



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 013**

Thursday, November 20, 2025

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Chair: Patrick Weiler





## Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Thursday, November 20, 2025

• (0820)

[English]

**The Chair (Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 13 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

[English]

I want to start by acknowledging that we are gathered on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people and express gratitude that we're able to do the important work of this committee on lands they've stewarded since time immemorial.

Before we get to today's study, members will all have received copies of the three proposed budgets for the different committee studies. I want to make sure it's the will of the committee that we adopt them before moving forward.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** With that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting to continue its study of the review of the Fisheries Act.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Orders, today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Members may participate in person or join us remotely using the Zoom application.

[English]

Before we continue, I would like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, particularly the interpreters. You'll also notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking.

[Translation]

With regard to interpretation, participants using the Zoom platform can choose between floor, English, or French at the bottom of their screen. Participants in the room can use their headsets and select the desired channel.

[English]

All comments should be addressed through the chair.

[Translation]

For members in the room who wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function.

The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We thank all participants for their patience.

[English]

With that, I would like to welcome our witnesses, who are both here today.

We have Leigh Fox, adviser on indigenous-led fish habitat stewardship with the RAD Network, and Peter German, president and executive director of the Vancouver Anti-Corruption Institute.

We're going to start with opening statements from the witnesses for five minutes or less, starting with Mr. Fox.

**Leigh Fox (Advisor, Indigenous-led Fish Habitat Stewardship, RAD Network):** Good morning. Thank you, Chair and committee, for inviting me to testify at this meeting. It's my pleasure to appear today representing the RAD Network—which stands for restore, assert, defend—a national indigenous-led network supporting indigenous leadership and engagement in nature-based climate solutions.

I will start my testimony with a brief background on myself and the RAD Network's activities. I will then present four specific recommendations to the committee relating to fish habitat management, with offsetting, banking, and indigenous-led ecosystem restoration and stewardship as priority themes.

I grew up on the west coast of the country before moving to the Ottawa River watershed three years ago. I've worked in habitat restoration and stewardship in Canada and East Africa for the past 25 years, and I'm currently a technical, strategy and finance adviser to the RAD Network.

I am a former resident of Halfmoon Bay, in the chair's riding. If the chair or any of the committee members are familiar with Vital Kelp, a company based on the Sunshine Coast, the re-establishment of bull kelp habitat in Halfmoon Bay, Agamemnon Channel, and with the Tla'amin Nation is an excellent example of work that creates fish habitat through indigenous-led ecosystem restoration.

I would be remiss if I did not report to the committee that a sport-fishing boat I still co-own in Halfmoon Bay, the *Blind Squirrel*, does occasionally find a chinook by Epsom Point around sunset. This can anecdotally be attributed to good habitat stewardship at the local level.

In the present era of major project ambition, tightening of monitoring and regulatory budgets, and the inevitable impact on fish habitat, there is a need to identify opportunities for creating better fish habitat outcomes, regulatory efficiency, and certainty for indigenous rights-holders that their inherent and treaty rights will be recognized and upheld.

The RAD Network has worked with a group of NGOs and policy experts to co-create a series of high-level recommendations to the committee that were first presented by Stewart Elgie on November 18. The recommendations generated by the group will require a change in policy and or legislation to implement. I will review the four recommendations and highlight how indigenous-led habitat restoration, stewardship and banking are effective ways to achieve net gain habitat outcomes. Indigenous management of fees collected in lieu is also an effective option to evolve and expand the current policy and legislative frameworks connected to the Fisheries Act.

Recommendation one is return to net gain as the guiding habitat objective under the Fisheries Act.

Net gain could be operationalized in many ways and include a blend of restoration projects and intact habitat stewardship work. A net gain objective also mitigates critiques of underperformance of the DFO's present no-net-loss objective.

Recommendation two is to add third party habitat banking for better fishery and economic outcomes.

Third party habitat banking presents a critical opportunity for indigenous communities to lead restoration work in their traditional territories and act as a habitat bank delivering outcomes to multiple project proponents. This will support proponents' objectives, because there will be supply certainty for high-quality, permanent fish habitat outcomes that also meet the government's commitment to "building a renewed relationship with Indigenous Peoples that is based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership."

Recommendation three is to allow fees in lieu of offsets for better fishery and economic outcomes.

Fees-in-lieu is a system that allows proponents to pay for their offset needs versus investing in habitat projects and waiting for the results. There is an efficiency element that is likely attractive to both proponent and regulator. It also makes possible the aggregation of smaller offset payments to finance larger, more impactful fish habitat restoration projects. Deploying capital through a series

of indigenous-led organizations would amplify the impact and legitimacy of this system.

Recommendation four is to address the cumulative loss from many small projects.

Cumulative losses of habitat from small projects that typically work to receive a letter of advice aggregate into habitat loss that is significant. This recommendation is premised on the robust adoption of recommendations one, two and three, which would give proponents of small projects a clear path to mitigate the loss of habitat.

In closing, I would like to urge the committee to include details of these recommendations in a final report and consider the larger opportunity provided by indigenous-led habitat banking, management of fees paid in lieu and net gain objectives. They all create conditions for better fish habitat outcomes, certainty, efficiency and permanence for project proponents, including provincial governments that are proponents of major infrastructure projects.

The recommendations also lower the cost of regulation and monitoring for the DFO.

Most importantly from the RAD Network perspective, these recommendations prioritize a rights holder-centred approach to restoration and stewardship of critical fish habitat across the country.

● (0825)

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the committee today. I look forward to questions and discussion.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Fox, and of course it's great to have a constituent presenting to the committee today.

With that, we are going to move to Mr. German for an opening statement of five minutes or less.

**Peter German (President and Executive Director, Vancouver Anti-Corruption Institute):** Good morning, and thank you for the invitation to appear here today.

The Vancouver Anti-Corruption Institute is an integral part of the International Centre for Criminal Law Reform, a non-profit located at the University of British Columbia.

I'm a former deputy commissioner of the RCMP. I worked alongside fisheries enforcement officers in my early policing career and was also a federal prosecutor dealing with Fisheries Act violations. My current expertise is with respect to money laundering and corruption.

I appeared before this committee in 2023, and I understand that evidence from that time has been rolled into the current review. I intend to touch on different but related issues today: enforcement capacity, organized crime involvement and money-laundering risks. Together, these issues pose a serious threat, not only to conservation and resource sustainability but also to public safety, economic integrity and community trust.

Over the past decade, enforcement of Canada's fisheries laws has struggled to keep pace with increasingly complex pressures. Fishery officers and conservation and protection staff consistently report under-resourcing, high-risk conditions and growing volumes of illegal activity. Several recent reviews and labour investigations have described officers facing armed individuals, intimidation, dangerous nighttime operations and significant safety gaps. Proper resourcing of those charged with enforcement is critical if we hope to make a difference.

Internationally, agencies such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime warn that the fishing sector is structurally vulnerable to organized crime because of opaque ownership structures, international vessel movement and high-value commodities that are easily moved. Canada is not immune. Our experience with elvers, lobster and illicit vessel activity reflects these global patterns.

