



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 132

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Monday, December 2, 2024

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 132 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders.

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

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. Please address all comments through the chair. Today, all of our witnesses are on Zoom, and we also have some members on Zoom.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and a motion adopted on Thursday, February 8, the committee is resuming its study of the Fisheries Act review.

I will welcome the witnesses for our first panel.

From Oceans North, we have Susanna Fuller, vice-president, conservation and projects, and no stranger to this committee. From M-Expertise Marine Incorporated, we have Lyne Morissette, a doctor of marine ecology and a fisheries and marine mammal specialist. We also have Richard Williams, a fisheries consultant.

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

Ms. Fuller, you have the floor.

Ms. Fuller is frozen.

Mr. Williams, I'll go to you first for five minutes or less.

Mr. Richard Williams (Fisheries Consultant, As an Individual): Thank you very much for the invitation to appear today.

Over my almost 50 years of fisheries research and consulting work, I have been privileged to support the development of what is arguably the best-managed, most economically robust and most sustainable coastal fishery in the world. It's not perfect by any means, but it's still a huge strategic asset for the rural coastal regions of Canada.

This current review of the act offers an opportunity to further advance sustainable development in the fisheries by addressing strategic issues and gaps where stronger legislative and regulatory govern-

nance is needed. In my view, the most significant failure in current fisheries legislation, regulations and licensing policy is the great disparity in support for coastal communities and working fish harvesters on the Atlantic versus the Pacific coasts.

In the Canada Gazette in 2020, the DFO minister articulated the government's rationale for new licensing regulations for Atlantic fisheries.

It reads:

Progressive fisheries policies that prevent vertical integration between the fishing and processing sectors and that prevent the concentration of licences in the hands of a few corporations or individuals have been pivotal in the maintenance of the wealth distribution across the [Atlantic] region and small communities. Without these policies, wealth from fishing licences would be concentrated in the hands of ineligible third parties resulting in fewer or lower paying fishing jobs available in rural coastal areas and in a decrease of economic benefits being maintained in the coastal communities.

These are the words of the minister.

This sets out in clear, concrete language why the Atlantic owner-operator policies were put into law. Importantly, it also describes in detail the negative outcomes we are seeing in British Columbia in the absence of fleet separation and owner-operator protections—that is, the concentration of licences “in the hands of a few corporations” or individuals, and “fewer or lower paying fishing jobs available in rural coastal areas and in a decrease of economic benefits being maintained in the coastal communities.”

StatCan tax filer data confirms the poor performance of the British Columbia fishery from 2010 to 2019. Average income from fishing employment, captains and crew on the Atlantic coast improved by 68%, while B.C. harvesters saw only 4% growth in earnings, even though total landed value in B.C. grew by 36% over the period. The wealth didn't go to fishermen. More up-to-date DFO licensing statistics show that, from 2014 to 2023, the fisheries labour force in British Columbia shrank by one-third—a loss of 1,954 jobs—while harvester employment in Atlantic fisheries had a slight uptick.

There have been 800 fishing jobs lost in B.C. since this committee's "West Coast Fisheries: Sharing Risks and Benefits" report was completed in 2019. Two major FOPO studies in 2019 and 2023 examined these issues in great depth and called on DFO ministers to initiate the transition to a made-in-B.C., owner-operator licensing regime. To date, however, only limited steps have been taken. DFO Pacific region is currently conducting yet another engagement process to consult not on how to fix the licensing system but on whether a fix is needed and what it might possibly look like.

I therefore urge the committee to recommend amending the Fisheries Act to establish fleet separation as the default licensing policy for all owner-operator coastal or small boat commercial fishing fleets in Canada, the template being the fleet separation rules currently in effect in designated Atlantic fisheries.

Thank you, and I look forward to the discussion.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now try Ms. Fuller again.

You have five minutes or less.

Ms. Susanna Fuller (Vice-President, Conservation and Projects, Oceans North): Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

I want to recognize the importance of this five-year review of the Fisheries Act, the first one ever. The 2019 modernization of the act marked its first major overhaul since 1868. It's one of the most important laws in Canada for both our environment and our communities. It's an act we should be proud of, and we should continue to implement it to the fullest extent possible. If we do that, the act will ensure future Canadians benefit from our freshwater and marine ecosystems, which sustain cultures, livelihoods and economies for so many indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

Two of the major upgrades to the act in 2019 were the inclusion of section 35 of the Constitution and, as Dr. Williams referenced, the enshrining of owner-operator policy in Atlantic Canada in law.

Oceans North staff have been active participants in many fisheries advisory committees over the last five years, and we also support Canada in its representation on international fisheries bodies, such as NAFO and ICCAT. We work collaboratively whenever possible with the fishing industry's owner-operator and offshore fleets.

I want to touch base on three major aspects of the act, and I hope you will consider them in your review. The first two are areas where implementation is happening or is needed—rebuilding depleted fish populations and proactive protection of fish habitat—while the third includes a recommendation for a surgical change to the act to ensure fisheries decision-making includes climate change and biodiversity as factors to be considered.

On fish stock rebuilding, with the addition of section 6 of the act in 2019, Canada joined other developed fishing nations in legally requiring depleted fish stocks to be restored. While there may be different perspectives in terms of timelines and measures to reach rebuilding, I think we can all agree that the most important factor in

economically sustainable fisheries is having healthy fish populations. Without any fish, we have no fisheries.

As of November 2024, Canada has largely met the requirements of this section of the act. The majority of rebuilding plans are complete, although not all are public. Now we must adhere to these plans and ensure they yield the results we need. Oceans North has conducted economic studies with a focus on forage fish like mackerel and herring that demonstrate how valuable these fish and fisheries can be to our economy and the marine ecosystem if we take the time to allow these populations to rebuild. It will require patience, adherence to scientific advice and consideration of future generations, who deserve an opportunity to fish.

Pending the approval of the next major batch of fish stocks currently in the Canada Gazette part I, rebuilding provisions will apply to 95 stocks in Canada. This means we have safeguards in place for when stocks decline. I know you've all been hearing and speaking a lot about northern cod. It's one of the greatest global population declines of all time, so we have a particular responsibility to get rebuilding right, not just rebuilding above the critical zone but also achieving healthy stocks.

The second area I want to bring to your attention is an aspect of the act that has yet to be implemented. In 2012, amendments to the Fisheries Act allowed for the proactive protection of fish habitat and the establishment of ecologically significant areas. This was maintained in the 2019 act. Under subsection 35.2(2), ESAs can be established by the minister. Canada has over two million lakes and rivers that support indigenous food fisheries and recreational activities and that provide water sources for many of our communities. Despite this ability to designate ESAs and ensure prohibitions to activities other than fishing that could negatively impact such habitat, to date, Canada has not made use of the powers of this act. In October 2024, St. Mary's River in Nova Scotia was announced as the first candidate ESA in the country. That's the first of over two million bodies of water. We're not expecting all of these to be fully protected, but we think we need to make progress. We can and must do better in developing an effective and efficient regulatory process that allows us to protect more fish habitat.

Finally, our marine and coastal ecosystems are changing. The Gulf of St. Lawrence on the east coast is nine degrees above the long-term average. Mahi mahi are being seen off Newfoundland. Whales are shifting their migration habits. Lobster catches in south-west Nova Scotia, one of Canada's most valuable fisheries, are declining as lobster move north in search of colder water. All of this is due to the 90% of excess heat that our oceans absorb as a result of global warming.

Fisheries will change and are changing as a result of climate change, so climate change must be incorporated as one of the factors to be considered in decisions. This can be done by amending section 2.5 to include climate change, which would ensure that ecosystem-based management, to which Canada committed in 2004, includes addressing climate and is fully implemented. This is also a key aspect of the recently released 2030 nature strategy, which commits us to sustainable fisheries under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Changing ecosystems will change our fishing communities, and planning ahead will reduce the impact of those changes over time. Working with the fishing industry and indigenous communities on ecosystem-based management can meet the needs of the ecosystem and incorporate on-the-water knowledge to insure future fisheries.

• (1110)

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective, and I look forward to questions at the right time.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

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

[*Translation*]

Dr. Lyne Morissette (Doctor of Marine Ecology, Fisheries and Marine Mammal Specialist, M-Expertise Marine Inc.): Hello, everyone.

My name is Lyne Morissette and I am the CEO of M-Expertise Marine.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my experience as a fisheries specialist, advocate of integrated approaches, and environmental mediator.

With its three oceans and diverse ecosystems, Canada possesses unique natural wealth. Yet our management of these resources is constrained by outdated approaches. The Fisheries Act, despite its 2019 update, exemplifies this lag with its lack of concrete implementation and interdisciplinary vision.

The first issue I want to address is the lack of interdisciplinarity in our departments.

