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# Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald





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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 128 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 would like 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.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on February 28, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of derelict and abandoned vessels.

We welcome our witnesses. We have on Zoom Roberta Bowman, executive director of the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce. We also have with us Chloe Dubois, executive director of Ocean Legacy Foundation.

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

Ms. Bowman, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman (Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce):** Thank you, Chair.

Good morning, Chair and committee members. Thank you for allowing me to speak on the pressing issue of derelict and abandoned vessels.

I come to you today from Ladysmith, Vancouver Island, on the traditional territory of the Stz'uminus First Nation.

Derelict and abandoned vessels directly impact our community, economy and environment. Over the past several years, I've seen first-hand the impact of abandoned vessels in Ladysmith waters. As a coastal community, we depend on healthy waterways for local fisheries and tourism. As a boater, I've sailed from Croatia to Vancouver, visiting 150 ports worldwide, and nowhere have I encountered the level of derelict boats we see here in British Columbia. Our waters are littered, and it's a growing concern.

Abandoned vessels leak oil, fuel and chemicals, harming marine ecosystems and endangering fish, marine mammals and coastal wildlife. These pollutants threaten our environment and compromise the health of waters essential for fishing and tourism. Our waterfront is a vital community asset, essential for residents and to attracting visitors; however, abandoned vessels create ongoing challenges, deterring tourists, boaters and recreational users and projecting an image of neglect that harms our local tourism industry.

Abandoned vessels pose serious safety risks, blocking channels and creating hazards for boaters. Sunken boats also make anchoring and navigation difficult. In Ladysmith, an area known as Dogpatch is especially impacted, with many boats abandoned or occupied by individuals facing housing, addiction and mental health challenges. This safety concern is troubling, especially given its proximity to Transfer Beach, a cherished community waterfront.

As a community, we cannot solve this problem alone. Stronger collaboration between local governments, provincial authorities and federal agencies is essential. However, I believe a comprehensive, multipronged approach is necessary to address the root causes of derelict vessels in British Columbia's waters.

While the initial steps are appreciated, they are not enough. Canada needs a proactive, sustainable and comprehensive strategy that goes beyond addressing existing abandoned vessels and focuses on prevention and accountability. A national strategy would ensure that all regions, communities and stakeholders are united in addressing, removing and preventing abandoned vessels in Canadian waters. This approach is crucial for preserving our environment, supporting our local economies and respecting indigenous rights to hunting, fishing and food security.

We have some recommendations from the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce. We believe that the Government of Canada should adopt a national strategy based on three principles: identification, removal and prevention.

Our key recommendations are collaboration and stakeholder engagement, improved systems for vessel owner identification, adjustment of fees to cover vessel disposal costs, establishing a vessel turn-in program, promoting recycling standards and innovation, sending support for salvage services in local and indigenous communities and streamlining the disposal process.

The expected benefits of a national strategy would be environmental protection, community safety, economic support and indigenous rights and food security.

At the end of the day, derelict vessels are not just an eyesore. They represent a serious risk to our environment, our economy and the safety of our residents. I urge the government to take action by creating more robust programs for vessel disposal, increasing funding for their removal and fostering co-operation between all levels of government and local stakeholders.

With a national strategy, I believe we can protect our precious coastal resources and ensure that future generations can enjoy the beauty and bounty of our waters.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions or provide further insights on this issue.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1105)

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Madam Dubois for her opening statement of five minutes or less.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois (Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation):** Thank you, Chair.

Good day, everyone. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you all. I'm calling in today from the unceded territory of the Musqueam First Nation in Richmond, British Columbia.

Ocean Legacy has been cleaning shoreline and ocean environments for the last 10 years and has been working incredibly hard to develop industrial-scale best practices that work to restore ecologically and culturally sensitive coastal environments by removing shoreline marine debris, subsurface ghost gear and derelict vessels, and through derelict aquaculture gear removal.

Our team works incredibly closely with indigenous and coastal communities to develop project plans together that remove large amounts of solid waste pollution and then work to recycle and reuse as much of the recovered material as possible. We work alongside first nation communities to help restore critical traditional food-harvesting and culturally significant areas, and to help collect, collate and share important data resulting from the survey and removal work.

To date, we have removed over 30 vessels along the coast of British Columbia, and we know there is a lot more work to do to remove the countless vessels remaining. According to estimates from a 2015 study, over 1,500 derelict vessels are listed to be on the Canadian Pacific coast alone, with over 4,500 across the country. However, these are just the vessels we can see on the surface. As underwater surveys and restoration efforts continue to grow, we expect these numbers to increase exponentially.

We have seen first-hand how destructive these vessels can be, leaking oils and fuel, resins, plastics, black waters, heavy metals from bottom paint and vessel construction, polystyrenes, asbestos insulation, chemicals and other anthropogenic debris into the water. If it doesn't sink or leach into the water, it will then concentrate and wash ashore. When these materials concentrate along shorelines, they then break up into millions of tiny fragments, entering the food chain and impacting the habitat, health and safety of all species.

We have found that cleaning up these vessels can be very time-consuming and financially demanding due to the required permitting processes that are mandatory for removal, alongside the complex aquatic environments that we must then navigate once these vessels have sunk. It becomes further challenging as databases are often not up to date. Vessels are easily traded or sold, and as owners retire or pass away, often leaving vessels to become derelict, the registry is not up to date.

We need to be able to address, remove and prevent these vessels from sinking, and we must not allow them to become subsurface hazards. We have found that once vessels have sunk, ropes, nets and other debris become entangled with these structures, creating very dangerous environments for wildlife, which then becomes entangled. They often become hot spots for ghost gear, resulting in wildlife emaciation, drownings and vessel strikes.

These submerged vessels often create a high risk for subsurface vessel strikes, creating dangerous navigable waters for vessels across the coast, which are then uncharted. Hitting a submerged vessel with a vessel not only risks injury to the persons on board but also poses the risk of adding another vessel to the list of derelicts. We have personally received countless reports from commercial divers that in areas where derelict vessels lie, there are often three or more other vessels stacked in the same place, one on top of the other.

The introduction of the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act, created in 2019, was a great start in addressing the derelict vessel program on this coast, but it is not enough, and the funds available compared to the immediate need of removal costs fall short. The funds that have been provided by the Province of British Columbia through the clean coast, clean waters initiative fund have also been an incredible resource; however, continuation of these funds has not been announced. We urgently need more physical resources allocated to this problem to continue to survey areas and to perform removal.