A particularly galling example of what is occurring involves the illegal harvesting of crab on the west coast and its sale to processors. This is a cash business, and the profits are huge. Although there has been enforcement, the fines are simply insufficient to curb the activity. Fines are simply viewed as the cost of doing business.

The involvement of organized crime shifts fisheries issues from being simple regulatory challenges to being public safety and national security issues. Organized crime is not a distant or hypothetical concern; there is now substantial evidence of the presence in Canadian fisheries of organized crime and money laundering, which is the back office of organized crime.

The concern is twofold.

First is the use of fishing vessels and export channels to move illegal goods or disguise the origins of illicit proceeds. The use of fishing vessels for illegal purposes raises the spectre of what we see taking place in the Caribbean and the response of the U.S. to drug boats.

Second is the use of licences and quotas as financial assets that can store or integrate criminal funds. Licences and quotas are valuable transferable assets. When beneficial ownership is not transparent, the system is vulnerable. The adoption of a beneficial ownership registry in fisheries, though still incomplete, and the federal government's recent commitment to a beneficial ownership registry for corporations reflect the importance of transparency. We cannot simply allow our fishery to be sold to unknown persons using un-sourced funds.

Recent investigative reporting and intelligence from FINTRAC, our financial intelligence unit, also point to suspicious activity within the fishery sector, including underground banking networks and unusual patterns in licence-related financial activity. Unfortunately, fish quotas and boat sales are not reportable to FINTRAC.

This is regrettable, as it eliminates an important source of intelligence.

The ongoing five-year review of the Fisheries Act is an important opportunity to strengthen five points: enforcement capacity, including capacity to deal with organized crime and money laundering; inter-agency co-operation and coordination with the RCMP, the CBSA and FINTRAC; beneficial ownership transparency for licences and quotas; data systems and a public registry in fisheries to enable accountability; and proactive tools, not just reactive enforcement.

In conclusion, Canada's fisheries are central to our environment, economy and coastal cultures, but weak enforcement capacity, documented organized crime activity and real money-laundering risks threaten the integrity of the system. Strengthening enforcement is not just about protecting fish: It's about protecting communities, ensuring fairness and safeguarding the long-term sustainability of one of Canada's most important natural resources.

● (0830)

I thank you for your work. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. German.

With that, we'll go into the first round of questioning.

Mr. Arnold, you have six minutes.

**Mel Arnold (Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank both witnesses for being here today.

Mr. German, I'll start with you. In 2003 you told this committee, "solutions require strong legislation and cross-agency co-operation. However, there is no point in creating regulations if they are not enforced, or if those tasked with enforcement do not have the necessary skills and resources."

In our current study, the committee is receiving a growing body of evidence stating that the solutions for long-standing problems are in the Fisheries Act and corresponding regulations. The issue is that the laws and regulations are not being adequately enforced. When we consider the developments around illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing of elvers in Atlantic Canada, when such harvests are not stopped, they provide the lifeblood for illegal black market sales. There are significant profits to be made. Failure to enforce in that one instance has a domino effect, as it creates other illegal activities.

In your opinion, what are some of the outcomes that can be expected when fisheries laws and regulations are not enforced?

**Peter German:** That sounds almost like a planted question, because I really appreciate the opportunity to answer that one. Thank you so much.

It wasn't a planted question.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Peter German:** Really, you're hitting on a very important issue there. Technical compliance is one thing, but operational effectiveness is quite different. That is really the issue that Canada is currently facing with the Financial Action Task Force review of Canada's compliance on money laundering. We are technically compliant in most areas, but are we operationally effective? The answer tends to be that in the money-laundering world, no, we're not operationally effective, even though we're compliant.

I would give the same answer to your question, sir. The fact of the matter is that organized crime is all about money. It exists only because of money. Organized crime will go wherever the risk is low and the money is good. If it's elvers today, that's where they will go. Once you have organized crime involved, money laundering just flows from it. As I mentioned, it's the back office. You have to deal with the money.

We often think about money laundering as being all about drugs or human smuggling, but there are so many other aspects to organized crime. Really, once organized crime gets involved in an industry, it's like a disease. It just sort of spreads. It develops networks.

• (0835)

**Mel Arnold:** Thank you. Our time is short.

In your opinion, can you describe what the predictable outcomes are when the illegal harvesting and production of something valuable is allowed to exist?

**Peter German:** Well, as with a lot of things, there's a tipping point, I would say. After a while, people expect.... Organized crime and money laundering will almost inevitably lead to corruption of one sort or another. You may find that there'll be corruption within your enforcement area or within the department. It could be anywhere along the chain. That's almost an inevitable result. More so, though, new ways develop, and they're not necessarily good ways to do business. If Joe next door is making money illegally and no one is stopping him, well, why don't we do the same thing? It's like a disease. It spreads.

**Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

When you were here with this committee in 2023, you talked about the issue of money laundering and so on. You mentioned that again this morning. Are you aware of what has developed in the Pacific region regarding the concentration of licences while harvesters have been waiting years for a beneficial ownership registry?

**Peter German:** I don't profess to be an expert on the fishery. I'm not current on exactly what's taking place, but my understanding is that not much has changed.

**Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

In your opinion, what should we expect to happen with fisheries licences in the ongoing absence of a public registry?

**Peter German:** I think we really need to get that registry up and running. We need that transparency, but we also need enforcement, and the enforcement is not just at the ground level.

If you equate it with policing, you have police officers who are answering calls during the day and they're coming to your house if there's some violence or domestic matter or whatever it might be, and that's the same with the fisheries officers. They're dealing with day-to-day affairs, but we're talking about some pretty sophisticated crime here, and you need people with the necessary expertise, or you have to link with enforcement agencies.

**Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

We've heard some pretty exposing testimony here at this committee over the recent few meetings about enforcement officers being told not to enforce, or potential direction from very high levels around this.

Do you think organized crime and money laundering has infiltrated our fisheries on all of our coasts?

**Peter German:** I really can't answer that one. I'm not aware of specific issues of corruption, but then again, I haven't been looking for them as such.

Look, there are a couple of things here. There's the conspiratorial view of life, and there's the cock-up view of life. One side would say that, yes, there's corruption in the department, because people aren't doing things. It could also be just a reluctance for whatever reason. Maybe people don't feel supported in the work they're doing. It could be any number of factors.

I'm thinking from the perspective of a police officer: "Why aren't you enforcing that?" It's not necessarily because I'm corrupt; it could be because I'm not getting the support I needed in one respect or another.

**Mel Arnold:** Okay. Thank you.

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

Next we're going to go to the Liberal round. I'm going to take this six-minute round of questioning here.

I want to pick up on the line of questioning with Mr. German. I want to thank both of our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. German, you mentioned five key areas for the committee to be looking at, and one of those was on enforcement capacity.

Since 2021, there's been a promise to bring in a financial crimes agency in Canada. In the budget this year, there are moves highlighted to advance that, with more details coming in the spring.