Interdisciplinarity has become a cornerstone in academic settings. Researchers collaborate across disciplines to tackle complex and interconnected challenges, such as resource management and climate change. This approach, widely recognized as vital for innovative solutions, is also gaining traction in some federal departments. But at Fisheries and Oceans, or DFO, it remains a concept waiting to be embraced.

DFO often operates in silos, with fragmented, discipline-specific approaches that struggle to integrate external knowledge. Interdisciplinarity could greatly enrich policymaking and fisheries management, but it is largely absent from departmental practices. As a result, decisions are made without fully leveraging the wealth of external expertise, be it scientific, community-based, or traditional indigenous knowledge.

This is not to say that DFO staff lack competence or commitment. However, it is hard to ignore a certain implicit attitude in their internal processes: a belief that their "science", framed within the Fisheries Act, holds a higher status than others, whether from academics or fishers. Consultations, when they include external experts or stakeholders, often feel more like validation exercises than genuine dialogue. And as for fishers, whose expertise is forged by a lifetime at sea? Their knowledge is often dismissed as anecdotal, if not outright ignored.

This posture is not only counterproductive; it is a barrier to progress. Managing fisheries and marine ecosystems requires an open, interdisciplinary approach. Continuing to act as though ecosystems, disciplines, or, worse, knowledge itself can be compartmentalized is a mistake. To build modern and effective management, it is time for DFO to step out of its ivory tower and join the collaborative table.

Rebuilding Canadians' eroded trust is essential to collaboration.

Another major issue is the lack of trust, which depends as much on just measures as it does on honest relationships. According to Statistics Canada, as of 2023, less than 30% of Canadians believed the government was effectively protecting the marine environment. This erosion in trust is fuelled by errors in implementing measures.

Take a recent example from 2024. Last summer, fishers in the Maritimes refused to remove their traps from a closed zone intended to protect a North Atlantic right whale. Why? Because the decision, poorly communicated, was based on incorrect boundary definitions. On site, fishers found that the whale was not even in the designated area. Such arbitrary decisions undermine government credibility and weaken conservation efforts.

Studies such as those by the FAO, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, demonstrate that integrating local knowledge not only improves policies but also strengthens community buy-in. Yet too often, fishers and indigenous communities are invited as token participants, not as active partners.

This must change if sustainable management is to be achieved.

All the briefs I have seen for this meeting point to an urgent need for collaboration and mediation.

Finally, it is time to embed mediation into the Fisheries Act. With its diverse stakeholders and interconnected systems, Canada cannot afford sterile conflicts.

Other jurisdictions have shown that this is achievable. Quebec's environmental quality act and New Zealand's resource management act both include mediation mechanisms to diffuse tensions. These tools foster collaboration, reduce conflict and rebuild trust. Mediation should not be seen as an option but as a prerequisite to any formal dispute.

DFO could lead the way by establishing regional committees to involve all stakeholders before decisions are finalized.

In conclusion, the Fisheries Act should be more than a piece of legislation.

• (1115)

It should embody an ambitious vision: protecting our ecosystems while respecting the communities that depend on them. Today, that vision feels out of reach. But by incorporating tools like mediation, fostering interdisciplinarity, and valuing local knowledge, we have the opportunity to transform the act into a model of sustainable and collaborative management.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to our first round of questioning, and we'll start off with 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 for appearing today.

My question is for Ms. Fuller.

Ms. Fuller, your organization celebrated the closing of the mackerel fishery in Atlantic Canada. How has closing the mackerel fishery in Atlantic Canada and being such a success story for yourself helped you in your international fundraising endeavours with groups like the Pew foundation?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: I'm not sure that it's relevant to any fundraising. I don't think it was a celebration at all. I think it was a recognition, after years of declining catches and science advice, that in order to rebuild the mackerel fishery in line with the Fisheries Act and the requirements... We worked very closely with the fishing industry on this, as well as first nations. We know it's a very difficult decision, but it's not for fundraising. It's actually to rebuild fish for Canadians—

• (1120)

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you very much. My time is short.

You mentioned that you want to incorporate on-the-water knowledge. How much of the \$13 million, which you had in your spend last year in your financial report between staff and projects, was spent in your on-the-water observations of mackerel from Maine to Hopedale? You mentioned the 9° warming of waters and, obviously, you expect that the range migration pattern of species has

changed. How much of your budget do you spend in trying to figure out why there's such a disconnect between on-the-water observations by fish harvesters and the stock assessments by DFO?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: We don't do our own science on mackerel. However, about 50% of our budget goes back out to communities to conduct research, science and work that they feel is important, and so...happy to collaborate on any research that is brought to us by the fishing associations. However, I think we follow DFO science, which is really what most fisheries industries rely upon. That is why we are advocating for more discussion to be had so that it does include harvesters' knowledge. A lot of discussion happens at the advisory committees, as you know.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

You follow DFO science. Last year, and over the last number of years, DFO science stated that it was safe for the capelin stock to have the very tiny capelin fishery that exists—about 25,000 tonnes in all of Atlantic Canada—but at the same time, seals in Atlantic Canada are said to consume a million tonnes of capelin.

You spoke about your interest in biodiversity. What efforts have you made to help the fishing and the sealing industries develop markets to have an ethically sourced seal harvest to aid in restoring biodiversity?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: As you know, we've attended the seals advisory committee meetings. I think you have had discussions with my colleague, John Couture, on this. I think you know that we are supportive of any fisheries that are ecosystem-based and healthy.

It's not our role to sell fish, but we are certainly not against a sustainable seal harvest, and we understand some of the barriers to those markets. One of those is the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act, as you know, and we are not able to change laws in other countries.

Mr. Clifford Small: You mentioned your participation in stock assessments. We know that stock assessments are a key component of the Fisheries Act.

Why are stakeholders—and what I mean by “stakeholders” are fish harvesters and fish processors—so upset that you received stakeholder status versus remaining as observers in a situation, like what happened in Gander last year during the stock assessment? What happened during the capelin stock assessment in Gander last winter?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: Mr. Small, we've been part of fisheries advisory committees for the better part of a decade, and we have been very welcomed by the fishing industry. We have a lot of shared goals in common.

I think what happened at that particular meeting was that the terms of reference had not been sent out to everybody. It was a very unfortunate situation where our staff person actually had to be protected by conservation protection officers because of the reaction. However, we have had good discussions with Fish, Food and Allied Workers since then to better understand their concerns, and we essentially received an apology for that behaviour. I don't think that will be the case going forward. I think that we have good relationships.

I grew up in a coastal community. I have sympathy for inshore fishermen. I think the best thing is to be around the table so that you can come a common understanding.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

Labrador is seeing mackerel on the coast for the first time in history as far north as Hopedale. They're all around the island of Newfoundland and Labrador right on down from the northern gulf to the southern gulf. There were mackerel in Nova Scotia this summer right on down to Maine. I consulted heavily with stakeholders. How about if mackerel have returned? Look at what you've done to the fishing industry stakeholders that depend on mackerel. What are you doing to improve any recovery in mackerel? Do you believe there's any recovery in mackerel?

• (1125)

Ms. Susanna Fuller: We hope there will be. We don't do stock assessments, but we're happy to talk with you further about what decisions in the future could be made when the stock recovers.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Morissette, you mentioned the problem that arose with a whale. That was in my riding. If you followed the news, you saw that some very questionable decisions were made. If I had not stepped in and secured the fishers' collaboration, there would have been a fisheries crisis, as we saw last year. As you said earlier, it is very important to consult fishers and consider what they have to say.

That being said, you noted that resource management is stuck in outdated approaches and that there is a lack of interdisciplinarity at DFO.

I think you consider yourself a scientist, and I think you are. Do you think the scientists at the department listen to your opinions on fisheries and resources, for instance, when you take part in their meetings?

Do you think you are taken seriously and what you say is truly considered? Do you get the sense that your suggestions go in one ear and out the other, as the saying goes?

Dr. Lyne Morissette: I hold a doctorate in fisheries from the University of British Columbia, so I do consider myself a scientist. I also have two postdoctorates. Unfortunately, at some meetings with DFO officials, it did not seem that I was taken seriously. In fact, it felt like I was just decoration because I was not among the elite scientists who work for the government.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Do you get the same sense when you are speaking with other scientists?

Do your colleagues get the same impression when they speak with DFO scientists?

Dr. Lyne Morissette: I am much better known in academic circles than I am at DFO.

Mr. Serge Cormier: In short, your colleagues also get the sense that their concerns are not taken into consideration.

Is that correct?

Dr. Lyne Morissette: Yes, that's true, but not all the time. It is most of the time though. I cannot speak for other scientists, but I think that scientists in the academic world do feel that way in general in terms of the attitude of government scientists.

Mr. Serge Cormier: As you know, the Fisheries Act is being updated. You are here to take part in our study, and I'm sure you have recommendations as to what should be included in the act or excluded from it.

Let's get back to whale management. The Fisheries Act says a lot about protecting the habitat of our resources, fish, but hardly ever refers to protecting our communities, which depend on those resources. To my mind, those things go hand in hand.

