or they're too derelict to live on, or they're listing or taking on water, they will just abandon them and take off.

Right now, on the foreshore of that provincial park, we probably have four or five vessels sitting there, in the park that thousands of tourists come to every year.

One of the things we do is try to get people to avoid anchoring. Legislation says you're only allowed to stay anchored in that anchorage for a certain amount of time, so what they do is move back and forth between a couple of other anchorages within our territory.

When we took you out on the water.... Part of our Indian Reserve No. 5 on Gabriola Island is also one of the main parts, and we had three vessels down there. Last year, one of those vessels broke apart and wound up coming on to one of our commercial clam leases. All

through those commercial clam beaches are about three different leases owned by people.

It's impacting us not only environmentally, but economically. As an estimate—I've worked for the marine division for the past three years—we've responded to around 40 or 50 vessels, which is pretty concerning to us. We've boomed off. We've had major oil spills. We've picked up microparticles, like I said, in the Nanaimo River estuary.

It's a pretty big problem in our territory.

• (1810)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much.

Just for time, I'll continue with my questions for you, and then I'll move my next questions after that, in the next round, to Chief Watts.

Mr. White, the contamination that you speak of would, of course, contaminate the commercial shellfish sites along the Snuneymuxw Nation. These are the same areas that are being used for food harvesting.

Could you speak to or enlighten us a bit about how this is a direct threat to Snuneymuxw titles and rights?

Mr. John White: Absolutely. We, like you, heard from witnesses in prior testimony. We strive and live off the ocean. Our people are right now fishing for food in the Nanaimo River estuary within our territory. To have vessels floating around, leaving microparticles, fuel and stuff is impacting us. We're not able to safely eat the shellfish within the territory. You've heard testimony about that. We're not able to go out and fish the areas that we fish. We have salmon. There's such a high volume of traffic throughout the Nanaimo harbour that we can't even fish. I was in a meeting today trying to plan a demonstration fishery for economic development for Snuneymuxw First Nation. One of the concerns is the available spots for us to set our nets. I've talked to another guy today, and he had three speedboats run over his commercial net. That's completely impeding on our rights and title as first nation people.

Thank you for the question.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to both witnesses. There are so many questions and so little time.

I want to start with Mr. Watts, if I could, because he's on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Are any of the vessels or the material you're finding washed ashore in your territory of international origin?

Mr. Ken Watts: No, we don't have that specifically in our territory. I know other first nations on the west coast of Vancouver Island have had issues. I think up in Tla-o-qui-aht territory, in Tofino, they had one boat or barge that came from another country. Mostly the ones that have run aground are barges, and other boats that have been left are local. In particular, forestry companies, as an example, have some foreshore leases with the province. The most recent barge that was left was very old, probably shouldn't have been out there, wasn't safe to be there, and sunk. A lot of it's more local ownership.

• (1815)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. White, you mentioned that you have to work with many different levels of DFO.

Could you elaborate a little further on that in a short period of time, or provide more in detail in writing, if it's going to take a long time?

Mr. John White: Thank you for the question.

Yes, I've been bringing these issues up at several different levels. We deal with the federal government in reconciliation working groups that bring these issues to a bit higher level. As well, I attend upper management meetings with the local Coast Guard and DFO. Then we're on the ground level, where I'm making calls to Coast Guard's ROC lines and the vessels of concern line to report these incidents.

It all starts on the ground level—our guys going out. If we're not seeing any action on the vessel being removed, or the contaminants, or on the information that we're providing, then I'm going to talk to someone a little bit higher up the chain to start getting things done and getting vessels moved.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Should it be one phone call, a one-stop shop?

Mr. John White: Well, it should be, yes.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It should be. Thank you.

I guess this is for both of you, and you can answer individually. I'll start with you, Mr. White.

In your opinion, should the last registered owner be responsible for ensuring the transfer of registration takes place or else be responsible for the removal or cleanup of the vessel?

Mr. John White: I think if we did do that, it would be great. I think they should be held accountable. I'll give you an example of a fishing boat on the west coast of Vancouver Island that I was involved with last year. It was a derelict fishing boat with oil and contaminants on it. The Coast Guard was being phoned over and over again. Finally, they intervened. The boat, for whatever reason, because of lack of capacity to dispose of the vessel, was towed to Victoria. The bill for that boat for disposal was \$90,000. The owner of the boat didn't have that money. Now what do you do? Now you have a \$90,000 bill. You're forcing a guy into bankruptcy. It's his boat and his responsibility, but you're not going to get blood from a stone.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Mr. Watts, do have any comment? What do you feel about the last registered owner either being responsible for the transfer of licence to the new owner or else being responsible for the cost of the vessels?