The government should also consider creating some concessions in terms of modifying the removal permit process when vessels are destroyed on shorelines and are actively polluting the environment. We have found dozens of vessels that are beached and ripped apart and that are actively contributing toxic pollution to environments, but then, we are not legally allowed to do anything about them without undergoing an incredibly extensive review and consultation process. This often results in the vessels having to remain in place because of constricted funding timelines for grants, which restricts the ability to undergo such administrative processes. Addressing this issue to enable cleanup crews to remove these acute sources of pollution when they are discovered during cleanup operations would be extremely beneficial.

• (1110)

Thank you for the consideration today and for the opportunity to speak with you all about these important matters. We look forward to continuing to work on these pressing matters together.

Thank you for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

Before I go to Mr. Small, I neglected to recognize Mr. Kelloway before I started opening statements. He had his hand up.

Mr. Kelloway, when you're ready, please go ahead.

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

I would like to put forward a motion.

I move,

That, upon tabling of the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year 2024-25, the committee invite Minister Leboutillier to testify on the supplementary estimates (B) by no later than the end of the current supply period.

The rationale for it is that the Conservatives are actively stalling the supplementary estimates from being adopted in the House of Commons. We believe that's going to have an impact on the ability of real, key essential services like the Coast Guard and CMP to operate effectively. These services are absolutely important. We think it could play a role, not just in safety but in ceasing a lot of operations with respect to harvesters. We'd like to have the minister come in and speak to that and the impact of the stalling with respect to Canadian fisheries, writ large, and harvesters.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Arnold.

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

I somewhat agree with Mr. Kelloway. It would be good to have the minister appear on the estimates and to hear what is being done. To counter the idea that it's the Conservatives who are stalling, it's the Liberals who have been ordered by the majority of members of Parliament to produce documents. They have not done so. Thus, it is the Liberals who are actually stalling the government process.

I would like to make an amendment to the motion at the end so that it reads, "the committee invite Minister Leboutillier to testify

on the supplementary estimates (B) for a minimum of one hour by no later than December 4".

I say that because of the uncertain calendar that we're always faced with as we move into December. The current supply period could be deemed as December 17. That would be the final sitting day for this committee. I'm unsure whether we would actually be coming back for it simply on Monday and Tuesday in mid-December, and also with the week prior to that being questionable. That's why I proposed December 4.

The motion would read, "That the committee invite Minister Leboutillier to testify on the supplementary estimates (B) for a minimum of one hour..." Actually, I'll make it that the minister appear "for two hours by no later than December 4, 2024".

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Small.

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

I echo what my colleague, Mr. Arnold, just said. These documents, which the majority of members of Parliament have asked for, need to be produced in Parliament. Then things can get back to normal and we can proceed. It's Mr. Kelloway's party, unfortunately, that's causing this backlog in Parliament. It's a very simple thing to produce these unredacted documents on the green slush fund, which I'm sure you, Mr. Chair, would love to see as well, given your support for this side of the table here.

Two hours would be an appropriate amount of time for the minister to appear, since Mr. Kelloway highlighted the importance of her appearance here. The fishing industry, I'm sure, would love to hear from her again.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bragdon.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** I would just like to further comment on the original motion plus the supplement to it. I think it's been very clearly established over, I would say, the beginning stages of the debate within the House of Commons as it relates to the statement that was made by Mr. Kelloway. It's abundantly clear: The Speaker has ruled that the documents should be released and that, right now, the government is standing in violation of the Speaker's decree as it relates to a majority vote that was held and passed by all parties in the House except for one. I think it would behoove our friends on the other side to take that into consideration before casting aspersions upon members of the opposition for doing our job of holding the government to account on this matter.

Just to reiterate, Mr. Chair, I think it's very important that it be clearly understood that the reason certain things are held up in the House is that those on the governing side of the House have not released the documents at this point. Release the documents, and I think everything will speed up quite quickly. I wanted to just add my voice to that.

Further, I support the call for the minister to come by December 4, because who knows, with the activities of the House, when we will actually adjourn for Christmas? Let's make sure she has an opportunity to come and address the committee and do it in detail. Two hours is a good time, and it would be great to have her come and share. I'm sure the harvesters across the country would appreciate that, and those in the fishing industry and coastal communities would as well.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

Go ahead, Ms. Barron.

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

I was going to call a point of order, but that works out well. It's my turn anyway.

I want to ask for unanimous consent from the committee.

I know we're in a motion, so it's more of a point of order around whether we can extend the meeting to make sure we get all of our questions in. We go into a closed business committee after this meeting, and I want to make sure that we get fulsome questions to our witnesses who are here, so I want to ask for unanimous consent that we continue on until all of our preplanned questions have moved forward, due to the fact we've had some delays in getting started here.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** We agree on this one.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Is it agreed?

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** There's no problem.

**The Chair:** Okay, so that's fine.

Now we go to Mr. Morrissey.

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

First, I don't have a problem with the amendment proposed by Mr. Arnold. What I do have a problem with is the continued hypocrisy coming from the Conservative official opposition, who choose to editorialize the Speaker's ruling selectively to suit their particular agenda, which is to delay the House at a time when we hear consistently from them, on this particular ministry, the urgency and the importance of funding for enhanced protection as well as for the Canadian Coast Guard. They hide behind the selective editing of a Speaker's ruling that does not really say what the official opposition likes to interpret it as saying, but that has not been lost on the Canadian public.

I must say, if you look at the record, ministers of fisheries in this government have appeared before this committee in greater fre-

quency than they did in the nine years of the previous Conservative government. That's for the record, if you want to choose that.

Mr. Chair, I'm okay with the amendment of Mr. Arnold.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Just for the record, as Mr. Morrissey stated, I did previously state that it was an order of the majority of the members of Parliament that the government produce the documents. The government has failed to produce those documents. That's why the Speaker made the ruling he did.

If we have no other amendments or discussion, I think we can go to the question on the amendment.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Madam Clerk.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 10; nays 1)

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

**The Chair:** The motion as amended has passed.

Now we'll go back to our round of questioning.

Mr. Small, you're up for six minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for coming here today for this very valuable study.