In terms of protecting the whales' habitat, measures were taken a number of years ago. We are talking about the same things. A report was produced about that, and you also appeared before the committee to suggest solutions in that regard.

Could we relax those measures to protect whales without harming them or our markets, while also continuing to protect our communities? Is that feasible?

I would like a clear and fair answer.

Dr. Lyne Morissette: The short answer is yes. More and more technologies and management approaches are being tested, and they are proving effective. All kinds of solutions have been tested in the past six years. It is possible to enhance the coexistence of fishers and the first nations, while also protecting at-risk species.

It will not be easy, but it is feasible. Concrete solutions are currently being tested in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and we have proof that it is possible.

• (1130)

Mr. Serge Cormier: It's hard to cover every aspect of the topic. We could talk about it for a week.

Ms. Morissette, what does the Fisheries Act lack to ensure that everyone gets involved and that all stakeholders' concerns come across clearly?

As you said earlier, fishers must be invited to the discussion table. You recently took part in a fishery forum held in my constituency. According to some fishers, the shrimp population remains satisfactory. Unfortunately, the population of certain species, such as mackerel, is declining.

My father worked as a fisher his entire life. If I asked him what he thought, he would say that there have always been and will always be fish. How can we obtain a fair and accurate picture of the situation? How can we encourage all stakeholders to work together?

What should the government do to find a win-win solution and truly improve the Fisheries Act?

Dr. Lyne Morissette: You must set up a framework that fosters a relationship of trust. People need to feel that their views are taken into account.

I have participated in a number of your meetings. I have often spoken about environmental mediation. This approach is rarely used in the environmental sector. Yet it's a formal process with standards and a proven track record. I think that it's a highly useful tool for fisheries management.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Ms. Morissette.

[English]

The Chair: We'll now go to Madam 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 want to thank the witnesses for joining us.

Ms. Morissette, I know that you're busy. I want you to know that we're pleased to have you here.

You talked a great deal about environmental mediation. You also spoke at length about it at the last Bloc Québécois symposium.

Can you briefly explain how it can be incorporated into the Fisheries Act?

How can this concept be more clearly defined? Environmental mediation could resolve a number of issues and help restore trust between people working in the field and people in the department.

Dr. Lyne Morissette: Mediation is a formula. It's a multi-step approach to finding solutions or compromises when a conflict divides people at the discussion table. This method has proved its

worth in all sorts of fields. Family mediation and workplace mediation come to mind.

The fisheries sector is facing a number of major challenges. Some species are endangered and some stocks are disappearing. We don't have the luxury of bypassing the knowledge of people, whoever they may be.

To make the most of their knowledge, people must be able to talk to each other. This means building trust. We need to rebuild that trust these days. People work in isolation and trust is somewhat undetermined. The first step is to restore it.

On a positive note, environmental mediation is a highly structured formula that can easily be incorporated into legislation. A number of pieces of legislation in various fields already stipulate the need to use mediation in the event of disputes, when topics give rise to conflict or when work fails to progress quickly enough.

New Zealand is an innovator in this field. It has incorporated mediation into environmental issues. I think that we could do the same here.

Canada is bordered by three oceans. It can benefit from rich and wide-ranging knowledge. We must be able to integrate as much of this knowledge as possible into the processes to ensure the most effective solutions available.

It's also a race against time. We must address a number of challenges. We can't wait 15 years to find solutions. We need to act quickly. The more we work together, the more effective and swiftly applicable the solutions will be.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: If we had mediation, would it win out over the political propensity for hasty decisions just to make certain people happy?

Can we provide industry people who have lost confidence with the reassurance that mediation will transcend politics and encourage an interdisciplinary approach, such as including sociologists in consultations?

There's a cultural element to the fishing industry. In the Magdalen Islands, everything—life, tourism, family—revolves around fishing.

In your opinion, how can we ensure that everyone will be satisfied with the act?

How can we prioritize mediation and avoid inappropriate political meddling?

• (1135)

Dr. Lyne Morissette: The first step in mediation is to make sure all the parties, no matter how many there are, understand that they are all on equal footing even if their reality, their priorities and their objectives are different. Everyone is equal. For mediation to work, people really have to work collaboratively and horizontally, not hierarchically.

It's a big challenge. This isn't how governments work. Normally, the department take precedence over everyone else and takes whatever it wants from coastal communities. When it's the government versus a small fisher standing on the end of their wharf, some people are obviously going to have a hard time grasping the concepts of unilateralism and hierarchy.

We need to start by rethinking our relationship to the evolution and preservation of our ecosystems. That means breaking down the silos and the hierarchical structure to put all stakeholders on a level playing field. During mediation, an independent third party facilitates discussions and mediation. The stakeholders are on a level playing field; none of them are subordinate to the others.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: This is all very interesting.

Lastly, what are your thoughts on having experts, such as sociologists, participate in the process? There are measures in place, but there has to be a way to consult experts on implementing laws in a specific social context, people who can explain the possible repercussions on an entire coastal economy, say.

Have you considered this approach? Do you think there's a way to incorporate that into this kind of mediation?

Dr. Lyne Morissette: Yes, it can be done. We do have to break down silos.

That said, fisheries issues are complex. The right whale situation is a good example of that. The right whale is a species at risk, and the problem is currently being managed via provisions relating to crab and lobster fishing, which have nothing to do with species preservation. It also poses many social and economic challenges.

Academics have started working in an interdisciplinary way. It's much faster and more efficient, because you can look at a problem through a number of different lenses. It works. There are even oceanographers who work with artists.

These people offer interesting perspectives, and it is important to integrate them into these processes. We need to break down the silos and work together as much as possible.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Desbiens.

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

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

Welcome to the witnesses today.

Through the chair, my first questions are going to be for you, Mr. Williams.

At the end of your opening statement, you talked about the DFO Pacific region going through another engagement process. I'm wondering if you can share at a high level what's going on there.

I know that we had an engagement process that happened since my time in this position and that there were many problems that occurred. The questions were problematic. They went to people that

perhaps they shouldn't have gone to and didn't go to people that they should have gone to.

I'm hearing that it's going through another engagement process around whether it needs to be fixed. This is highly concerning to me. Can you share a little bit around what's happening? Could you share more information?

Mr. Richard Williams: It launched in the summer. It's an engagement process. It's called their modernization process. It has five, I think, agenda items on it, including transparency around ownership data and foreign ownership. Number five on the list is licensing policy without any specific or concrete mention of what the issue to be addressed in relation to licensing policy is.

I would say that the people conducting the engagement process seem to be making a very concerted and genuine effort to reach people who are often not involved in these kinds of processes. They're not just going to the standard advisory committees and to the major stakeholders; they're making a real effort at the community level and in the various industry sectors. I think that part is positive.

The part that is a bit disturbing to those of us who have been involved in this for some time is that, again, they kind of seem to be starting from square one. They seem to not really have any kind of foundation in terms of the work that's already done, particularly the extremely important work done by this committee but also by the provincial government.

The provincial government has come out very strongly endorsing development of an owner-operator licensing regime. That's built into the new coastal marine strategy that the B.C. government has announced. The Premier of B.C. has written to the Prime Minister saying that it's time to transition to an owner-operator licensing model. The major alliance of coastal first nations in British Columbia has endorsed the transition to an owner-operator licensing model.

It's very discouraging that this modernization engagement exercise doesn't seem to start from that place. It seems to go back to even before the first FOPO report and ask basic questions about what's going on in the fishery.

● (1140)

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

I was just looking through the list of recommendations that we put forward as a committee in 2023 and trying to find the exact recommendation here or where in the report it speaks to it, but this seems to be in direct contradiction to what it is that we talked about as a committee and the recommendations that we put forward. I appreciate your bringing this to our attention. I think it is important for us to be reviewing this and finding out how to best move forward.

There's another piece, Mr. Williams, and I need to be fairly quick on this. You talked about 800 fishing jobs being lost since 2019.

Do you have any quick insights as to why you think there is such a difference of treatment between the Pacific and Atlantic coasts here in Canada?

Mr. Richard Williams: The major factor is that the majority of enterprises on the west coast rely heavily on the leasing of access rights in order to be able to continue their businesses. On the east coast, the majority of small boat inshore enterprises have a lobster licence or a snow crab licence as the foundation for their enterprise. That's almost a career for a captain and crew once they have that. They're not so reliant from year to year on getting into different...

In B.C., there isn't that sort of foundational fish stock that you can build a business around. The industry there depends on access. Because of the ownership of licences by non-fishing interests, that comes at a high price. Seventy per cent to 80% of landed value goes to pay leasing fees.

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

Ms. Fuller, I have been in correspondence with you around deep seabed mining. I think this is applicable to what we're talking about today. We have a lack of clear information around the actual ecosystem that we have in our deep seabeds. We know that the seabed acts as a form of carbon sequestration, basically capturing and storing carbon compounds from the environment.