Mr. Ken Watts: Yes, I think you hit the nail on the head. The owner of the boat should be responsible for what happens to the boat. I think it's also about streamlining transfers of ownership. Again, I hate to bring up the cars example, but it's just making sure that it's very clear who the owners are.

I think what often happens—and what I see, anyway—is that sometimes those transfers don't happen in time, or some people just don't carry them out right away, and they just buy a boat, as an example, off somebody and start using it.

I think that obviously whoever the owner is at the time of the accident should be responsible for it. I'll say it again. Before the incident happens, let's prevent it from happening, and if it does, let's not wait for an insurance provider to step in and fix it. Let's fix it.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I was trying to get at the prevention piece of it because that's how I think.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

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

Chief Lenora Joe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What we have, then, is an issue of “dock and dash” or “buoy and boot it”. This brings out my internal Conservative. I want a gold star for that.

Obviously, there's a lot of sneaking around, trying to just get a boat out of the way without anybody noticing. I would imagine, Mr. White, that this leads to boats being abandoned in very difficult places in a very dangerous manner, or at least increasing the potential that something bad is going to happen. Is that a fair assessment?

• (1820)

Mr. John White: Yes, absolutely. I'll give you an example.

Chief Lenora Joe: Make it a very quick one.

Mr. John White: I'll be very quick.

Last week, we identified a vessel of concern. We went out. We had a big storm come up, and now the vessel is scattered all over the beach. There's been no response. Right now, we don't have the capacity to remove vessels. We could tow—

Chief Lenora Joe: I have to intercept you right there.

Councillor Watts, you mentioned that you have beach keepers who are out doing this kind of work and looking after the beach. We had a previous discussion with Chief Joe, prior to your appearance here, and she talked about a guardian program that had been around but that unfortunately lost its funding. Can you give me an idea of what the cost is for your beach keepers program?

Mr. Ken Watts: Yes. It is funded mostly by Parks Canada. Depending on the seasons, it could be several hundred thousand dollars a year. It's not cheap. As you know, fuel is very expensive.

However, really, they have other jobs they do. It's not just monitoring for derelict boats. They are out there providing visitor services to people. They're often like a first responder or the first ones on the shore, so they're pulling multiple tasks. They're also counting southern resident killer whales. Much like the others and our friends at Snuneymuxw First Nation, they have a bunch of other work that they do besides just watching out for derelict boats.

Chief Lenora Joe: That's great. Are they still getting their training down at the Kitsilano Coast Guard station?

Mr. Ken Watts: Yes, I think what's been great is actually a lot of the collaboration. I shared before that WCMRC is, I know, industry funded, but they do provide training for us, and we are collaborating with them as well as with Coastal Restoration Society. Again, we do collaborate with other groups out there, so they are getting more training. They also trained with the Coast Guard. They do receive training at numerous places with different partners.

Chief Lenora Joe: You mentioned collaboration. There are a lot of different communities up and down the coast, and although their specific problems might vary from place to place, it seems that there could be good use of time and effort to collaborate and to pull something together that covers the whole coast, where you can come up with the brainstorming and the tactics. You could maybe get some good advice going back and forth on strategies for dealing with that. Mr. White, would you provide a quick comment?

Mr. John White: Yes, absolutely.

That's kind of what we're partnering on with the Canadian Coast Guard, developing a zipper tool that's going to allow first nations up and down the coast to collaborate with response assets and to be able to get real-time information from that communications portal to develop that response plan.

Chief Lenora Joe: Good.

Here's an off-the-wall idea. People are abandoning these boats in bad places, creating all kinds of difficulties. What if we set up system where they could just volunteer their boat, but made sure it went to this location. They could bring it in, sign a paper to give it up and walk away. I'm sure the processing of the boat, in terms of the time, the effort and the money needed, would be much better if they basically were just given a free pass to get rid of something that they would otherwise want to "dock and dash".

Mr. John White: I attended the Salish Sea Strategy Symposium last year. I sat through a session with the Canadian Coast Guard, and there was a discussion about a boat amnesty program, which is kind of what you're referring to.