I'll go to Ms. Bowman first of all.

These waters are littered by members of the public. When the mining industry or some other type of industry leaves its junk behind, it's forced by the government to clean it up.

How much onus should be on the government to clean up garbage that's left behind by the general public?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Thank you, Mr. Small, for your question.

I totally agree. The public should be cleaning up after themselves. Here on the west coast, we do cleanup days multiple times a year. There are shore volunteers who go out, multitudes all over B.C., and clean up the shores. It's all volunteer. They go out and they clean up the shores of all of the remnants you were discussing.

More does need to be done, definitely. I know that there are a lot of impacts and changes, like people going from plastic straws to paper straws and things like that, to help mitigate that as well. I think it's an ongoing issue that people are really focusing on.

Thank you.

• (1125)

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you very much.

We've heard testimony, Ms. Bowman, that it seems like the derelict vessel problem is increasing as time goes on and as more people realize they can leave their derelict vessels behind, abandoned, and the ownership is not traced. Even people who are paying attention to this study are going to realize that it's easier to do this than what they might have thought before.

What do you think can be done to slow down the increase of this, basically, dumping in the ocean?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** I think a lot can be done. I think we need to be putting some new initiatives in place and put them back on the boat owner. I can say that. I'm a boat owner, so I totally understand this situation.

What's happening with the growing increase in the cost of living these days is that folks are not able to afford moorage, so they are taking their boats and anchoring them. From anchoring them one day, one thing leads to the next. It's a domino effect, and all of a sudden these boats are abandoned and become derelict.

I think this ties into insurance. Once a boat reaches a certain age.... Getting insurance on a vessel is increasingly difficult with older vessels, with the increased amount of maintenance that needs to be done on them. Again, a boat is as good as it is used. The more you use the boat, the healthier it is. Not everybody knows or understands that. I've managed and run multiple marinas in my time. That is something we tell folks all the time.

I think it starts with boat owners and educating them on what they can do. Then I think it leads to multiple levels of government coming in and helping to put processes in place.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you, Ms. Bowman, for that excellent expert testimony.

Mr. Chair, my next question is for Ms. Dubois.

You spoke about how expensive removing these derelict vessels is.

Do you have any suggestions for maybe creating a pool of money or drawing together different sources of funding privately to help deal with this problem, versus placing the bulk of the onus on taxpayers across Canada, many of whom have never seen the ocean?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** Thank you for that question, Mr. Small.

This work is incredibly expensive, and just to speak a little bit on your last question, it can be dangerous. I don't think that leaving this work in the hands of volunteers is the right way to go long term.

In terms of raising funds or pooling funds, we can look to waste management models, such as extended producer responsibility. I know people aren't in favour of taxes or putting a tax on something, but creating a deposit scheme or method at the point of purchase of the vessel could help pool funds together for that.

When shipping containers come into the port, we've also discussed looking at creating a small tax on each container, so that money can then be pooled for restoration funds across the coast. That could create a substantial fund to help not only with the funding and removal of derelict vessels, but also with many other restoration needs across the coast. Those are some of the mechanisms we've explored to date.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

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. I also want to thank our two witnesses for joining in today by video conference.

I want to start with Ms. Dubois. You mentioned a few things that piqued my interest. Number one, you mentioned some of the challenges with the removal permit process and the time that it takes to go through this review and the consultation process. I was hoping you could share a bit more with this committee on what that type of process looks like right now and what types of recommendations you might have for amending it.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** Right now, in a nutshell, what this process looks like is that when we come across a vessel, we have to identify the registration number, and then we have to work through Transport Canada to identify the owner.

This can be quite a long process in terms of putting out consultation. Usually, that looks like a public announcement, which lasts, I believe, up to 60 days—there are 60 days for somebody to claim that vessel. When we're looking to do restoration and cleanup efforts, we have to be planning six months to a whole year in advance in order to align the approval of the permitting process. If none of these vessels are owned, or the owners don't come forward, we have to align that with the funding that we're applying for. That looks like grants, oftentimes, or donors or sponsors we get from the community to do this work. It makes it challenging for us to be able to go through that administrative process and align all of the resources that we need in time to be able to do the work.

After the consultation process, if no owners claim the vessel, we can fill out a few other forms to own the vessel, so the ownership of the vessel then gets transferred to our organization. From that point, we are legally allowed to clean up and remove the vessel. We've encountered numerous instances of going to clean up a vessel underwater, submerged, and when we remove the vessel, there's another vessel underneath that vessel. We have the resources in that moment to clean up the stack of vessels, but we are not legally allowed to.

It creates an incredibly frustrating circumstance for us when we have to literally leave these vessels that we can see actively leaking and polluting toxins into the environment. Then we have to go through the whole process again, reapply for more funding and then get the permitting process involved.

I feel that there needs to be some sort of concession in place when extreme circumstances like that occur. There need to be concessions to be able to remove the vessel when we have an expert and a specialized team in place with the resources in place.

We've also come across instances when we're doing extensive shoreline cleanup and debris removal. We do extensive surveys of these areas ahead of time; however, sometimes we come across, say, up in a forest or a location where we didn't initially catch the initial debris, concentration from a derelict vessel. These vessels are ripped apart and shredded, and they're actively leaking all kinds of pollutants. Again, we can't touch the vessel unless we go through this permitting and consultation process. It's heartbreaking to see and to have to leave these vessels in place.

That's a little bit of our experience in undergoing this process.

● (1135)

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Thank you.

It leads to the next question I wanted to ask. You mentioned that the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act was a very good start, and some of the funds are provided through that, but you also mentioned that more resources need to be allocated to survey areas. Certainly, what you mentioned about finding these submerged vessels and the cumulative impact of other vessels or other ghost gear that is getting attached to it is very concerning.

I think, number one, it's the need to have more resources, but I think it's also about ensuring that those resources go to surveying areas that are going to have the biggest impact, so you're avoiding those situations that you just mentioned, of removing one boat and finding more there that are submerged.

I wonder if you have any recommendations for this committee about how those resources can best be allocated to do surveys.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** That's a great question. Thank you for that.

I think to allocate the resources best, what we're seeing—and to Mrs. Bowman's comment about Dogpatch—is that there are very large concentrations outside of larger cities and urban establishments. Oftentimes we're seeing incredibly large concentrations in remote indigenous harbour communities.