Given some of the issues you've referenced today about the risks of organized crime and money laundering in the fisheries sector, as this financial crimes agency rolls out, what kinds of opportunities and what kinds of measures should be taken to ensure that some of these risks could be addressed through this new agency and through better inter-agency coordination?

• (0840)

**Peter German:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am not supportive of the federal financial crime agency proposal. I think it is not going to work and will not be effective.

My view is that you already have the RCMP there. The federal government should properly resource the RCMP to deal with this form of crime that we're talking about. The federal government does not have a natural constitutional role to investigate fraud and money laundering. That is a provincial responsibility.

With a financial crime agency, it would have to carve out a role as a national agency. With a proposed 150 resources—quite frankly, there were 200 resources working on one file in Vancouver on money laundering, so I don't think 150 spread across the country, taking away the back office that they require and the technical expertise, is the solution to what we're talking about here today.

I think the solution is about the fisheries officers themselves and linking up, as I mentioned in one of the recommendations, with those agencies that have the particular expertise. Creating a new agency, in my respectful opinion, is the Canadian answer, but it's not the right answer.

**The Chair:** Great. Thank you very much for that.

Next, I want to move to Mr. Fox.

Thanks for being here.

You mentioned four recommendations that Professor Elgie also brought up a couple of days ago. I want to touch on the fourth recommendation, because that was not one we were able to get into, in the last meeting, about the need for fees in lieu for supporting habitat conservation, to deal with the cumulative impacts.

We heard some other testimony in the previous Parliament about the need to have letters of advice for projects that are in areas where you're not going to have a big impact. Really, the idea behind that is that we're dealing with smaller impacts, and it's very challenging to go through these processes at a smaller level.

I was hoping you might be able to speak to the importance of having this type of a solution instead of going about it that way, so that we're able to have an efficient process but one that is actually going to lead to habitat not only being protected but having a net gain.

**Leigh Fox:** Thank you, Chair.

I think you said at the end of your statement there that it speaks to efficiency. If you aggregate many, many small impacts—let's say a few square metres of fish habitat impact or one culvert.... If there are tens of thousands of those, that's a significant impact. I think that in order for the system to function well, fees in lieu is a great way to be able to aggregate that money, deploy it in larger, more impactful fish habitat projects, and then be able to have that system function in such a way that proponents are not, you know, overly stressed or overly charged in what the activities cost to be able to mitigate those impacts—that they're not being lost in the system.

You know, it's.... If you have major projects, the province is putting together a major project proposal, there are some major fish

habitat impacts. That's, you know, all of the sunk costs or your capex costs for building out that project; you can justify that. If you're a small proponent and you have a log dump—you're a small logging operation—you have to put a logging road in, and you have a few culverts to do. There's a way to very efficiently collect the fees for that, and our advocacy would be to enable indigenous-led organizations or first nations to lead the larger restoration project that would utilize that money in an efficient way. You'd get the efficiencies of scale for the per-unit reductions.

**The Chair:** Great. Thank you. I have just one last question.

When we're talking about habitat compensation in the traditional sense, there's always an interest in having that habitat compensation done in the relative vicinity of the area of impact. With the ideas that you put forward here about net gain, banking and fees in lieu, how is your approach ensuring that it's going to restore habitat in the regional vicinity, if at all?

• (0845)

**Leigh Fox:** I think it affords the opportunity. If you think about a habitat bank, there are many different project types that you could establish and that you could hold as credits within the bank. There'd be a choice for the customer, the proponent. Is it always going to be right beside? Probably not. Is the restoration work's being right beside the project the best for fish habitat outcomes? Maybe yes, maybe no.

In engaging with first nations on what their priorities are and in looking at these larger opportunities, there's a way to ensure permanence. I know the DFO is concerned, if it's a permanent fish habitat impact, that you have a permanent fish habitat offset. That's a regulatory requirement that goes out into time. First nations are interested in stewarding lands and restoring lands in perpetuity, so there's a de-risking element to that and a regulatory efficiency that comes with these systems that can be a win for all of the stakeholders involved.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

With that, we're going to move on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to all the witnesses. I thank them for joining us.

Mr. German, you were a Crown prosecutor for the federal government.

Mr. Chair, I would ask that you stop the clock while the interpreters get settled and Mr. German finds the right channel.

**The Chair:** Mr. Deschênes, we'll now restart the clock. The floor is yours.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. German, do you understand what I'm saying? Is the interpretation working properly?

[English]

**Peter German:** Yes.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you for joining us, Mr. German.

In your testimony, you said that you were a Crown prosecutor.

Were you responsible for laying charges for violations of the Fisheries Act?

[English]

**Peter German:** Yes, I did, but that was many years ago, in Prince George, British Columbia.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** How long did you hold that position?

[English]

**Peter German:** Oh, that was back in the 1980s.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** At the time, did you receive instructions suggesting, in some cases, that you not pursue charges as Crown attorney?

[English]

**Peter German:** No, not that I can recall. I was in a private law firm, and we were federal agents, so we handled all federal statute prosecutions, fisheries being one of them. I don't recall at that time much in the way of direction to us.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** We've heard from a number of witnesses over the past few weeks. We're told that fisheries officers feel limited in their ability to intervene in the fight against illegal fishing. You touched on that issue.

Can you shed some light on that situation?

[English]

**Peter German:** Yes, that's a really good question. I can only dip back into my experience as a police officer.

For one, you have to feel supported by your own organization. For example, I handled some very high-profile corruption investigations, like Airbus and "Bingogate" in B.C. In those cases, I always felt that the people over me were supportive. They let me do my job; they didn't interfere. That's really important.

The second issue is that you have to believe that the criminal justice system is there for you. If you're putting in a lot of work and risking your own safety and so forth, because this is a tough job that the fisheries officers do, and then you find that the courts are really not paying attention to matters—because, oh, it's just fish, so why should they be concerned?—after a while, you ask yourself why you're doing this.

There could be multiple factors at play.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Do you agree with me that, in order to shed some light, fisheries officers should be able to testify freely about what is happening and how their work is done?

[English]

**Peter German:** I suppose it depends on what forum you're talking about.

As a police officer, I didn't feel I ever needed to speak publicly as a constable about how I didn't like how things were working. We were supported in terms of speaking at conferences and so forth. I guess it really depends on the context.

• (0850)

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** We find ourselves in a situation whereby, on the one hand, fisheries officers say they feel political pressure and that this prevents them from acting, and on the other hand, officials come before the committee and tell us that, on the contrary, everything is fine. The situation we find ourselves in may prevent us from clearing things up.

Do you think that if fisheries officers were to come and explain what is actually happening, it would reveal that they are not being supported?

Don't you think that would help us put things right?

[English]

**Peter German:** Obviously, there's an issue in that case. One outlet might be their union. If they're unionized, which I believe they are, their union can express these concerns. That way, the individual officers don't have to feel that they're risking their own careers and so forth. That's the first outlet I would utilize.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** If I understand correctly, you are saying that organized crime has infiltrated the fishing industry, that the phenomenon is on the rise, and that when organized crime enters an industry, it eventually leads to corruption.

Is that correct?