I'm wondering if you could speak about why you feel it's essential that we see leadership being taken by Canada to protect our deep seabeds at a time when we're seeing the climate changing so rapidly as a result of the climate crisis.

Ms. Susanna Fuller: I think it's one of the few opportunities we have to make sure we understand the impacts of an industry before it starts. I think we're increasingly understanding the role of the deep ocean in carbon sequestration. I also think we don't understand the impacts on our fisheries. We know that the plumes from test mining can go up to 1,000 kilometres away from that test mine.

There are now 32 countries around the world that have said they don't want deep seabed mining until and unless we fully understand the impacts. Norway, just yesterday or the day before, actually decided not to go ahead with leasing. It's an industry that we don't need right now. I think that we have lots of other technological solutions.

We're fairly pleased that Canada has said that we're not establishing regulations or a path forward on deep seabed mining. I think the other thing in Canada is that the resources that have been identified on the west coast are now in a protected area. We don't allow mining in our protected areas. I think we need to solidify that position, particularly given what we're talking about here and the importance of the fishery to first nations and coastal communities. We really can't do anything to jeopardize that renewable resource for what is a non-renewable resource and is just not needed at this time.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Williams, I'll start out you.

You talked quite a bit about the owner-operator issue and what's in place on the Atlantic coast, not necessarily on the Pacific coast. Are the legislative pieces and regulations to manage owner-operator issues in place on the east coast?

Mr. Richard Williams: They are, yes.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Are they being adequately enforced on the east coast?

Mr. Richard Williams: People in the industry, I think, would say no. They feel that there are still companies and other investors that are getting away with various kinds of under-the-table ways of controlling licences and so on. In particular, in Newfoundland and Labrador, there are challenges. I think the emerging kind of reality is that, with some of the demographic challenges and so on, a lot of harvesters are at retirement age, and licences are changing hands. It's not only companies that are finding ways to control. You're also seeing rich fishermen kind of buying out and building up enterprises where multiple licences are stacked within an enterprise. There are ways of disguising that and putting the licence in somebody's name, etc.

There certainly are enforcement issues. Overall, the industry leaders in the harvesting sector that I'm in touch with strongly appreciate what has been done since the new Fisheries Act and the regulations but are pushing for better enforcement.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

What's taking place on the west coast? You've talked about how they're finally moving forward, but really it only seems they're looking at.... Are there changes needed? I know this committee has done two reports that clearly said changes need to be made.

Can you elaborate quickly on that one? Then I have questions for someone else. Thank you.

Mr. Richard Williams: You have these converging forces in the B.C. fishery, the demographics—the aging out of the baby boomer generation who are the majority of licence holders, working fishermen, boat owners and crew—and then economic conditions. As I mentioned, the leasing costs and so on are so bad for working harvesters that the young people are not coming in or staying in the fishery.

I think a large part of that story about the loss in employment is about just simply you can't get people to work in the sector. As more and more people age out, we're going to have a really serious crisis about who's going to catch the fish.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I can echo that. I was contacted by a prawn fisherman off the west coast who this year had to buy his quota at approximately \$110,000 for a 34- or 38-day opening. He didn't know how much he was going to catch, but he had to invest that \$110,000 just for the licence on top of having the vessel, the gear, the crew, the bait and everything else. It seems to be high time something was done on the west coast.

Ms. Fuller, I'll switch to you now.

In response to one of the other questions this morning, you mentioned that Oceans North is not able to change laws in other countries. Who can?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: That would be the government of other countries.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Would that be achieved through diplomatic work by Canadian officials to encourage other countries, or is it simply left up to other countries?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: There have been lots of diplomacy with our closest trading partners, including the U.S. and European Union, on the seal harvest, for example. That was the issue that was raised.

We recently saw our Canadian government trying to make sure that tariffs don't go into place. Other countries absolutely can have a role, particularly when it comes to trade. When we're talking about fisheries, about 75% of our fisheries are exported, so absolutely...

Specific to seals, there's some work to be done. There are some trade barriers from a legal perspective. There are also not a lot of markets. I think we face that with other fisheries, such as redfish, as well. It's usually never just one obstacle in fisheries.

• (1150)

Mr. Mel Arnold: There could be a market if the diplomatic work was done. Is that correct?

Ms. Susanna Fuller: Potentially. When you look at redfish, they're too small for the commercial market, so trying to figure that out is complicated. Seals have other issues in terms of markets, but, for sure, more work can be done.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

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

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

Hello to the witnesses. There has been some good conversation today. I hope to get to the three of you in terms of your testimony, but also your focus on recommendations.

I'll start with Dr. Morissette, knowing my time is limited.

You made a really good point in terms of focusing on science and the importance of having industry, fishers' knowledge and sci-

ence involved in the mix in terms of making decisions and trying to find that ecosystem.

If you were to open the page of a forthcoming study that we complete and you look to the recommendations on that very topic, how would it read to you? What would you want to see?

[*Translation*]

Dr. Lyne Morissette: We really need to call on people who have real-life knowledge and expertise acquired in the field. Knowledge doesn't necessarily come from university studies. The knowledge that first nations and fishers acquire on the ground must be recognized as being just as valid as that of scientists who have acquired expertise on ecosystem protection matters provided for in the Fisheries Act.

Stakeholders and experts should be consulted equally about problems with the Fisheries Act and things that should be included in the act, regardless of whether or not they have a degree, and regardless of the common perceptions in society.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you very much, Dr. Morissette.

Mr. Williams, I want to drill down around the owner-operator model on the east coast, in the Atlantic. In your testimony, you talked about the need for an owner-operator's fleet separation, which I totally agree with, and we need to land the plane on that. I'm looking for a better analogy related to fisheries, but we'll forgo that.

Mr. Richard Williams: Dock the boat.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Dock the boat. There you go.

When we're looking at the model on the east coast, are you looking at a complete replication of that on the west coast, or are there nuances that would need to be made in a British Columbia model?

Mr. Richard Williams: We've done a great deal of work on this over the last couple of years with industry people on the west coast, and we've come to a strategic approach that we think is very workable.

When you look at the evolution of owner-operator licensing on the east coast, there are two major steps in the process. One is the introduction, in 1979, of fleet separation, which was a decision made by the minister and imposed with minister's authority on the overall industry, dividing up all of the east coast fisheries into in-shore and offshore sectors. Everything that's happened since then in terms of owner-operator rules—who can fish the licences, how different fleets are managed, whether they have stocking or leasing, all these things—was not done by ministerial fiat; it was done by fishermen's organizations, advisory committees, etc. We see the same process in British Columbia.

Change the whole structure of the industry, the same as on the east coast, by bringing in fleet separation. Under section 9.1 of the Fisheries Act, the minister has the authority to do that. It's a ministerial order to say licensing will [*Inaudible—Editor*]. Use the PIIF-CAF process to allow a transitional period of time for that to take place through willing selling and willing buyer. It will need support in terms of access to capital for fishermen and so on, but bring it.

Then let the owner-operator rules, the specific ways in which, in each fleet, you have stocking, leasing, all of these different things...and, because B.C. is made up almost entirely of multi-species enterprises, there probably will need to be much more flexible owner-operator rules, leasing systems and so on, but under a fairer structure. The thing that fleet separation will do is bring licence prices down to be affordable for working fishermen, and it will put working fishermen enterprise owners at the table and, as the people who control access to the resource, it's therefore their responsibility to solve these problems, as happened on the east coast.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway. There are two seconds left.

Now we go to Madam Desbiens for two and a half minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Dr. Morissette, I want to talk a bit about the human factor. I could obviously go on and on with stories about distressing situations that fishers, particularly mackerel fishers, are experiencing. For example, a young man got himself a boat, a licence and all the rest. He spent a fortune a few weeks before the mackerel fishery closure was announced. People have committed suicide. We actually heard of a suicide in Chandler recently.

With the way things are done now, should the human factor be a fundamental consideration? We need to eliminate this idea that fishers are evil opportunists. Fishers must become an ally in modern ecosystem management.

Dr. Lyne Morissette: Over the past few years, I've had the opportunity to work with the Réseau Québec maritime, which funded a very interesting interdisciplinary project. We worked in Chaleur Bay, in Gaspé, with a professional fishers group called the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie.

It was a four-part project. We started with an ecological study of the state of the fishery and species at risk. We also did a sociological study, and we learned that there is no next generation of fishers, because fishing is too complicated. It's a high-stress, financially risky, problematic job. The situation is very worrisome.

For that part of the study, we worked with a leading sociologist at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, an expert in analyzing crisis situations. She worked with the people of Lac-Mégantic, who were in shock following the tragedy there. She analyzed the fishery-related crisis with a view to helping the community mitigate the shock associated with such a volatile job.