I think allocating these resources should go in the hands of the indigenous communities, so that they can oversee.... Oftentimes they know exactly where a lot of these vessels are and where their traditional grounds and harvesting areas are being affected. Working more closely with indigenous stewardship is essential, as is working with the coastal communities, which can then help co-create the restoration and removal plans together.

A lot of the indigenous communities that we partner with to do this work have generations of vessels in place under water. The survey work is imperative, so definitely partnering with these communities is the direction to go for that.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank the witnesses. It's always so valuable to have them with us.

I'll turn to Ms. Dubois.

I'll briefly review the first testimonies that this committee heard.

In 2016, we learned that \$2.2 billion had been injected into the sector's economy to equip the various organizations involved in managing ghost ships.

You said that you have a hard time obtaining funding and that it's complicated. Have you received any significant financial support since 2016, in your opinion?

[*English*]

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** We have received significant support from the federal government through the ghost gear program fund, so we've been able to remove subsurface ghost gear and develop sustainable end-of-life solutions for processing this material once it's removed. I'd like to note that I don't think we struggled with the administration process itself. It was just the timing of the administrative process, and then aligning that with the fiscal end of year and the constraints of the funding we received.

We're asking to look—when we're in the field, collecting and removing vessels—at potential concessions, if there are more vessels underneath those vessels or, from a shoreline perspective, if those vessels are completely ripped apart and too far gone and are just polluting everywhere. If there's something in place that we can quickly apply for, like a mechanism that can then be enacted and that we can run with, instead of having to go back to a six month-plus process, that's what we're really asking for.

We have been funded. We do have the ability to go through the administrative process, and we've done that repeatedly. The challenge is that, once we're in that and when we're actually doing the work, it would be great to have some of those additional mechanisms in place.

Thank you.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Thank you. Your comments are informative.

We also heard from witnesses, Quebec divers from Québec Sub-aquatique. They provided insight into a sometimes positive aspect of shipwrecks when the wrecks don't contain any hazardous materials. In the St. Lawrence, boats even serve as shelters for the marine life of certain species.

To your knowledge, is this component found on the west side of the country?



[English]

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** Sunken vessels can create habitat, and they can stimulate biodiversity within the marine ecosystem. However, I would caution actively leaving vessels in place until extensive survey work on those vessels has been completed, if there's no hazardous waste involved in that. The type of material and the composition of material that the vessel is made out of needs to also be considered with that. There might not be oils or batteries or any kind of hazardous materials on board, but leaving a fibreglass vessel in place that is made out of plastics and resins could also create photodegradation over time. I would say the same for tires. I know tires are often also used as a substrate to stimulate underwater biodiversity growth.

Those factors should be considered, as well as extensive survey work, before those actions are taken.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Thank you, Ms. Dubois.

Ms. Bowman, you spoke about three pillars. I actually wrote down the word “pillars”, but that may not be the right term.

These pillars are identification, the removal of boats following identification and prevention.

If you had to ask the committee to make recommendations in these areas, what would be the priority? Could you provide an order of priority? Are your biggest challenges with identification, removal or prevention?

How would you categorize the financial needs of these three pillars?

[English]

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

I think there are two opportunities. The first one, trying to get this under control from a triage perspective, I think, would be identification and removal. Prevention would come last. Once we get this current situation under control in terms of what's there, then I think prevention comes first, followed by identification and then removal.

I say that because the vessels need to be identified by the owners, and that's difficult to do. Here in B.C., there are two ways that a boat can be registered. One is through the Canada registry, which is how I registered my boat, because I bought it offshore. The other way, which is the case for the majority of the boats here, because they are pleasure craft, is through a licensing process.

You would indicate the province—for example, B.C.—and then there would be a series of numbers beside it. Generally, this registration is located on the side of the boat. If a boat is going to become abandoned or derelict, boat owners generally will remove those numbers to make it more difficult for vessels to be identified. I think we need to put more onus on making it more difficult for an owner to remove that licensing information.

The other thing is that we need to put the onus again on the boat owner, to put in place more red tape, for lack of appropriate words, to make it more difficult for them to just sell their boat to anybody,

because that is what's happening. They're giving their boats away to people or selling them, and the new person is not registering them. Even though the boat technically hasn't been removed from the prior vessel owner's insurance, or the identification has been removed—

• (1145)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bowman. I have to end it here. We're going a little over time.

I will now go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less.

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

Welcome to both of you here today. Ms. Bowman, if you wanted to finish your thought, I'm happy to provide you with the space to do so.

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

I lost my thought. I just wanted to say that I think if we put prevention.... Put the onus back on making it more difficult for owners to sell their boats. We need to make that a priority, in my view.

Thank you, Ms. Barron.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you.

Ms. Bowman, I'm going to ask you my next question, through the chair. It's so nice to see you here.

As we've already heard, there are multiple reasons that it's good to be hearing from you. As the executive director of the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, and also as a boater and a west coaster, there's lots of vital information that you're bringing forward today.

As the executive director of the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, can you clarify some of the implications that you're hearing from businesses of these vessels being left abandoned along our coast?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** It's a safety issue for sure. I'm going to use Dogpatch as an example.

Boat owners are leaving their vessels in Dogpatch. It's a body of water located right on the outskirts, right off of our Transfer Beach, which is a very popular beach in the summertime. Tourists come from everywhere. Folks are squatting in those boats. There's drug use happening in those boats.

Last spring, somebody lost their life inside one of those boats. They weren't found until about three or four months later. We have the dignity of humanity at that point. We really need to put that into play.

When a squatter is sitting in a derelict boat, the boat's just sitting there and it's not being checked on. All of a sudden, someone within that community—because they have their own little communities—realized that this person hadn't been seen for a few months. They called the authorities, who went in and, sure enough, located a body. It's a safety issue on many levels.

I've worked at the community marina, which is located right beside Dogpatch. I ran that marina in 2019 for six months, and when I came home—it was interim with me bringing my boat home—we saw people from that area coming in with full fights and on drug overdoses. It's a real community issue. It's an issue for sure.

Thank you, Ms. Barron, through the chair.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Ms. Bowman.

It definitely highlights some bigger issues. It's a compounding issue that we're seeing. It's all interconnected. Thank you for highlighting that.