[English]

**Peter German:** I did say that, yes.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** What can we do to combat corruption?

[English]

**Peter German:** I don't think it's a secret that the west coast is quite different from the east coast in terms of the fishery in Canada.

On the east coast, you've had the more blatant violence. You've had the elver issues, the lobster issues and the organized criminal activity of one sort or another. I would refer to that as organized crime: It's three or more people doing illegal things, and they're making money doing it.

On the west coast, it's a bit more discreet, let's say, in that I'm more concerned about the money laundering, the licences, the quotas and transparency on the west coast.

The blatant corruption that's in your face is more likely to surface on the east coast, where you have interaction right there at the ground level. People are dealing with producers and harvesters and so forth.

Thinking of the crab issue on the west coast, it's same thing there. You could have what are believed to be legitimate processors bringing in crab that is illegally harvested on the side. We actually call it tailgating, if you're talking about a container. You've got 90% legal cargo and 10% illegal cargo. That's a form of corruption right there. The processors are being corrupted, because they're getting this crab cheap.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Deschênes:** You're not necessarily talking about corruption among public officials.

What should we be looking at to find out if there is corruption at Fisheries and Oceans Canada?

[*English*]

**Peter German:** It's not necessarily political officials at all. Corruption.... If you're a money launderer, wouldn't it be great to corrupt someone in a bank, like a bank teller? They can take care of all your deposits for you.

It's that type of thing. It's often people who...or it's someone who can control, who can give you driver's licence information and so forth, like the functionaries within government, so to speak, the bureaucrats, not necessarily high-level politicians or high-level officials. It really depends on the scenario.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deschênes.

That concludes the first round of questions.

[*English*]

We're going to start the second round with Mr. Small for five minutes.

**Clifford Small (Central Newfoundland, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming here today.

Through you, Mr. Chair, for Mr. German, I'm going to paint a couple of pictures here right now. In the northern cod fishery this summer in Newfoundland and Labrador, we had harvesters who were working under weekly trip limits, who underestimated their catch. Now, the column in the logbook is marked "estimate", so if they underestimated their catch by 10% while they were working within their weekly trip limits, three or four fisheries officers were at the wharf handing them a \$1,000 fine, which they feel they can't really fight. I encouraged them to go to court and fight it.

That's one level of C and P. These guys seem to have a lot of support from their superiors to pick on these minuscule things.

Also, then, we look at the reports coming out of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, where reporters purchased FSC lobster quite easily, and for C and P to say they don't have any knowledge of this or to turn a blind eye.... Why do we have a double standard in enforcement in fisheries in Canada, do you think, Mr. German?

• (0855)

**Peter German:** Thank you.

Again, I'll dip back into my policing background. If you don't feel that you can handle the difficult cases or are not getting the support to deal with the difficult cases, it's real easy to deal with the simple stuff and collect statistics, which is really what's happening in your situation.

It appears that the fisheries officers are working. They're giving out fines and so forth, but they're not being, in your example, effective, because they're not targeting the right areas. They're not targeting at a high enough level. Again, that goes to support. It goes to training. It goes to having the right expertise. It goes to support at a high level or from your supervisors, managers and so forth.

I don't have a specific answer other than that. You end up doing the simple work if, for whatever reason, you don't feel capable of doing the more important stuff.

**Clifford Small:** You spoke of organized crime accessing product, raw material. Who are they working with? Are they working with the inshore fishery, the offshore fishery, first nations or simply poachers off the street? Is there an organized set-up here for accessing product?

**Peter German:** Again, I don't have that specific expertise in the fisheries sector, but let me use the crab on the west coast as an example. I have made some inquiries in that area and have spoken to processors, consultants and so forth.

It is organized crime in that you have certain people who are doing the illegal harvesting, and also, then, in some way, they have corrupted particular processors, and they're dealing with those processors. There are various people in the chain, and that is a form of organized criminal activity. Even by the definition of our Criminal Code, it's three or more people. That's what we're looking at. They're involved in this.

**Clifford Small:** We heard Mr. Fox talk about habitat restoration and maintenance. If we're not protecting our breed stock, we can do everything in the world with our habitat, but if we're not protecting what's supposed to be breeding in those habitats, where are we going to get from where we are in our fishery right now? We've had a 25% reduction in real GDP, or in our GDP landings in Canada, since 2010, whereas Norway has increased its landed value 4.5-fold. If we're not focusing in the right areas, where are our fisheries in Canada going to end up?

**The Chair:** We're getting close to the end of our time, but you can have a quick answer to that.

**Leigh Fox:** Just to clarify, was that for me?

**Clifford Small:** Yes.

**Leigh Fox:** In one of the recommendations, we talk about net gain and recognizing that habitat restoration eventually, if it's permanent, becomes habitat stewardship. Protecting the habitat for the breed stock is part and parcel of good fisheries management. Restoration and stewardship go hand in hand.

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

Next, we're going to go to Mr. Klassen for five minutes.

**Ernie Klassen (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Fox, I think we are all very concerned and want to ensure that fisheries are maintained for generations to come. Thank you for all the work that you do in this area.

Conservation is so important to long-lasting, stable fisheries.

How can DFO work together with the indigenous groups, some of which you represent here, to improve our conservation efforts while maintaining a strong fisheries industry for people who are making their living from this?

● (0900)

**Leigh Fox:** There's a lot of efficiency and effectiveness that can be built with the DFO working with first nations indigenous communities and rights holders across the country.

As opex budgets are constrained and reduced in the government's plan to increase capex spending and reduce opex spending, there's an opportunity to reduce the regulatory costs for DFO.

If it's an indigenous-led project—and that's not to say that if it's a indigenous proponent that consent should not be sought—it is a more likely outcome, if it's a nation on their traditional territory stewarding the fish habitat, that rights holders will be aligned with that as opposed to a project proponent that needs to go through a robust consultation process.

I think that it speaks to efficiency. Within the fish habitat offsetting system, which has a lot of potential to expand, there's a lot of private capital that would come in to do the work that government grants are doing and that philanthropic money is doing. With a robust system with a clear demand side in the proponents of large and small projects, that creates the market for creating the supply.

By both aggregating small projects and doing work for large projects, third party habitat banking is a real opportunity to capture some of those efficiencies.

**Ernie Klassen:** Thank you.

The minister has stated on several occasions that we need to strengthen relationships between indigenous groups and the government especially.

I'm wondering if you could comment a bit on what you have seen over the last few years. Are we working on strengthening those relationships? How could we build them even stronger and better?

**Leigh Fox:** Thank you.

I can give an example of a proposed pilot project that we're working on that involves the DFO, the Government of Manitoba, first nations, ENGOs and private finance. It's looking at the opportunity to create a large bank of fish habitat offsets for multiple projects within the government.

This is in the very early stages, but it is an example of where you want to start at the very beginning. You want consultation and engagement to be early. You don't want it to come later. The opportunity is that, when indigenous communities and first nations are proponents, they're leading the way. It creates the opportunity for a more robust system to function and better fish habitat outcomes.