It would be a great idea if people could potentially take in a boat and have it disposed of. I know about developing; I've been working with some of the people, as Mr. Watts said, like the Coastal Restoration Society on developing systems to have them removed in partnership with them as well, but I think a boat amnesty program would go a long way. You'd see a lot of people.

Chief Lenora Joe: I had more questions, but I'm out of time. Thanks.

The Chair: We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes, and then to Ms. Barron to conclude.

[Translation]

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

I just want to commend Mr. Watts and Mr. White for their skill and determination in pro-environmental recovery. I say so wholeheartedly and with much admiration.

Your efforts are truly focused on healthier, more balanced lifestyles.

I would like to take advantage of this time to say that we hear your position and your needs, and that we will echo your recommendations in our report as much as possible.

I'd like to hand over the remaining minute and a half of my speaking time to my colleague Ms. Barron.

• (1825)

[English]

The Chair: Okay. That's a minute and forty seconds plus your own two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

[English]

I'm sorry, I was waiting for an answer to your question.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mrs. Desbiens.

[English]

It's great that I have that extra time, because I was hoping to ask a bit of a bigger question of both of you.

Chief Watts, I'll start with you. I'm curious about this: If first nations were able and interested in taking on the work of helping to clean up the vessels, and if they were funded appropriately and supported, what do you think could be possible, and what would obviously be so much different from what we're seeing right now? What would that look like?

Mr. Ken Watts: As I've shared before, even with the capacity, we have 10 boats as a nation. We've got monitoring staff. We've got 10 different staff who are doing different things. We as a nation are also doing a bunch of other work. We have multiple tasks that we have to do, and we'd still probably want to partner with other groups. I use the Coastal Restoration Society just as an example. There are other groups that are out there.

To paint that picture, obviously the resources are important and the boats are important, but in order to do it better, as I've said before, let's focus on prevention. Let's actually be doing the work to monitor boats before they become an issue in the first place. That's where the funding and the resources need to be looked at. Let's not wait until this boat is barely hanging on by a thread to go out and clean it up after it's been done.

How you do that? There's a ton of experts who could come up with monitoring ideas for checking boats on docks that are of concern and finding out a real method to actually going out and assessing these boats before they become an issue.

For us as a nation, we'd love to be a part of it. We'd love to find partners. We don't pretend to have all the answers, but we're here and we're committed to working with everybody, because this coast is so sacred to us as well. These are our waterways. This is what feeds our community.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much, Chief Watts.

I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on that, Mr. White.

Mr. John White: It's the same thing, to echo what Chief Watts said. We have our marine division. We have 20 employees. We have a dedicated staff for emergency response. However, like I said, we don't have infrastructure and we don't have capacity, so we also partner with the Coastal Restoration Society. We partner with a lot of different people to get out there.

If we had long-term, sustainable funding for us to get out there and actually do some removal and mitigation.... We're at the level now where we're monitoring the vessels. We've got Barnacle systems that we put on these vessels that'll tell you when the boats list. They'll tell you if they're taking on water. We're putting stickers on boats. We're there; we just need to move it a bit further ahead and either, like Chief Watts said, partner with people or start developing our own way to remove these vessels in partnership with the Canadian Coast Guard and Transport Canada.

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

Chair, how much time do I have left after that conversation?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Mr. White, perhaps you could expand a little bit. We know that it shouldn't be easier for owners of vessels to abandon their vessels than to dispose of them properly. This is a key theme throughout all the discussions I have.

I'm wondering if you could speak to any knowledge of a turn-in program or what it might look like to develop one so that owners would know exactly what they can do with their vessels once they've reached the end of their lives.

Mr. John White: Absolutely.

You just have to communicate it properly—get it out to the people on the wharfs and docks. Communication will be a key point to that. It's about funding to do that type of program and disposal, along with a proper disposal site. As I said, I've talked to some of the boat construction people along the inside of Nanaimo's harbour. They're telling me, "We're here, and we're ready to start dealing with derelict vessels, so let's get a plan together."

I think implementing an amnesty program like that would be a huge value for the coastline.

● (1830)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

I want to say, on behalf of the committee, a huge thank you to Mr. White and Mr. Watts for sharing their knowledge with the committee today as we move through this particular study.

For notice purposes alone, at Monday's meeting, we will resume our study of northern cod.

Thank you, everyone.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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