Ms. Bowman, you spoke about the adjustment of fees in marinas. Can you share more of your thoughts on that?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

Yes, from my personal perspective and experience on this, at the marina that we are located at in Ladysmith, the moorage fees have gone up 24% over the past three years. That's a lot for those fees.

In order to have a boat in a marina, you must have insurance. As I was saying earlier, with older boats, it's more difficult to get insurance. You need surveys. You need an in-water survey and you need an out-of-water survey. You need those to get insurance. For the older boats, it's getting more difficult to get insurance on these vessels.

If there's no insurance, you cannot moor. It's a catch-22 situation when it comes to that.

I don't know how we could do this, because a lot of those marinas are privately owned, but I think that if we could put a moratorium on fees in the marinas until we could get the derelict and abandoned vessel issue mitigated, it would help the situation quite a bit. I think it would be a start, if people aren't looking to solve the next problem of not being able to afford moorage and moving their vessels out on their anchors.

Thank you, Ms. Barron.

• (1150)

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Ms. Bowman.

Ms. Dubois, could you share quickly with the committee the status of your ability to access ghost gear funding? Do you have any current applications? Is there funding available?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** The ghost gear fund has stopped providing resources. Along the west coast we haven't seen resources here now for about two years, as resources were directed to address the effects of hurricane Fiona. It has created a massive loss in our community. For years we've built capacity. We've been able to train a coastal community to respond to ghost gear, and now those resources are gone and there aren't any resources to replace them.

We've been calling on the federal government to reinstate the ghost gear fund across Canada, from coast to coast, as it created an incredible opportunity for this country to continue its leadership in environmental stewardship and marine conservation.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

We'll now go to our second round of questioning.

We have Mr. Arnold for five minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you both for appearing today.

I'll ask Ms. Dubois first. Are you aware that vessel purchasers, the new owners, are required to register the vessel with Transport Canada?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** Yes, I am aware that it is required. However, I can say it's still not always being done, just from being out on the coast here.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I'll ask the same question to Ms. Bowman.

Are you aware that owners of vessels of no matter what type, on purchase, are required to register their ownership with Transport Canada?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Yes, I am aware of that. The issue is that the ownership is registered for a new boat with a new owner, but when the transfer of ownership happens, it doesn't always transfer over. That's the issue. It disconnects with the next owner.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** It disconnects if the new owner fails to register with Transport Canada, which is something they are required to do under current legislation and regulation.

There appears to be little enforcement or little in the way of the ability to track the resale of vessels. When a new vessel is sold by a manufacturer, there is a registration process that they have to go through. When that vessel is resold by an original or even a second- or third-generation owner, are you aware of any onus on the seller to identify to anyone that they have sold the vessel?

• (1155)

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** No, and I totally agree, a hundred per cent, that there is no onus for the primary owner to inform anybody that the boat has been sold. That's exactly what I was saying. We need to put that onus in place for each and every owner.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Ms. Dubois, I see you nodding your head. Please comment.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** Sure. I completely agree with Ms. Bowman and you.

The lack of enforcement and the disconnect between transferring ownership has to change, I think, to prevent, or at least help continue to prevent these vessels from being abandoned, as well as to enhance the tracking mechanisms that we can have available to us.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

Ms. Bowman, I believe you said that you operated the marina for a time. How often did you see or hear of officials actually inspecting or checking for registry requirements on vessels?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** I can say that the only time the RCMP went over to that area was when there was an issue that they needed to deal with. At no time did I see anybody go over to Dogpatch to review any of the boats in any way, shape or form. That was in 2019.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

Mrs. Bowman, you also mentioned the serious issues of housing, mental health, addiction problems, squatting, drug use and overdoses.

Have those issues compounded over recent years?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Mr. Arnold, I agree. I believe it has compounded over the years, especially with our current housing crisis and increasing cost of living. More and more people are moving onto boats, because it's a shelter.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you. I have just one more quick question.

Are the people who are either squatting or occupying without permit or ownership typically people who used to have homes and vessels? Did they have a land-based home, or did they only live aboard and can they simply not afford...? Can you categorize the situation they might be in?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** I can't give you an actual answer to that. I don't know of any to date. I'd be curious, and I'd like to do some research on that.

Some people have never owned a house. They've only ever lived on their boat; they're live-aboards. I'm going to say that these folks here who are squatting are just like the folks we see on the streets living in tents. They were once housed and then became unhoused. For them, moving onto a boat, whether it was given to them or whether they just decided that this boat had been abandoned there for such an amount of time and they could move onto it.... It's a good question that I unfortunately don't have the answer to.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

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

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

It's good to have the witnesses here.

I'll ask questions of both of you but will start with Mrs. Bowman.

Are you up to speed on the bylaws, etc., that are potential tools in the hands of municipalities to set some rules with respect to where boats are moored, how long they're allowed to stay there, etc.? This came to light because it seems that derelict and abandoned vessels are more of an issue on the west coast than anywhere else. It could be, then, that we have to get creative on the west coast as opposed to looking at pan-Canadian rules.

On those bylaws, are you aware of the abilities of the municipality in this situation?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** I've gone to the town of Ladysmith with questions like this, and they've told me that where the boats are moored in waters, it is a provincial and federal issue, so they have no jurisdiction. I think they feel their hands are tied. I think they would like to put bylaws in place and have some ownership of this. I think that would help them—

• (1200)

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Thank you, Mrs. Bowman. I have to interrupt, because my time is rather short.

Ms. Dubois, I have a question for you.

If we're going to have to deal with the residual effects of the problems that have been evident, in order to proactively deal with the future, are there things that manufacturers can do to, first of all, look at the materials they're using on the boats to make them more easily recyclable—because fibreglass, apparently, is not—and other things, like hidden vessel identification numbers, that might actually enable an owner to be tracked down? Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** Yes, I think putting a hidden registration number in place to identify the vessel would be beneficial. However, if there is a disconnect in tracking the ownership of that vessel, we're going to continue to run into the same problems and issues.

I'm sorry. Could you repeat the first part of your question?

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** It was about the issue of what the manufacturers actually use and materials that could be more easily recycled.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** I think this speaks to a larger problem in terms of the disconnects in our waste management systems, but having some sort of proof of a life-cycle assessment analysis would be incredibly beneficial, so that full thought could be given from the very beginning of the construction of the vessel to, then, the disposal of the vessel.