**Ernie Klassen:** Thank you.

Mr. German, you talked about weak enforcement capacity.

Do you have any recommendations, within the budget restrictions that obviously we're all moving towards, of where we could be working within those financial restrictions? Are there any efficiencies that you could point out within the act?

**Peter German:** As we know, with most departments, human resources is your largest cost. You need your human resources to do the job that we're talking about.

I think what it really boils down to is targeted enforcement. What work are you doing, and what work should you maybe not be doing? It's really a matter of making choices. Certainly, that's what police do every day, and I'd include the fisheries folks in that.

There's always crime out there. There's lots to do, but it's a matter of properly targeting where you should and linking with other agencies that can support your developing those things, because there's expertise in other agencies that could probably be brought to bear.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Klassen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

● (0905)

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. German, I'd like to come back to an issue you discussed—money laundering. From what I understand, according to your observations, organized crime is acquiring licences.

What have you learned about this, and how is it happening?

[*English*]

**Peter German:** I'd go back to when I prepared the “Dirty Money” reports, as they're referred to, for Attorney General Eby, as he was at the time, in British Columbia. That goes back to 2018-19. The issue of the transfer of quotas and lack of transparency was really quite apparent at that time. That speaks to the issue of transparency being important.

What you often don't know is who really is behind something. We became aware of people buying fish quotas who had nothing to do with the fishery. It had become an investment tool. When you dig a little further, you find out that certain of these individuals have foreign connections of one sort or another. It raises more questions than answers.

To say that a particular individual is an organized criminal is going too far. We just haven't seen those prosecutions and so forth. It's really this lack of transparency and not knowing, and suspicious connections.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** What benefit would organized crime derive from buying licences?

[English]

**Peter German:** As I understand it, it's more the quotas themselves. It's a commodity that can be transferred. It's no different from art as a commodity. A drug dealer can actually exchange paintings that are worth money. It's value. It's a transfer of value. It's all a matter of determining what that value is.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** I would like to address the issue of the support required by fisheries officers—much like police officers—to fight crime.

How can we ensure that employers provide the necessary support to fisheries officers?

[English]

**Peter German:** Again, I have to be careful. I don't know enough about the nature of the supports they currently have. A person would have to do a study of that issue to see if that is a problem.

As I mentioned earlier, the office of a constable is in some ways a sacred office in our common-law tradition. A constable has the power to lay a charge and so forth. You need to have that independence. There's a certain independence that every constable has. A fisheries officer needs to have that same independence to be able to do their job, to not be interfered with, and to not have people looking over their shoulders all the time. It doesn't necessarily mean that the people looking over their shoulders are bad people. It's that you need to have that freedom.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Deschênes, but your time is up.

[English]

We have two three-minute opportunities for questioning.

Mr. Gunn, you have three minutes.

**Aaron Gunn (North Island—Powell River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. German, you mentioned through your research stumbling across this illegal crab fishery that was happening off B.C.'s coast, and how processors were being corrupted as part of that process. From your research, how much digging did you have to do to uncover that? Through that process, did you encounter any instances

of DFO or the RCMP pressing charges? Is this something that they are aware of and are not pursuing and not prosecuting?

**Peter German:** Thank you. I understand the question.

Yes, there have been charges. As far as I'm aware, there was at least one fine of somewhere in the area of \$175,000. I'd have to confirm the exact amount. It's not that nothing was being done, but that's where I get into this issue of how it became a cost of doing business. In talking to other legitimate processors, I was basically told that the word on the street is, hey, it's just a cost of doing business; we're going to keep doing it.

It's not necessarily that there wasn't work taking place. It's that we're not seeing results because of the fine. No one's going to jail, so to speak.

• (0910)

**Aaron Gunn:** You also mentioned, as far as money laundering goes and with the quota and the licences.... In British Columbia, in real estate, for example, there are a lot of instances, or at least talk, of individuals from foreign countries who want to get their money out of that country using real estate, by parking their money and using real estate as a vehicle.

Is that what you believe is happening with some of these quotas and licences as well?

**Peter German:** At the time I looked at it, that was the context. That's correct. We refer to that as the Vancouver model, so to speak, in that people—not necessarily criminal—are trying to move money out of countries that have exchange controls and so forth, through underground banking systems.

**Aaron Gunn:** You also mentioned your past with the RCMP as a prosecutor. Can you explain the relationship?

We talked to some frontline DFO officers who didn't feel they were sufficiently supported by the RCMP when they were out doing their job in certain high-risk situations, or they felt that the RCMP weren't always willing to get involved in certain circumstances, potentially because the law was too grey.

Can you talk about the interrelationships and the dynamics between DFO, the RCMP and prosecutors?

**Peter German:** There are actually two different issues there. One is the prosecution side, and one is that co-operation with other law enforcement, because the prosecutors, of course, are quite separate from law enforcement.

Oftentimes, I think the issue with prosecutors is that the federal agents don't necessarily see many fisheries cases, so they're not that familiar with it. The fisheries officers know more about it than they do, in terms of the technical knowledge, so that can be a bit of a problem.

In terms of the RCMP support, I can't speak for the RCMP. Generally speaking, law enforcement agencies get along very well with each other. If someone says that they need support in terms of physical support, oversight or whatever, usually that's not a problem. It could be a lack of resources on the part of the RCMP when they can't spare three people for a night surveillance with fisheries. There could be a lot of different circumstances like that.

I would think that's something you would want to see raised within both organizations, so that people come to a meeting of minds in terms of co-operation.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Gunn.

For our last questioner, we're going to Mr. Morrissey for three minutes.

**Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.):** I have a question for Mr. Fox.

Thank you for the thoughtful, knowledgeable testimony you gave in your opening statement on habitat, because when the original act was being discussed, there was a lot of push-back that habitat restoration had to occur right within the site or as close as possible. This was an area that caused a lot of concern.

Could you briefly tell the committee why the government would get push-back on ensuring that habitat that was destroyed or interfered with should be replaced right at the site versus the option you put forward, which I agree with? You're the second one to give similar testimony on that. It seems to be a very practical way of dealing with it that would not harm any fish species overall.

Could you answer briefly? I have a question for Mr. German.

**Leigh Fox:** There's an intuitive element to it. If we impact here, let's restore here. That doesn't necessarily mean that the best opportunity for restoration is right beside the site. If we're talking about fish habitat outcomes—and everybody on this committee, and I think more broadly, wants to see better fish habitat outcomes—analyzing what's been done, reflecting on that and looking at where the opportunities are is the way forward.

**Robert Morrissey:** Thank you. It's important for the committee to have that knowledge testimony on the record.

I have a question for Mr. German.

You've been in protection and enforcement for some time. Often we hear conflicting advice that somebody told fishery officers to "back off". Are there reasons for when, from time to time, superiors would not proceed with an action or a rapidly occurring situation?

Are there other factors that may lead somebody who's superior to give direction to not proceed at that time, to protect other evidence or cases, or for the protection of the officers at the time? Could you opine on that for the committee?