There was also an economic analysis and a sustainable development analysis. Successful sustainable development absolutely has

to involve all these experts. An interdisciplinary approach means integrating social science professionals into our action plans and our situational analyses in order to find solutions.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Dr. Morissette, thank you very much for coming to talk to us about your scientific field with such generosity and open-mindedness. You are an important part of our study.

Dr. Lyne Morissette: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Desbiens.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron to clew up the first hour of testimony and questioning.

Go ahead for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

My first question is for you, Mr. Williams, and I'm going to be quick on this.

Regarding the survey and the engagement process that we were talking about, I found the recommendation. It's recommendation 3 in the recommendations that we put forward as a committee in 2023 around owner-operators.

Recommendation 3 not only points out the flaws of the survey that was put forward, but also talks about how the timeline for a "full transition to Canadian ownership should be seven years or less".

Can you clarify if you feel that we're on track to meet that recommendation put forward by this committee?

Mr. Richard Williams: We're not on track at all, because the decision hasn't been made to go in this direction.

If you think about a PIIFCAF kind of process where the minister makes an announcement that this will take place in terms of the control change in the ownership structure for access rights, that hasn't happened yet.

Until that happens, no, there isn't anything at the moment happening that's taking us in the direction that the FOPO committee recommended.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: It's interesting that we heard from witnesses when we did this study that the only thing of the recommendations from 2019 that had really been acted on was a petition, which was highly flawed, and now we're in a position where we are finding out that the petition is basically being redone.

Anyway, I'm not going to use my whole time talking about this. I appreciate this information coming forward, and I hope that we can see some solutions to this problem as we move forward.

My next question is for Ms. Fuller.

Ms. Fuller, I don't have a lot of time.

There was a letter sent to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans by you and other conservation and environmental NGOs from across the country that worked with the Liberal government for over four years to help modernize the Fisheries Act. One of the recommendations you talked about that was put into place was around the precautionary principle and an ecosystem approach in the consideration for decision-making.

This is something I've brought up before with other witnesses. Can you clarify what needs to be done to more clearly identify how these precautionary principles are more consistently applied through the act?

• (1200)

Ms. Susanna Fuller: Yes. I think the rebuilding process and the precautionary approach framework help to do that in terms of having scientific reference points. I think precaution, though, is fundamentally a value judgment, so we don't want to put it all on scientists all the time.

From an ecosystem perspective, DFO is working on an ecosystem-based framework. It's overdue. It's been 20 years since we promised that we would do ecosystem-based management.

I think it is more urgent, because we are understanding the links between predator and prey species. Also, I can't underestimate the impacts of climate change. We're seeing shrimp disappear from the Scotian shelf. Snow crab is being impacted.

I do think that ecosystem approach work really needs to happen. It's good that it's in the decision-making part of the act as a factor to be considered, but we need to get to some real-world outcomes and processes. Perhaps the process that Dr. Morissette is referencing can help us get into better ecosystem-based management if we're doing it collectively across stakeholders and rights holders.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

That concludes our first hour of testimony and questions.

I want to say a huge thank you to Dr. Morissette, Ms. Fuller and Mr. Williams.

We're going to suspend for a moment as we switch out the panel.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1200)

The Chair: We're back.

Welcome to our witnesses on our second panel.

We have, from the Cooperative of Captains Owners of Gaspésie, Claudio Bernatchez, director general; and from the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, Mr. Robert Jenkins, president, and Mr. Ian MacPherson, executive director.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today.

Each organization will have five minutes or less for their opening statements.

Mr. Bernatchez, you can start off for five minutes or less, please.

• (1205)

[Translation]

Mr. Claudio Bernatchez (Director General, Coopérative des Capitaines Propriétaires de la Gaspésie): *Kwe*, good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

For centuries, the St. Lawrence marine environment has provided access to diverse and high-quality food. Coastal and riverine communities derive revenues from these waters that fuel a significant economy in eastern Canada.

However, time and time again, the worst has been allowed to happen. Fisheries resources have fallen to such low levels that their survival has been in jeopardy. Generation after generation, the same approach persists. I don't know how this can be allowed to happen over and over again.

Every now and then, individuals stand up to sound the alarm. Then they disappear, lost in the fray. Meanwhile, some people get rich, others go bankrupt, others leave their communities, and some seek re-election.

Everyone has their own priorities and their own interests. These are all too often detrimental to one or another of the biomasses that make up the St. Lawrence. We keep doing the same thing—high-volume fishing, processing and marketing—so we keep getting the same results. We keep failing. Yet, the signals are clear and unequivocal.

Canada needs a Fisheries Act that is enforceable. It must come with the means to enforce it. We need this to be the case in order to preserve the economy of many coastal communities that depend on it, in whole or in part, to continue integrating our indigenous communities into this industry.

We also need to have objective, non-partisan exchanges that are based not on individual interests, but on the best available evidence, whether that evidence comes from our scientists and other resources around the world or from our leading fishers' associations. Fishers' knowledge and expertise can contribute to a broader understanding of what's actually going on.

That's why I would like you to think about the possibility of recruiting fishers to acquire scientific data, which would foster co-operation.

This would facilitate the development and integration of a true ecosystemic approach that should, in turn, enable the adoption of integrated fisheries management by DFO and the industry, which indigenous communities are part of. A greater understanding of the fishing environment and the many factors that define it will position us to give the industry the predictability it needs to become more resilient.

This industry needs DFO to be flexible and enable the sustainable use of species, including emerging species. It needs fishers to be open to moving away from high-volume fishing and towards a quality fishery. It needs processors to be constantly on the lookout for new markets, small or large, some of which occupy a certain niche. Lastly, it needs provincial authorities to support the initiatives of all players in the supply chain.

This industry also needs competent people to make important decisions about the future of the fisheries and the sustainability of the resource. I've only been at this for four years, but I've seen three DFO ministers come and go so far. I don't believe that any of them has had enough time to develop the knowledge and expertise required to make sufficiently informed decisions about the most important issues. I sometimes wonder if it would be better to have a non-partisan, pan-Canadian organization whose members would serve for limited terms, leveraging their complementary expertise to make appropriate decisions in accordance with a new version of the Fisheries Act.

I invite you to think about the possibility of discussing this proposal with senior DFO officials and giving them opportunities to get closer to the community so they can better understand the issues. The Association des capitaines propriétaires de la Gaspésie, or ACPG, in Rivière-au-Renard, would welcome them.

Fortunately, despite all the challenges, individuals want to help the fisheries evolve into something different. They want to demonstrate enough flexibility to adapt to the changes they're being subjected to. These people are in industry, in DFO, in other federal and provincial departments, and even in the general public.

All the necessary foundations are in place to develop a multi-stakeholder collaboration that will enable us to go further together. There are many issues affecting Canadian waters, and several groups are trying to address those issues. Fishers can help find solutions. They can even participate in the effort to enforce Canada's sovereignty over and in its waters.

Thank you.

• (1210)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

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

Mr. Ian MacPherson (Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association would like to thank the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for the opportunity to provide input on potential changes to the Fisheries Act of Canada. This important document is vital in keeping our ocean resources viable for current and future generations.

Today, Captain Jenkins and I, on behalf of our 1,260 captains, will present what we feel are important, critical and relevant changes that will assist in keeping our ocean resources healthy and sustainable.

The current fisheries regulatory regime is extensive and complicated. However, above all, it is important that the resource wins

while contributing to the continued existence and vibrancy of coastal communities.

Today, we would like to highlight the following high-level points. We are very receptive to expanding on these points in the question and answer period that follows today's opening remarks.

This list is meant to be comprehensive, but is by no means complete. With meaningful harvester discussion and pragmatic approaches, workable solutions can be obtained. In addition, any regulatory changes need to be supported with effective and practical regulations that will reinforce these initiatives. We support the following initiatives:

Number one, the resource must come first.

Number two is the "one licence in, one licence out" approach to maintain equilibrium in terms of not adding additional effort in the fishery.

Number three is boots on the boat: direct operational involvement of owner-operators and first nation vessels that are crewed by band members. This keeps the financial proceeds from fishing in our local communities.

Number four is for the same seasons for all harvesters. "Same seasons" has a direct correlation with the protection of the resource and the resource coming first.

Number five is consistent and transparent enforcement of the Fisheries Act for all harvesters.

Number six is for all harvesters to be part of nation-to-nation discussions concerning our ocean resources and how they will be managed.

Number seven is mandatory use of electronic logs for all primary species fisheries.

Number eight is the declaration of our Canadian seafood as a critical North American resource. The protections that have been recently put in place for Canadian critical minerals should be extended to our Canadian seafood. Alliances with global security partners should be created and formalized.

Number nine, revise the current new entrant criteria so that the many men and women who seek a future in the fishery can gain valuable experience and enter the industry when they are ready.

Number 10, allow more flexible partnership agreements so that expensive hard assets are utilized more efficiently. In addition, this process must be simplified from an administrative perspective to gain wider adoption.