This becomes complex, because in each community there are different capacities in terms of waste management. In British Columbia, we are pretty lucky in terms of the recycling capacities we have locally. However—

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** At that point, again, I have to interrupt. I'm sorry to do that, but my time is short.

We've had suggestions that one of the difficulties with respect to cleaning up derelict vessels is the fact that they're scattered up and down the coast, because the process and the cost of turning them in for disposal is difficult, if not expensive. Should we basically start to set up zones in which people can voluntarily surrender their vessel at no charge? At least it would make the whole issue of cleaning these vessels up easier and less expensive.

I'll ask you, Ms. Bowman.

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Yes, I think we need to put some infrastructure in place for these boats, to help mitigate this issue and to encourage people who no longer want their boat, or whose boat is not seaworthy, to hand their vessels over in a good manner.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Getting back to you, Ms. Dubois, you mentioned the difficulties you have when it comes time to try to remove a vessel. What kind of red tape would you like to see eliminated to make that process a lot easier for you?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** That's a great question. I think some of the red tape we are facing is the length of the consultation period to find the owner. We've heard here today that finding the owner can be very difficult and then, on top of that, when we find the owner, sometimes it's a negotiating process with that owner to then have them agree to have their vessel removed, even though it's causing risk to public health and safety. It would be good to have the vessel somehow assessed and to be able to remove some of that consultation process around the vessel once it has been identified.

Just quickly, even when a vessel is reported as abandoned, there is very little that can be done until that vessel is sinking. Even when we try to prevent the issue from occurring and prevent the vessels from sinking, there are no mechanisms in place for us to do that until that vessel is either under water or sinking in its own right.

There needs to be some kind of mechanism when these vessels are reported as abandoned, almost like a fast track, in order to remove them from the water before they sink—to prevent very costly removal efforts—and then, when they are under water, to fast-track them to get them out of the water.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

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

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** I have two minutes, Mr. Chair.

I think that my question is more for Ms. Bowman, but perhaps Ms. Dubois can respond too.

So two aspects require attention. First, the boats that already lie at the bottom of the water must be removed, especially if they pose a threat to the environment. Another aspect is managing the registration of these vessels.

Should the committee treat these two aspects separately and consider suitable distinct funding, which means providing more support for the removal of hazardous vessels with one budget and setting up a functioning and reliable registration system with another budget?

Ms. Bowman, we can start with you.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Yes, I think that dividing the two would be good. They are both so important. We've seen here today that dealing with the ones that are sunk is critical, and the management of the registration and licensing is also critical to mitigate future issues. Yes, I believe that dividing the two for the funding would be a good suggestion.

[*Translation*]

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

I'll stop here. I went over my time in the previous round.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes, please, or less.

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

Ms. Dubois, I didn't get to mention at first: Thank you for being here and, of course, for all the work that you do in this area.

I wanted to ask, Ms. Dubois, for you to expand a little on the constricted grant writing and how that impacts the ability to clean up these vessels or prevent them from sinking in the first place.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** Oftentimes, the grants that we're applying for are on an annual basis, and those grants are not reoccurring or committed to annually. We need long-term, committed, annual funding that we can then use to perform survey work as well as conduct removal efforts that are not constricted by the end of year for March fiscal—say the end of government fiscal. We find that as we're doing the work, we want to do meaningful consultation with first nations communities; we want to have community engagement, and these things take time to complete in a meaningful way. We would like to see longer-term funds, available over a multi-year period, that we can then utilize to continue to fund and do the work in a longer way.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you so much. Yes, they are all very good points and very important for us to put forward in our recommendations.

My final question is for you, Ms. Bowman. Do you have any thoughts around how important it is that we see federal leadership here, that we see a strategy that's put in place? You talked about the importance of a national approach being taken. Can you share a bit? You talked about the onus of responsibility and the response that you get more locally. How important is it to local chambers of commerce, to local communities, that we see federal leadership on this issue?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** I think it's important because it's Canada—it's federal; it's our top tier. It's where our leadership starts, and then it goes down to provincial and then down to our municipal. I think if there was collaboration from the top down, that would be a really good representation of leaders across the country—federally, provincially, municipally—working together to address this issue.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing here today and giving very insightful testimony. Thank you for the work that you do on this.

I wanted to start off by asking both of you a question. I can maybe start with Ms. Dubois, and then we'll go to Ms. Bowman. In your opinion, has the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act achieved its stated purpose? In your estimation, do you believe it is accomplishing what it set out to do?

I'll start with you, Ms. Dubois.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** I believe that, yes, it is accomplishing its initial intent. However, I think more obviously needs to get done in terms of the removal work and the resources available to do the work.

Thank you.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Ms. Bowman.

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Yes, I believe that what has been put in place is a good start. As we are seeing increasing numbers of boats being left derelict and abandoned, I think that there is more to do.

Just to give an example, in the last two weeks, two more boats sank, one in Dogpatch and one just on the outskirts of Sydney and Victoria. Both were abandoned vessels, so I believe there is a lot more work that can still be done.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Thank you.

With that in mind, we've heard testimony on this here, and I'd like to get your perspective on this as it relates to what we call the traditional jurisdictional ping-pong that oftentimes happens when it comes to this. It's, "No, that's federal response," but, "No, no, that's provincial," or, "No, no, that's municipal." Oftentimes, the people closest to the ground or those doing the work, the organizations like yours that are closest to it, say they just wish it was clearer and more succinct, so they know exactly who they need to be contacting, how they can start the process when they discover one of these vessels, how it gets prioritized and what the greatest risk is. Have you found in your experience that this is a big challenge that needs to be resolved—the jurisdictional ping-pong, as it were?

If you want to comment on that, I'll start with you, Ms. Dubois and then you, Ms. Bowman.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** We have one hundred per cent experienced the ping-pong effect. That trickles over into even derelict aquaculture removal. There are often many different permitting bodies involved. Often, it gets batted around in terms of who needs to pay for it. That's really what it comes down to. When there are large dollars at stake or a large amount of resources needed, nobody really wants to foot the bill for that. We have definitely been through that experience of being passed around.