● (0915)

**Peter German:** Certainly, I think that's quite possible. If you're a supervisor, you're responsible for your people. That's number one. If you think they're going into harm's way, that they may not have the necessary tools to deal with something, or that they could mess up the evidence and that sort of thing, yes, you would say that you have to rethink this or that you're not going to go down that road.

Just to say that you're not going to enforce certain areas because you don't like enforcing them is probably a stretch.

**Robert Morrissey:** Thank you, Mr. German.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Morrissey. That concludes our first panel.

I want to thank both of our witnesses for appearing today and for your testimony. It's going to be very helpful as we finalize our report and recommendations for how the Fisheries Act can be updated going forward.

I'm going to briefly suspend before we welcome our next panel.

● (0915)

(Pause)

● (0923)

**The Chair:** I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

[*Translation*]

For interpretation, those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

[*English*]

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

With that, I'd like to welcome our witnesses from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for the second panel. We have Adam Burns, assistant deputy minister, fisheries and harbour management; Rachelle Duval, director, domestic fisheries policy; Kate Ladell, director general, ecosystems management; Peter Lambertucci, national chief enforcement officer; and Bernard Vigneault, director general, ecosystems science directorate.

We are going to have one opening statement, from Mr. Burns, for five minutes or less.

**Adam Burns (Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Harbour Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Good morning, everyone.

My name is Adam Burns. As mentioned, I'm the assistant deputy minister of fisheries and harbour management at DFO.

[*Translation*]

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which I speak is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

[English]

I would also like to recognize the diligent work of this committee thus far in the study. Your commitment to hearing from and exploring the perspectives of so many who are invested in the sustainable use and future of Canada's fisheries is greatly valued and appreciated.

This current examination of the act is vital to informing the department's work. This includes supporting the sustainable management of Canadian fisheries and the health of our aquatic ecosystems, while ensuring indigenous and coastal communities continue to prosper from our fish and seafood sector.

• (0925)

[Translation]

I would like to reaffirm that the department is always listening. We recognize the unique challenges that Canadian fisheries are facing today, including environmental impacts from climate change, market shocks and instability, and social changes related to demographic issues, to name but a few.

Through the ongoing process of strengthening relationships with harvesters, partners and stakeholders, the department continues to work to ensure our efforts are both responsive to the current challenges and taking a long-term view to support fisheries for future generations.

[English]

As we continue to implement the suite of important changes to the act that were put in place in 2019, I want to highlight some of the work the department is currently advancing under the act to better protect fish and fish habitat and to support a vibrant, sustainable Canadian fishing sector.

First, we're working to ensure that the benefits of our fisheries flow to the intended coastal Canadians. We're doing this through a review of our east coast inshore regulations to strengthen the application of owner-operator policies, through policy development to support new entrants to the fishery, and by exploring options to address concerns of foreign ownership. We're also engaging on a fishery-by-fishery basis to support the modernization of west coast commercial fisheries.

[Translation]

In addition, we are undertaking a comprehensive review of all national and regional licensing policies and processes to identify priority areas where streamlining and simplifying the rules will provide meaningful benefits to the fish and seafood sector.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is also actively developing digital solutions and reviewing processes to improve licensing and data management in the fisheries sector.

[English]

The department has been advancing a number of measures under its United Nations declaration act action plan through existing policy tools such as co-management agreements, reconciliation agreements and joint management plans, and using policy directions such as the sustainable fisheries framework.

Next, in support of the Building Canada Act and actions to accelerate major project reviews and approvals, we are improving regulatory efficiency and decision-making while continuing to protect fish and fish habitat in a way that respects indigenous rights and advances reconciliation. Specifically, we are streamlining the review of higher-risk projects while simplifying approaches and requirements for low-risk and routine projects. These steps will help to reduce the project review times and ensure that decisions on major projects can be completed in under two years.

[Translation]

Finally, we are taking action and doing the science needed to support decisions in alignment with the 2019 changes to the Fisheries Act.

This includes collecting more data on fish stocks; dedicated effort to set new reference points for sustainable stock management and rebuilding plans; performing new stock assessments; and studying freshwater habitats to inform policy and regulatory decisions.

In addition, we use the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat process to provide peer-reviewed science advice to inform decision makers.

[English]

Despite these advancements, we recognize that continuous improvement is always possible. As such, we await this committee's final report and recommendations with great interest. The insights and recommendations of the report will be instrumental in guiding the continued modernization of the Fisheries Act, ensuring that it reflects the values and priorities of Canadians.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Burns.

With that, we'll jump right into the first round of questioning, the six-minute round, starting with Mr. Small.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming here today.

Mr. Burns, we've had a 25% drop in the real GDP for the landed value of fish in Canada since 2010. During the same period, Norway has seen a 450% increase. Is that the fault of the Fisheries Act?

**Adam Burns:** There are a variety of factors that influence the landed value of fish stocks, including the species mix that is caught. I'm not familiar with the statistics you're putting forward in terms of Norway's landed values, but that may in fact be part of the consideration.

• (0930)

**Clifford Small:** Considering that Norway has a coastline that's one-eighth the length of Canada's, would you say that's alarming?

**Adam Burns:** Again, I'm not familiar with those statistics and would certainly want to look into those in more detail.

**Clifford Small:** Come on. You know it.

I heard you mention protecting fish and fish habitat. You saw the new report that came out of the marine institute at Memorial University, highlighting that harp seals, which, I might add, are responsible for only about 50% of the pinniped predation in Canada, considering that there are grey seals, hooded seals, harbour seals, sea lions and whatnot.... We could be at a factor of 50% more fish taken by pinnipeds in Canada than what harvesters land, 50 times more than what harvesters land.

What are we protecting the habitat from? How are we going to grow our fish stocks if we don't deal with the elephant in the room?

**Adam Burns:** With respect to harp seal and grey seal harvesting—the primary species on the east coast, as I'm sure members know—the department has, for a number of years now, set very flexible management measures to enable significant harvest. Unfortunately, there is again a global market situation here.

**Clifford Small:** In all honesty, tell us the truth right now. Do you think that there will ever be a seal harvest that, in a meaningful way, puts Canadian seal products in foreign markets again? Honestly, do you think we'll ever see it?

**Adam Burns:** The department and the Government of Canada are actively engaged in trying to reduce the market barriers globally. Clearly, access to markets and having viable markets are the critical pieces in order for a harvest—

**Clifford Small:** Why did the Prime Minister remove Canadian seal products from the discussions with the EU in June, when they were on the agenda? Why did he himself remove that?

**Adam Burns:** I can't speak to those negotiations. I'm—

**Clifford Small:** We have proof that it happened. Is that shocking?

**Adam Burns:** Again, I'm not privy to those—

**Clifford Small:** Considering that pinnipeds consume 50 times more fish in Canada than is harvested by fishermen and that the Prime Minister removed discussions about seal products from the trade discussions in June with the EU, are you shocked?

**Adam Burns:** Again, I'm not privy to those discussions. I can say that the department is actively engaged with global partners to try to advance work to reopen markets.