Number 11, reorganize the substitute operator policy to be more flexible to meet the needs of everyday life. We need appropriate allowances for time off without lessening the strength of owner-operator requirements.

The oversight of a resource that is literally fluid in all aspects is not an easy one. Currently, we are seeing fractured relationships and resource exploitation by some that see the ocean as a source of short-term gain at the expense of the resource and the future.

There are very encouraging signs that the next generation is keen on continuing the life of their ancestors. We collectively have a responsibility to get this right and currently, communication between government and all harvesters is lacking. We must come together with a goal of a clear, transparent and articulate fisheries act.

Our most current challenge is the current uncertainty that surrounds many aspects of the fishery. We require expanded dialogue amongst all parties that count on this valuable resource for our livelihoods. As legislators and decision-makers, we all need to do our part in implementing practical solutions to complex challenges. Let's make the changes that will benefit all harvesters and communities.

Thank you again for this opportunity. Captain Jenkins and I would be glad to address any questions at the appropriate time in today's session.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

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

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

I thank the witnesses for coming today.

My question is for Mr. Bernatchez.

Are there parts of the Fisheries Act that worked against your fleet in the recent allocations of unit 1 redfish?

Mr. Claudio Bernatchez: We could say, was it against our fleet? Was it to favour another fleet? I won't comment on that, but definitely we were hoping.... I would say that actually the whole federation of Canadian fish harvesters was hoping for a more balanced distribution of fish between offshore owners and inshore or mid-shore owners.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you think the act should address beneficial access to quotas on species that have had biomass growth at the expense of other species that have met their demise by over-predation, such as, for example, with the redfish explosion and the destruction of the gulf shrimp fishery?

Do you think these types of predator-prey balances and those fishers that are affected by changes in balance should be somehow addressed in the act?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claudio Bernatchez: If we really want to implement an ecosystem approach and see fishers and the communities that depend on them as part of the ecosystem, the answer is yes. That's what we asked for, by the way, and we weren't the only ones. The Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels,

FRAPP, and the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, the FFAW, also asked for this.

We all agreed that DFO scientists had clearly demonstrated the effect of shrimp predation by redfish. They even said that redfish had eaten up to 200,000 tonnes of shrimp. It would have made sense for those who were hit hardest by the arrival of redfish to have a better chance of getting fishing quotas that would have enabled them to get by in the medium term.

[*English*]

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. MacPherson.

Mr. MacPherson, when fisheries close for conservation measures and then reopen, who should gain beneficial access as a result of the conservation measures and the suffering that's been incurred by stakeholders? For example, in the case of mackerel, should the mackerel fishery reopen in the near future, how would you like to see that access applied?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Thank you for that, Mr. Small.

I think what we need to do is refer to history in terms of who was fishing that resource before. The licence-holders are the ones who are most impacted by a closure of any fishery.

To tie in with your question for Claudio, one of the things that I think needs to be looked at is what's the economic loss to a particular area. Maybe that should be a part of any decision: if one species replaces another, so to speak, because of whatever reasons, that a case is made to keep the money, similar money, coming into those communities.

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

Many fishing industry stakeholders that I talk to are alarmed at the influence of the ENGOs at stock assessments. Many of these ENGOs that work against access to quotas are funded by organizations from south of the border, like Pew.

Can the act address this? Who's a stakeholder and who's not a stakeholder in assessments? Do you think this should be addressed in the act?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Yes, absolutely.

We're very involved with that process in terms of the advisories and things like that. We've been disappointed because DFO, in some cases, is not following their own guidelines to have people involved with some of those committees.

At the end of the day, we're very clear about who we represent. I think that if people are going to be around the table, there needs to be transparency in terms of who they are actually representing, and I mean that for a number of groups.

Thank you.

• (1220)

Mr. Clifford Small: You're welcome.

What would be your number one ask if there were to be a change to the Fisheries Act right now? What would that ask be, Mr. MacPherson?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: First and foremost, we want to protect owner-operator. As in our list, the resource has to win, so there has to be fulsome discussion with all stakeholders. If a fishery is in decline, how is that going to happen? What are the impacts going to be?

I think those are some of the biggest things we're facing right now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

No, I jumped over Mr. Morrissey.

I'm sorry, Bob.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): That is a tall order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I don't know. We'll see.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I'm referencing size.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for Captain Jenkins and Mr. MacPherson.

Thank you for the very precise list of recommendations. Either one of you can comment as you choose on these in your answer. I want to go through a number of these to give you a chance to expand and time is limited.

Could you add a little to the "reorganize the substitute operator" rule?

What's your thinking here, Bobby?

Mr. Robert Jenkins (President, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): Thank you very much.

Is that on organizing the owner-operator?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No, it's on the substitute operator, because I get a lot of criticism.

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Right now, we have five days. That's what we have in the gulf. Fisheries have changed a lot since the 1970s, when that five-day rule went in. I think we have to take a real comprehensive look at whether somebody needs 30 days, or whatever the case may be. It has to be looked at case by case.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Right now, you only have the option to use your five days or lose the whole season, which is impactful.

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Yes.

I'll give you the example of my tuna fishery last year. My grandson was fishing with me. I was booked in the meetings. We had one fish left to catch. I had one day left on those five days. My grandson was fortunate enough to get that tuna on that last day. Had he not gotten that tuna on that last day of my five days, I would have had to be on the boat every single day after that to catch the fish.

An awful lot of the membership now are telling us—we're hearing it at annual meetings all the time—that the five-day rule has to be looked at. It's just not enough time, Bob.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you. I appreciate that, because I'm hearing that, as well.

I'm going to your next one.

You referenced a modified "new entrant" policy. Again, you're the fisher here—the captain. You're on the wharf.

Expand on this. What's your thinking here?

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Right now, we have the Atlantic fishery regulations. I don't have the criteria here in front of me, but it's not hard to get a hold of them, if that's out there in the office. I think, of the criteria, there are three or four things right now. What we've heard in particular from the west end of P.E.I.—we've heard it from the east, too, and from all over the island—is that some of these criteria have to be looked at. We don't want to make it difficult. Say somebody was working out west and he's coming home and wants to get in. He may have a tax base in the oil patch out there. He may be a renter and doesn't own property in P.E.I., New Brunswick or any place in the gulf. This applies to all of the gulf.

We're just saying that it has to be looked at and relaxed a bit more, Bobby. The next generation coming up will have easier access.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Right. Some people will go offshore to work in order to accumulate enough money to buy in.

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Exactly.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's tripping them up.

There are a number of them here.

How important is "boots on the boat"?

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Well, we believe—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You can tie that in with "same seasons for all". I think we're seeing some fisheries now starting to show catch declines because of different sets of enforcement rules. I'll be candid.

• (1225)

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Okay, well, I guess I'll have to be candid back.

“Boots on the boat” came out of the moderate livelihood rule, officially for indigenous people. It came out of the maritime region down there. We adopted it here on P.E.I., like other associations and various unions across the gulf. We feel that's the way it is for us under owner-operator: boots on the boat. I'm not allowed to hire somebody to run my fleet. I have to be present, unless I use up the five-day rule we just talked about.

We feel that boots on the boat is very important to sustain owner-operator.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: In the time I have left, which is less than two minutes, could you focus on “same seasons for all” and on the importance of consistent enforcement for all for the long-term future of this very successful fishery?

Mr. Robert Jenkins: We ran into a problem—and I don't have to tell you people—and Saulnierville was the perfect example of what took place a few years back. People were trying to fish out of season. The fishermen down there didn't like it. They were very concerned over the sustainability of the stock. We are, here in the gulf, as well.

Our biggest fishery here, Bobby, as you know, is the lobster fishery. We feel that in order to protect that resource to the best of our ability—and we've heard this countless times from all our members—it has to be one season for everybody. You can't fish during the molt. You can't cut a bunch of people loose when everybody else is ashore. It'll be just a free-for-all, and it's not going to do the resource any good.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: For the last part, could you comment on partnership changes? That was in one of your recommendations that you referenced. Maybe Ian or Bobby, or whoever wants to, could take it in the time I have left.

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Under the streamlining document that we did with Moncton, partnerships were brought up at our various meetings. I'll give you an example of partnerships here on P.E.I. or in the gulf under the Atlantic regulations.

I partnered up a few years ago because my brother had cancer. He had to go for surgery, but he didn't know when he would be going for surgery. To make a long story short, we partnered up my fleet with his fleet. He lost 50% of his fleet. I maintained my fleet and my full trap limit. I didn't realize at the time, until I actually experienced it myself, that was quite a shortfall for somebody who was suffering from a disease like cancer. I've since heard from other people who have done the partnership that 50% is too much and that 25% would be adequate, but not 50%, so that's what I'd comment about it.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I would also like to thank all the witnesses for being with us, especially Mr. Bernatchez, with whom I will be speaking for the next six minutes.