I will comment quickly that there is a new strategy being developed on the west coast of British Columbia, called the coastal marine strategy. It's the first time in history that a 20-year coastal marine strategy is being planned, co-written, by coastal indigenous first nations. This could be a really great opportunity to bridge all levels of government in collaboration, working together through this 20-year management plan to ensure that derelict vessels be-

come addressed in this plan and that the bridge is formed between provincial and federal levels.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** It's called the coastal marine plan. Is that correct?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** It's called the coastal marine strategy. It's currently being developed through the province, through the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Thank you.

Ms. Bowman, do you want to comment as well about the jurisdictional ping-pong?

That's probably going to be the end of my time. I'm seeing the chair look at me here.

If you want to say something quickly, you go ahead.

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Really quickly, yes, I totally agree.

I think the growth of Dogpatch is a good example of that. The municipality is saying it's not its problem. The province is saying it's not its problem. The federal government is saying it's not its problem. I feel like we need to bring all of the parties together to the table to discuss who needs to meet. They need to work together, ultimately.

• (1215)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bragdon.

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

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Thank you, Chair.

I want to pick up on a number of comments that were made earlier.

Ms. Dubois, you mentioned the need to have long-term, ongoing funding for some of the work of removing vessels.

Ms. Bowman, you mentioned, as part of your recommendations, changes that you'd like to see on the fees for boats.

One thing the federal government has proposed is the creation of a vessel remediation fund, whereby when boat owners register their vessels, they would be subject to a small fee that would go into this fund. It would in turn, over time, provide a sustainable source of funding to do this type of work.

First Ms. Dubois and then Ms. Bowman, I'd love to hear your thoughts on whether you think this is the right approach to be able to ensure that there is that type of ongoing funding to do this work.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** I definitely agree. I was trying to convey that earlier, in response to another question, in terms of putting a small fee, levy or tax on the procurement of the vessel and then have that go into a bit of a slush fund that's available for remediation and restoration activities across the coast. I think that's low-hanging fruit in terms of solutions to put in place. I totally agree with that direction.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Ms. Bowman, I'm curious about your thoughts as well.

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Yes, I think that a small fee or a tax levy is definitely something that we should be adding to each and every vessel. It could be when the vessel is first purchased and registered with Canadian government, as we discussed earlier. Then that levy is attached to that boat for the duration of that boat. That's a good idea.

I think there might be other ideas through marinas. We could be looking at increasing some sort of tax there that we could put into this fund as well.

Thank you, Mr. Weiler, through the chair.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Thank you, Ms. Bowman.

I just want to pick up on one thing related to that.

I'm not sure how it is in other provinces, but in British Columbia we have liability, for instance, for people who have oil tanks found on their property. It will go back multiple property owners before that. You can ensure that if someone unknowingly is subject to pollution on their property from that, then that responsibility goes back.

I'm curious as to whether you might be supportive of something similar when we're talking about abandoned and derelict boats. You do often have boat owners who will sell or transfer that boat to a new owner, who won't register it. Oftentimes it's difficult to make that polluter pay, if that boat will be wrecked or abandoned.

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Was that question for me?

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Yes.

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Thank you.

I totally agree. Start putting the onus on somebody, and maybe that will send a strong message to people who are trying to sell their boats and who are not transferring that registration over. Putting an idea or a process in place such as that, I think, is a great start.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Thank you very much, Ms. Bowman.

The last question I want to ask is for Ms. Dubois. Are there other jurisdictions we should be looking at around the world, whether that's at the national or subnational level, to adopt some of their good practices for how we can approach this issue?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** At this time, I'm not aware of any other sorts of examples or case studies that we could refer to.

Just to quickly comment, I had an idea while Mrs. Bowman was addressing the other question, in terms of the transfer of ownership. There could be a tax incentive created, or something along those lines, for vessel owners when they transfer their vessels, which they could get or could acquire and which would incentivize them to report such changes, or some kind of incentive model.

I'll leave it there. Thank you so much.

● (1220)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

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

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

It's great to have another opportunity to present some more questions to these witnesses here.

My colleague Mr. Arnold questioned earlier about the housing issue as it relates to abandoned vessels.

To Ms. Dubois, how often do you encounter folks living on board these vessels because it's their only option? How has that become a hindrance to removing derelict vessels?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** We have encountered some of these vessels being lived on or squatted on, as Mrs. Bowman was also encountering and was referring to in today's group. However, it's very challenging to know the frequency of use of some of these vessels, or the amount of support or housing they are providing.

When you look at the example of the Dogpatch, it's very close to the city. The use is very high in circumstances like that. However, when we start looking into more coastal rural communities, without monitoring, we're not sure if people are actively living on these vessels or what's happening with them. Then, when they are reported abandoned, unless they're sinking, there's not much we can really do about it until they've sunk, and then we can get additional resources in place.

It's a challenging question to answer.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** To Ms. Dubois again, what would be the solution to the squatter issue on those abandoned vessels? Do you have any suggestions?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** Yes. I'm not sure how practical this is in this meeting here, but creating affordable housing for people in British Columbia would be a great start. The cost of housing, no matter where you are across this coast, is increasing exponentially, and it's very challenging to afford for the best of us. It's a much larger conversation and issue, I think, but creating low-income affordable housing would be a great start.

Thank you.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** The housing crisis is even affecting the ability to remove abandoned vessels.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** That's correct. Yes.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Okay.

I have another question here, Ms. Dubois. How accurate do you believe the count of derelict and abandoned vessels is on Canada's coast, specifically on British Columbia's coast?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** I believe it is significantly underestimated. Figuring out the unit count of the number and concentration of these vessels is very challenging, especially for submerged vessels. I think there are probably thousands of these vessels that have not been identified through aerial survey work and that sort of thing. I'm personally not sure of the best way to survey the quantity or number of vessels out there right now, but I know that more survey work needs to be done.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** With the availability and relatively inexpensive operation of drones, do you think that technology could be deployed, especially given that, from an aerial view, you can see fairly deep down into the water? Do you think that some kind of an aerial campaign would be able to identify more of these vessels?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** I think it's worth exploring.

Also, combining AI technology and training AI to identify certain characteristics that are common amongst derelict vessels would be incredibly beneficial as well. Performing ROV and subsurface survey work is going to also be critical in the campaign. I think we need to look at it from the sky and from the water to get a holistic sense of what is happening on the coast, and I think there are a lot of data gaps right now, as it stands.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

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

Here's a thought: We've been talking about the problem of people finding refuge on abandoned boats. What about the notion of actually formalizing a process by which these boats could be shelter for people who would otherwise be in doorways in your downtown business district, and—here's an additional thought—with federal support through a housing accelerator fund, let's call it, that could provide some of the infrastructure necessary to support that kind of community?