**Clifford Small:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, my next question is for Mr. Lambertucci.

Congratulations on the great work that you've done since you came in. We've seen some heavy-duty enforcement in southwest Nova. There were reports last night of quite the sting operation going down. It's a bit peculiar to me that all this has happened in the last eight to 10 weeks. Does that have anything to do with plea bargaining on behalf of Mr. d'Entremont when he crossed the floor? Did you give him a soft landing?

**Peter Lambertucci (National Chief Enforcement Officer, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Good morning, and thank you for my first invitation to FOPO. It is a pleasure to represent the green and gold, and the men and women who do this job, and I look forward to the questioning.

Our enforcement approach is evidence-based and supported by intelligence, and what we do is based on substantial operational planning, which is based on that evidence and intelligence that we work with.

**Clifford Small:** We've seen the arrests in the last eight to 10 weeks. What about the next level? What you've taken here feeds into something else. What's happening in terms of investigating the dark web and electronic currency that bad actors are using to...? They're a step ahead of the Canada Revenue Agency, by the way. They're prepared for what's coming. Are you going to be investigating who's above these harvesters and the movers and shakers on the ground? There's someone else beyond it all. Are there any investigations ongoing, or is there political interference that's stopping that from happening?

• (0935)

**Peter Lambertucci:** I can't speak to what my interdepartmental peers are doing for responsibilities and accountabilities that fall outside the Fisheries Act. I can speak to the fact that we have very regular dialogue with our partners, through other federal and provincial agencies, to work on issues. I cannot comment on active investigations or investigations that are in the planning stages.

At the same time, in response to your question about interference, law enforcement independence is something we enjoy in C and P. It is based in the rule of law that the judgment exercised by our fisheries officers on the ground is independent. The way we form that independence is through solid standards, practices, policies, guidelines, training and development, and that independence is a key function of their using their judgment in how they operate in the field.

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

Next, we go to Mr. Connors for six minutes.

**Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.):** Thank you.

I'm going to ask Mr. Lambertucci a couple of questions as well. First of all, I'm glad to hear about the new enforcement that's happening under your leadership, and I look forward to the due process as it follows through on those investigations.

Fisheries officers can be put in difficult situations, when they can easily be outnumbered in rural areas or remote locations. Is DFO using any new technologies or engagement to make sure officers are safe and supported? Are there tools that you believe would help them be more effective?

**Peter Lambertucci:** Officer safety is at the forefront of everything we do in our operational planning, when we engage in operations and are working, within the Fisheries Act, for our accountabilities and responsibilities. In matters of public safety, we also have interdependencies with local police forces of jurisdiction and the RCMP, and we take measures to ensure that officer safety is at the forefront of our planning, with the support of our local law enforcement partners for public safety interests.

In terms of technology, we have and are in the throes of substantial dialogue right now in the assessment of modern tools and technologies to reinvest in ourselves, which will enable greater efficiencies to augment our boots on the ground and our presence in the community.

**Paul Connors:** In following up on that, we heard some testimony earlier about working with the RCMP or other enforcement agencies, and how enforcement in fisheries—DFO officers—may not be fully suited to carrying out all the enforcement. How do you see DFO officers and the RCMP or other agencies working together so it can be beneficial?

**Peter Lambertucci:** Enabling functions and multiplier functions are essential in what we do as we approach the challenges that lie in what we enforce, from the fisheries and unauthorized...to the protection of our fish and fish habitat. The dialogue is continuing with our law enforcement partners, and it's frequent and ongoing. It is on a case-by-case basis as we investigate certain issues and projects. We talked about projects that happened yesterday in Nova Scotia—that was referenced earlier today. Those are examples of when we have those interdependencies and we employ those partnerships.

**Paul Connors:** Once the official charges are laid at the boat level, say, or at the wharf level, then it would be a process of partners who would join in as that moves along to further charges.

**Peter Lambertucci:** The same independence I talked about from law enforcement independence is similar to the independence that the Public Prosecution Service enjoys in terms of taking charges forward. Fisheries officers are responsible for investigations, case packaging, material preparation and investigating to the best evidence possible. Those submissions are then made to the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, with whom we have a very active relationship and partnership. PPSC then makes the decision on what to prosecute and not prosecute, based on public interest and opportunity of success or chances of success. We forward our materials on the recommendation that we are seeking charge approval, and PPSC is the one that independently makes that decision as to what goes forward.

• (0940)

**Paul Connors:** Thank you.

As we've already discussed, there have been major busts so far in the last little while, in different areas. What types of support are fisheries officers getting from their provincial counterparts? Is this support adequate to ensure compliance in both provincial and federal jurisdictions?

**Peter Lambertucci:** Our partnership with the provinces is ongoing and frequent. We do work on an interdepartmental enforcement working group, where we discuss various operations that we can collaborate upon. Undertakings we do that are beyond the Fisheries

Act accountabilities and responsibilities are where we seek participation from the province to assist us.

Fisheries officers are governed for what they do up until that first point of sale, and then, from the sale and buyer side, this is where we have our interdependencies with the partners, both provincial and federal, to help facilitate those investigations.

**Paul Connors:** Is there anything that you think could be improved upon or that you're looking to improve upon in those relationships with the different partners and provincial partners? You have only about 30 to 40 seconds to answer that.

**Peter Lambertucci:** The facts of those relationships are that communication is the key, and communication is constant and ongoing. As we see the provinces share those interdependencies with us, it's incumbent on us to keep that dialogue open and active in the interest of Canadians.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Connors.

[Translation]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Lambertucci, how long have you been the national chief enforcement officer for Fisheries and Oceans Canada?

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** I joined DFO in February 2025.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Have you had the opportunity to review the testimony the committee has heard over the past few weeks, according to which some of your officers are terrified of enforcing the law?

Others tell us that they are under political pressure not to enforce the law.

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** I am aware of prior testimony that was presented before this committee.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Are you also aware of the report on the program *Enquête* exposing a not-so-subtle smuggling ring in New Brunswick?

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** Yes, I have reviewed that *Enquête* presentation.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Are you concerned about that information?

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** I take my accountabilities very seriously when it comes to legislation around harassment and violence in the workplace. To hear that there are reports of fear of reciprocity amongst the officers.... I can say that we would approach anything of that nature with ferocity. We do investigate how harassment and violence prevention in the workplace is administered. We have very strong controls and governance in that place. We have a number of supports in that place.

I have not, since hearing those comments from the committee, had anything presented to me from a concrete position in terms of a fact-based or evidence-based case-to-case situation. That is not to say that if they were presented, we wouldn't pursue those allegations with ferocity.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Mr. Lambertucci, I have a proposal for you. You're correct. We have heard testimony, but we have not yet received any directly from fisheries officers.

That said, some of your fisheries officers have contacted us over the past few days. They described some rather troubling situations. These people are afraid to testify here because they fear reprisals from Fisheries and Oceans Canada authorities.

If your goal is to shed light on this—as is ours—and to assess each case to understand what happened and improve things, are you prepared today to tell fishery officers, particularly those listening to us, that they can come and testify before the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans in public and that they will not suffer reprisals from Fisheries and Oceans Canada?