Mr. Bernatchez, Dr. Morissette spoke earlier about horizontal mediation, which means giving independent scientists from all kinds of fields, such as ecology, sociology, the economy, sustainable development and, obviously, resource protection and biodiversity, an equal seat at the table. The Réseau Québec maritime has in fact conducted a study on this.

You and I both know that Quebec and the Maritimes very much want to be united in improving, changing and saving our fisheries.

What do you think of this horizontal mediation approach, and how would you make it better?

Mr. Claudio Bernatchez: There are a number of ways to do that. I'm not very familiar with the concept of horizontal mediation, but I understand what you just said.

Here's another example. A researcher at Université Laval, Dr. Isabelle Goupil-Sormany, is researching the psychosocial effects on fishers and their communities. Right now, quite a few people are very interested in making fisheries more inclusive and more comprehensive. That includes optimizing various species.

High-volume fishing will become less and less common in the Gulf and St. Lawrence River waters. Fisheries will therefore have to be diversified. To do that, we will have to involve people from all kinds of backgrounds.

In a given industry, it can be good to have people who, though not necessarily leaders or experts in their field, can help us think differently. That's why it's extremely important to have people from different backgrounds. That's kind of how I see things.

● (1230)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: From that perspective, wouldn't it be more beneficial to move away from purely partisan politics, which we often see in Parliament—I don't need to get into the details—and be more transparent and collaborative?

I also think there has to be a genuine willingness to integrate the skills of people on the ground as well as new factors that make it possible to diversify marine products.

Would removing politics from the equation be helpful?

Mr. Claudio Bernatchez: I would say yes, but I'm not sure.

However, I am sure that everything we do is doomed to fail if we continue to manage Canada's fisheries as we have done for too long, where everyone looks out for their own interests. Scientists want to protect their department, fishers and processors want to earn more revenue, and politicians just want themselves and their party to keep their seats in the next election. All these fine people neglect the primary objective, which is preserving the resource.

The fact is that this approach has failed, as we've seen recently. Unfortunately, in the four short years I've been here, moratoriums have been put in place for a number of species as well as species that are declining dramatically. People will blame climate change when it suits them, but they don't necessarily listen to the solutions we recommend to mitigate, even very modestly, the effects of climate change.

For the first time in the history of fisheries in Canada, everyone needs to work with one interest in mind: the resource. They will have to co-operate more and more to succeed. We have common challenges. I'm thinking of my friend Mr. MacPherson from the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association. The same challenges exist across the country, and the Canadian Independent Fish Harvesters Federation, for example, is trying to address them. However, the government does not seem to be listening.

We may not be good enough lobbyists to advocate for major issues, and we should hire specialized lobbying firms, as others do. The fact remains that, if personal interests, including politically motivated decisions and management, are not set aside, we will get nowhere.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Your comments are very interesting.

It's a lot of food for thought, Mr. Bernatchez, because we are in the process of reviewing the Fisheries Act. Some of your recommendations will have to be incorporated.

Should we establish some kind of authority outside the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or DFO, one that would have significant clout in decisions and ecosystem management?

Mr. Claudio Bernatchez: That was my very humble recommendation. There are people who are even better suited than I am, people like Mr. MacPherson and people from other provinces. They could think about ways to ensure that the most important decisions do not come down to one person, a minister who has not had the time to acquire the necessary knowledge or expertise.

Basically, it would be a group of well-informed people who would support DFO in making the most important decisions. Such important decisions should not be made by one person.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I welcome our witnesses, Mr. MacPherson, Captain Jenkins and Mr. Bernatchez.

Mr. MacPherson, perhaps I'll direct my questions at either you or Captain Jenkins, whoever is best-suited to respond.

First of all, thank you for so clearly outlining the items you see as the most important. That helps us to easily use this information in our recommendations, moving forward.

You spoke about the mandatory use of logs. I don't believe this was expanded on yet. I know you spoke to us before about the importance of e-logs.

Can you share a bit about any updates you have on that, and any movement you see as being required, in order for us to move forward on this?

• (1235)

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Thank you for the question.

Electronic logs have been discussed for quite a while. I think it goes back to 2014. It's been a few years. It has been delayed, but we are seeing some implementation in the spring of 2025, at least on the east coast for snow crab and lobster. The PEIFA, the RPPSG and a private company called Vericatch are, I think, going to be the three primary suppliers. The PEIFA one is in the last stages.

I think we all understand that, if we're going to protect the resource and make that paramount, there needs to be as much real-time data collection as possible. This is for our international certifications, but it's also for a lot of other reasons. It's not going to be a silver bullet. I think it's also very important. If we can collect data for science and make that more timely, hopefully the people in resource management have more tools at their fingertips to make cases for when a stock is declining, but also for when a stock is rebounding.

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

There is another thing that was brought up quite a bit. Captain Jenkins mentioned "boots on the boat". You were just talking about this.

I find it interesting how the same concepts are used with such ease when we talk about east coast fisheries. However, when we talk about them on the Pacific side, there seems to be a lot of justification for not moving forward. Now, there's no denying a transition is required to support the process, moving forward.

I'm wondering if you could reiterate, at a high level, how boots on the boat result in increased proceeds going towards local fishers and communities.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I don't want to oversimplify it, but I think that a lot of the time people live in the communities. Their kids go to school. They contribute, volunteer or whatever. I don't have the exact statistics at my fingertips, but I know a lot of our members reinvest in their communities if they're there. The benefit goes there. It can benefit a number of communities. If it's a corporate entity, however, we could see proceeds going to other parts of Canada or out of the country.

This is why we feel it's important that we're fishing locally, employing local people and having those benefits go back to the local communities.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: One item that I don't believe I heard you bring up is the impact you're hearing about from fishers around any changes to stocks—migratory changes, reduction in stocks or new stocks—as a result of the climate crisis.

Are there any points you can share with us today that you are hearing from fishers about first-hand implications? Are there any recommendations you might have on how we can best move forward to address our quickly changing stocks?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Yes, I think there are a couple of examples.

Certainly, one of the most striking local examples is the prevalence of striped bass. They're a predatory fish. They're very aggressive. They're starting to really decimate some of our stocks, and the smaller fish and juvenile lobsters. There have been autopsies done. They're like vacuum cleaners out there. We are working with DFO. There was a bit of a pilot project done. This is a prime example on the east coast of Canada where we have a fairly detrimental stock. Now it is worth something when it's caught and sold, which is the upside.

I think we need to adapt more quickly, or we're going to see the decimation of some key stocks on the east coast.

• (1240)

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

You mentioned the importance of nation-to-nation work. Can you expand on that a bit more?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I remember Bobby mentioned Saulnierville. I will be absolutely clear that our fishing organization does not want to see any sort of repeat of what happened down there three or four years ago.

There needs to be dialogue. Harvesters need to talk about the tough things, too, and the problems. It's my understanding that the reason harvester groups are not allowed at the table—I'm talking about non-indigenous harvesters—is the nation-to-nation policy. My understanding is that it's a policy; it's not a legal requirement. I think this goes a long way in creating issues. When there's a vacuum and people don't know what's going on, human nature is to assume the worst, a lot of the time.

We need more in-depth and transparent dialogue among harvesters, plain and simple.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. MacPherson, I'll start with you.

You talked a lot about everyone being under the same season and so on. We've read articles about this issue for some of the fisheries on the Atlantic coast.

Is there anything specific needed in the act to deal with the organized crime element, or is that under the Criminal Code or other statutes? Are there pieces that could be in the act to address the ever-increasing value of the commodity and apparent attraction of organized crime?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Certainly, the PEIFA has been quite prominent in this part, Mr. Arnold. We do issue victim impact statements when we're asked, in terms of the detrimental impacts. One of the things that we haven't been making a recommendation to the courts on is to make the fines substantial enough so that it's not becoming just the cost to do business.

The other thing we've been quite focused on is suspension of fishing days, particularly at the front end of the season, as a deterrent. In a lot of fisheries, those are the most prolific and valuable days to a harvester.

These are things that could maybe discourage that, but if the fines are such that it's just the cost of doing business, that's a big problem.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Are these pieces of legislation or would they be regulation that is already enabled in the act that hasn't been implemented? Are there actually changes in the act or is the ability there within the legislation to implement regulations and adjust fines and penalties for that piece of it?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Well, certainly they need to be in lock-step.

You're the legislator. I guess we're more exposed to the regulation side of things, but there again, when you have fulsome discussion amongst groups, I think industry can come up with some good recommendations.

We want the same rules, as we mentioned earlier, for all harvesters. That keeps the playing field level and protects our resource. Obviously, if there are criminal elements involved, we need to have legislation that will help to plug those holes, so to speak.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

Are the current regulations and laws being enforced to the extent that they need to be or should be in order to protect not only the resource but also the legal harvesters who are out there?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: That's a broad-spectrum question. I think we need to see consistent enforcement in all of our fisheries in light of some of the things that are going on.