Mrs. Bowman, what do you think of that idea?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** Yes, absolutely. The unhoused are looking for different ways to find shelter, and these boats are that way. Having an accelerated housing fund would be a great option, and having some of these funds go towards this area would be a good idea to look into.

Thank you.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Thank you.

Ms. Dubois, do you have any thoughts on that?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** I think it's worth exploring; however, I would caution that living on a boat is a lot more complicated than landlocked housing solutions. If we are, potentially, going to be putting people with mental health issues and people who are currently not housed into a boating environment, they will need training.

Also, a lot of these abandoned boats are not suitable to live aboard. They don't have heat. They often don't have any kind of black water containment.

I would say that it's worth exploring. However, if you were to choose to pursue that avenue, there would need to be some pretty strict parameters in place to guide the process.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Yes, it isn't just a matter of getting a whole bunch of boats together, but rather some sort of infrastructure that would support them, and that could be social infrastructure as well as physical infrastructure.

What about the notion—I'm just test-flying some possible recommendations here—of turning vessel registration over to the Insurance Corporation of B.C.? They have the system set up. They could basically apply the same rules on the sea as they do on the road in terms of registration, ownership, etc. If somebody finds a motor vehicle by the road with no licence plates on it, it's abandoned; it's gone. They don't care who the owner is.

Do you think that kind of regime would be something worth exploring in British Columbia, given that's where it seems we have most of the problem in Canada?

We'll start with you, Ms. Dubois, and then Ms. Bowman.

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** That would be a really interesting model to explore. I know it's effective with vehicle management, so I don't see why it wouldn't be effective as well with vessel management. I think that's a great idea.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Ms. Bowman, what do you think?

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** I agree. I think a good way to track the vessels is through the insurance. The new owners, if they are responsible owners, should be getting insurance. If they are able to get insurance, having that tracking mechanism and having it filed through the insurance is a great idea and a great option.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** I would invite both of you to submit to us any other thoughts you have on reducing red tape, especially to relieve the difficulties of trying to locate an owner rather than have a system whereby, if certain conditions are met, the boat is deemed abandoned and it doesn't matter who the owner is. It belongs to either the province or the municipality to do with as they need.

That's all the time I need, Mr. Chair.

• (1230)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to ask our two witnesses on either side to tell us how the committee can support their respective areas of work. I think that these areas are related, but a bit different.

Ms. Bowman, is money the only issue? Is it also the whole organizational definition of federal involvement? I'm thinking of Transport Canada, for example, for registration. I'm thinking of the Canadian Coast Guard for more concrete action in hostile environments. I'm also thinking of DFO, in some ways.

Can you tell us, in two minutes—maybe take a minute each—your expectations of these entities, according to your criteria?

[English]

**Mrs. Roberta Bowman:** This committee could put a report in place to address the issue as a whole, breaking down each section, including all of the associated entities that work so hard already to help us address these issues. Putting new mechanisms in place means insurance, mitigation, prevention and removal. It's all part and parcel.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Ms. Dubois, we're listening.

[English]

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** I would agree with Ms. Bowman. I think it involves all levels in terms of mitigation, prevention and removal, and it will require collaboration across all levels of government.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

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

Ms. Dubois, my next question is for you.

Can you share a bit more with the committee about the work that you're doing and why you see first-hand how important it is that we have indigenous stewardship and indigenous-led work happening at the forefront of the derelict and abandoned vessel issues that we're experiencing on the west coast?

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** We work hand in hand, collaborate and co-create a lot of the cleanups that we perform, including the ones with derelict vessels. It is absolutely critical that indigenous communities be given or provided the resources necessary to help lead. Oftentimes, a lot of these communities lack resources or administrative capacity and can't participate in the grants that are being offered to steward their own lands.

There needs to be a mechanism in place to ensure that there is equal opportunity for remote, coastal indigenous communities, because they know their lands like the back of their hand. They know them inside and out. They know where these vessels are. They know how close in proximity they are to their culturally significant lands and burial sites as well as their traditional harvesting grounds. They need to be given the same resources or at least have the capacity built so that they can participate equally.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you.

Because I only have a short time left, I'm going to ask my next question to you as well, Ms. Dubois.

You mentioned the tax on containers, and I'm not sure if you're aware—I believe you are—that this committee has already done a study on the direct response to the *ZIM Kingston* spill that happened along the west coast and the containers that were spilled as a result. We also looked at a more appropriate and timely plan for these spills when they do occur.

In terms of the tax on containers, you mentioned how that would help with some essential funding to clean up these vessels. Can you expand on that, so that it's really clear for us to understand for our recommendations moving forward?

• (1235)

**Ms. Chloe Dubois:** Sure. Our group has been the “boots on the ground” in response to a lot of these shipping-container spills, as well as addressing the actions in the removal of the derelict vessels. An idea that we had was to create a small tax or levy through the port. Every shipping container or ship that comes in pays a small levy that then gets pooled into a larger fund or pool of resources. In looking at the “polluter pay principle”, we see that a lot of times it fails when the polluter doesn't pay or can't be identified. This fund would then allow some baseline resources to be put in place so that we can respond faster.

Oftentimes, when the polluter is identified, there is a lengthy administrative process that needs to occur. Those funds do not get out into the hands of communities or into the hands of experts to then remediate the pollution that is occurring from these spills. With the *ZIM Kingston* spill, the response was very delayed overall. The whole time that we were waiting for funds to be released, materials were photodegrading, smashing against the rocks and coastlines and getting smaller and smaller, which increases not only the difficulty of reclaiming these materials but also the cost of removing them.

We need to ensure that there's some kind of recurring income coming in that we can use as a resource to respond to these larger-scale spills that happen and will continue to happen as ocean traffic and transport continue to increase and trade increases on our coastline.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Barron. You turned two and a half minutes into four and a half. Not everybody can do that, so congratulations.

I want to say thank you to Ms. Dubois and Ms. Bowman for sharing their knowledge with the committee today, as we get ready to give some direction on the writing of this report.

I'll allow you to sign off now, and we'll suspend for a moment as we go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]









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