I just want to quickly loop back to something you mentioned. Ten or 12 years ago, a lot of these fisheries weren't very lucrative, and hardly anybody was interested in them. Absolutely, it's a problem, in that the value of the fisheries has skyrocketed, and we have a lot of people interested in participating—or in getting the proceeds of the fisheries—who weren't really interested too many years ago.

• (1245)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I want to switch quickly to Mr. Jenkins.

You talked about the five-day rule and so on. Are there any changes that are needed to deal with, say, captains who have long-term health issues, whether it be cancer or dialysis requirements? Those long-term health effects and issues would keep a captain or an owner-operator from being on the boat. Are there adjustments needed there?

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Yes, I believe there are, especially in light of the fact that a lot of these fishermen and enterprises in the gulf here are family-oriented. I've been fishing for 50 years. That will give you an idea of how old I am. I still enjoy fishing and I want to keep fishing. If I go to my doctor next spring and he tells me that something's going on, it doesn't mean I'm going to be ready to get out of the fishery, Mr. Small, but I would like the opportunity to be able to grab one of my grandsons and say, "Here, it's going to be up to you now, and you take the gear until I get a clean bill of health."

There shouldn't be all these loopholes, especially for families. There may be a case where you may have to look at this on a case-by-case basis, but if you're looking at father-son, father-daughter or even nephews, nieces and things like that, I think that has to be taken into consideration when you're looking at this. A lot of these gears are family-oriented and have to be looked at in that way to cover some of these obstacles. That's what I'm calling them right now, obstacles, because they're outdated—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. You have gone way over.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Bernatchez, I agree with some of your statements. As far as shrimp is concerned, I agree with you that we probably waited too long to look into the redfish issue. The large number of redfish in the gulf has had an impact on shrimp, and perhaps even on other species.

That said, I find your statement about decision-making a little odd. You said that decisions should not be made by politicians.

I was elected in 2015, but I also worked in politics before that. In my time as a member of Parliament, I have seen that if stakeholders

in the fishing industry or groups like yours don't like decisions made by public servants, they meet with MPs and ministers to ask for changes.

What are you going to do if it's not politicians or public servants making the decisions? Who's going to make the decisions?

Mr. Claudio Bernatchez: I was talking about the most important decisions. Obviously, there could be discussions.

What I'm trying to get at is that all stakeholders in the industry have their own interests, including fishers.

I don't have an answer to your question. We need to figure out a mechanism to ensure that people set aside their interests and guide the decision-making process in a neutral, apolitical way when important decisions affecting the future of the resource and the future of Canada's fisheries are made.

I know public servants do good work. I know several of them. However, we also know that their hands are often tied and that the minister is the one who decides. I'm wondering whether that's the best way to proceed.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Bernatchez, a number of people advise the minister, including DFO officials. Even we MPs can make certain recommendations to the minister when we think things should be done differently. I did that with respect to shrimp and the management of the whale crisis in the spring. In that case, we managed to get the regulations changed, because the department officials made the unfortunate mistake of using three different maps to measure water depth.

That said, you say that other people, such as fishers, should be involved in the decision-making. I agree with you that fishers' arguments must be taken into consideration. However, one of the things that Dr. Morissette, who was on the previous panel, and other scientists outside DFO are saying is that the shrimp population is not as large as it used to be. They say they've seen a decline in the species. However, some fishers are saying the opposite. According to them, there are a lot of shrimp, and they could be fished again.

Some arguments can be divisive and raise questions. As you know, the Fisheries Act provides measures to protect our resources, but there is no mention of protecting our communities.

Don't you think the act should include a provision to compensate fishers, the industry and the communities that depend on the fishing industry if a fishery is closed? Should we consider compensating them when a resource is declining so much that it is necessary to protect it for a number of years?

That may be in the act, but I don't recall.

• (1250)

Mr. Claudio Bernatchez: Yes, that would have to be looked at.

The idea is to get all the players and all the stakeholders to work together. We obviously don't want to further divide an industry that's already far too divided.

We have to try to bring the various stakeholders together. That might help prevent crises like the one we experienced. Obviously, people will always want to promote their interests.

I know where the information comes from regarding the claim that there are still a lot of shrimp in the gulf, but we know very well that there aren't many left. Statements like that should be taken with a grain of salt.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I agree.

Mr. Bernatchez, that's why I brought it up earlier, when you mentioned that some people say things to get elected. If I had wanted to say such things, I would have done so at the fishery forum organized by the Bloc Québécois in Caraquet.

Thank you, Mr. Bernatchez.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

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

[Translation]

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

It doesn't often happen that Mr. Cormier and I disagree, but we absolutely disagree right now. In fact, he was invited to our forum, and I expected him to be there. He was welcome. It was a really rewarding and enjoyable experience. No one got attacked. Everyone wanted to work together.

That said, Mr. Bernatchez, I'm going to go back to the testimony that David Vardy gave before the committee a few weeks ago. Mr. Vardy is a leading economist who has also worked in government in Newfoundland and Labrador. He told us at the outset that we had to not only restore fishers' trust in the system, but also re-establish ties between the various authorities. I think that's what Mr. Cormier is referring to, and that's what we're trying to do here. We want to find solutions.

I know you'll agree with me, since we've both experienced it, that everyone on the ground is facing a major crisis. It was mentioned earlier. In fact, Ms. Morissette said that urgent action was needed.

We are at a crossroads, a turning point. We really need to review the way things are done, and I'm including the politicians, the people from the department and the scientists who work there, the independent scientists, fishers' associations and the fishers them-

selves. If there was one theme that emerged from our forum, that was it.

Do you happen to have any important points to add regarding Mr. Vardy's assertion that an open, public and transparent forum needs to be set up? He also mentioned that the success of countries like Norway and Finland, I believe, stems from the fact that they are not federated countries. Ms. Morissette also mentioned New Zealand. Apparently, the fact that they did not opt for a federalist system gives them more flexibility, more transparency and better cohesion among the authorities.

What do you think?

Mr. Claudio Bernatchez: Regardless of the model that is chosen, the first thing to do would be to avoid creating an entity that would sow discord or create division. I say that because there is already far too much distrust within the industry and among the fishers themselves, unfortunately. It's sometimes hard to get consensus on the issues. We're seeing it right now, and we've seen it with the redfish announcements.

In our region, there will soon be an announcement about adding lobster fishing licences, which creates a lot of uncertainty. There will be a lot of discontent, and it could even lead to chaos, unfortunately. People in the industry have trouble thinking long term.

When we're in the midst of fishing season, we don't take the time to attend forums, express our opinions and figure out how we could do better to ensure the future of the industry.

Mr. Cormier, for your information, the Fisheries Act talks about ways to protect coastal communities, but the main emphasis is on preserving the resource and using all necessary means to do so.

I realize that nothing is perfect. However, I think the way the current system works indicates that we could probably have done better, at least since 2020. That's as far back as my data go.

Climate change is not the whole story. Couldn't we find ways, as we are already doing at the Canadian Independent Fish Harvesters Federation, to address common challenges? We could at least solve some problems.

• (1255)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll cut you off there. Madam Desbiens has gone way over.

I'll go to Ms. Barron to clew up this portion of our meeting today.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I have a very important job clewing up all the time.

I just have a comment because I ran out of time in the last round. It's about the last comment around nation-to-nation by Mr. MacPherson.

It's important for me to just say that I do agree there's a lot of work that management at DFO has to do to ensure there's clear communication between indigenous and non-indigenous fishers, but there's also, of course, the constitutionally protected first nations treaty rights. I would definitely welcome a larger discussion with Mr. MacPherson to make sure we have an understanding around the best path forward prior to our recommendations being formed.

[*Translation*]

I'll stop there, because I'd like to give the rest of my time to Mrs. Desbiens.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That's great.

Mr. Bernatchez, I'd like to give you an opportunity to finish your answer.

What could we incorporate into the Fisheries Act in the short term to try to preserve some of what is already under way, unfortunately?

Mr. Claudio Bernatchez: In coastal communities, we have to preserve the owner-operator concept as far as possible. It is the basis of everything. We also have to realize that changes are happening very quickly, for the first time ever. As a result, all industry players need to adapt to the situation and show some flexibility.

I don't know how to go about it, but at the very least, we have to try to show some trust and improve the way things are done in many aspects of fisheries management.

I urge all stakeholders to realize that, at the end of the day, if we haven't done what we have to do to preserve the current resources in our waters, our children, grandchildren and future generations will have to continue importing farmed fish, which come from all over the world. We will no longer be able to occasionally eat a fresh fish that has been caught in our waters.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Desbiens.

I want to say thank you to the witnesses, Mr. MacPherson, Mr. Bernatchez and, of course, Mr. Jenkins for sharing their knowledge with the committee today as we do this study.

We're going to suspend now for a moment to go in camera to give instructions to the analysts for the drafting of the report on northern cod.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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