• (0945)

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** Although I'm unfamiliar with the fisheries officers with whom you've been speaking, we do operate in an environment of transparency, accountability and authenticity. Fisheries officers could come forward at the invitation of this committee and share those views.

I would suggest that there may be instances where in camera presentation may be more suitable for perhaps the sensitivities of the discussions that are being addressed, but fisheries officers would have an unfettered opportunity to appear and answer questions from the committee.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** As I understand it, you see no problem with fisheries officers coming to tell their stories. We can determine whether this should be done confidentially, but there would be no reprisals from Fisheries and Oceans Canada against fisheries officers who come forward to tell us how things are going on their side.

Is that correct?

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** I'm very prepared to work with the committee and supply a list of fisheries officers who could present that testimony or witness presentation for this committee.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** I want to make this very clear. As I told you, there are currently fisheries officers who are reluctant to come and testify.

Can you confirm that they can come forward and testify, without fear of reprisals by Fisheries and Oceans Canada authorities?

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** As stated earlier, we run a very strongly governed, transparent and accountable process. Part of the presentation of witnesses at this committee is how we will learn, develop, grow and collaborate moving forward. There would be no fear of reprisal for people who appear before this committee and provide testimony to the best of their ability.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lambertucci. That will help us shed light on the issue.

I would like to use my remaining time to ask you if you are aware of a directive that was given to fisheries officers by Fisheries and Oceans Canada authorities.

They were told that if they approached an individual who was fishing for lobster for food, social or ritual purposes, and found that the person was doing something illegal, such as possessing female lobsters carrying eggs, they should not issue a ticket, but give them promotional materials and a warning instead.

Are you aware of that?

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** I just want to ensure clarity of my understanding of the message that the directives that you are speaking of relate to law enforcement officers' independence to use judgment throughout the enforcement continuum that we apply as part of the tools that we engage in that enforcement continuum. Those tools can involve education, ticketing, arrest and release, seizure of gear or, ultimately, submission of charge request packages to the Public Prosecution Service of Canada.

I'd also like to add that we have a right to protect the rights-based fisheries and FSC as well. These are sometimes highly charged situations, and our fisheries officers do an outstanding job in those situations and implement their best judgment on what part of the enforcement continuum to implement, be it education, ticketing or further elements of that enforcement continuum.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deschênes.

That concludes the first round of questions.

[English]

We're going to start the second round of five minutes, with Mr. Arnold.

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

I thank all of the department officials for being here today.

I'll start with Mr. Burns.

Mr. Burns, this study has exposed some troubling evidence regarding how DFO deals or does not deal with illegal fisheries activities. Were you at DFO in 2018, when Minister LeBlanc was leading the department?

**Adam Burns:** Yes, I was.

**Mel Arnold:** In 2018, Minister LeBlanc literally made headlines after he stated that he wanted to name and shame countries involved in massive illegal fishing of Pacific salmon. This naming and shaming never happened.

Do you know why the fisheries minister waffled on naming and shaming bad actors that illegally harvest Pacific salmon?

• (0950)

**Adam Burns:** Since that time, Canada has successfully implemented at the North Pacific Fisheries Commission an international rule that prohibits the retention of Pacific salmon in the conduct of other fisheries, which makes it far easier for international enforcement, including by Canada and in Operation North Pacific Guard, to detect illegal salmon fishing. Those measures greatly protect Pacific salmon as they spend their time in the North Pacific.

**Mel Arnold:** At around the same time, Minister LeBlanc made a statement that a satellite photo had been seen that showed an eight-kilometre-long net that was scooping more than 400,000 kilograms of wild salmon in the Pacific Ocean.

Mr. Burns, can you think of a reason why a fisheries minister should not expose such perpetration of illegal harvest on such a massive scale?

**Adam Burns:** Again, Canada has made significant investments in recent years for enforcement on the high seas in the North Pacific. In the last number of years, we've had enforcement vessel presence—

**Mel Arnold:** Has DFO named and shamed?

**Adam Burns:** We have, indeed, taken action against—

**Mel Arnold:** Have you named and shamed? Have you named the perpetrators?

**Adam Burns:** The process in international law for us to undertake this is to work with the flag states in order to ensure enforcement actions take place against those vessels.

**Mel Arnold:** Are you aware of any provisions in the Fisheries Act for the Government of Canada to resource or enforce fisheries laws or regulations overseas?

**Adam Burns:** The Fisheries Act is not the legislation that provides those authorities. We do have other legislation, such as the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, as well as international law, that affords Canadian enforcement officers the authority to undertake inspection and enforcement on the high seas.

**Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

The Fisheries Act does contain provisions for fisheries enforcement in Canadian waters, but a growing body of evidence has stated that enforcement is selective and not happening adequately.

Mr. Burns, you have insights into how the DFO operates. In your opinion, why is it that Canada funds surveillance of illegal fishing

overseas but does not fund the same activities for enforcement in Canadian waters?

**Adam Burns:** I'll turn to my colleague, Peter Lambertucci.

**Peter Lambertucci:** We do have a very robust international program that we operate with a number of our international partners against illegal, unreported and undetected fishing. Those programs benefit Canadians substantially by pushing out our borders and apprehending those who are involved in IUU fishing—illegal, unreported and undetected fishing. We've had tremendous successes in recent years and a number of convictions based on referrals we've made in the areas of salmon and dolphin.

**Mel Arnold:** What is the situation in Canadian waters?

**Peter Lambertucci:** In terms of how we enforce in Canadian waters, if I'm understanding the question properly, we undertake that same evidence-based, intelligence-supported initiative to allocate our capacity and our resources to the highest priority.

**Mel Arnold:** I have time for only one more series here.

There seems to be a different approach to conservation and protection enforcement in recent weeks and months in your department.

Have you been directed, or have you taken your own direction that is different from that of your predecessors when it comes to C and P enforcement and prosecution within your department?

**Peter Lambertucci:** This again, speaks to the law enforcement independence that I enjoy as the leader of C and P and that our investigators employ in the course of their duty.

We have focused on those highest priorities, based on that intelligence-supported and evidence-led priority, which has shifted our focus and the reassignment of resources to enforcement.

**Mel Arnold:** You have changed direction, then?

**Peter Lambertucci:** These are directions that I've implemented since I onboarded. In regard to directions before me, I can't speak to that.

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

Next, we're going to go to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes.

**Robert Morrissey:** Thank you, Chair.

My first question is for Monsieur Vigneault.

We've had two witnesses give testimony on fish habitat restoration. They highly recommend that this be changed to allow for overall net gain—establishing destroyed fish habitat in one area and replacing it someplace else—which seems reasonable. Could you give us your opinion on that from the departmental side? It seems like a very reasonable request. I think there's too much energy being put into ensuring that if you move a stone here, it has to be replaced in the same area instead of the overall management of the habitat for the betterment of the fishery.

What are your thoughts?

• (0955)

**Bernard Vigneault (Director General, Ecosystem Science Directorate, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** At DFO science, we've been providing science advice on the question of offsetting for a number of years. The idea is to make sure that the approaches that are taken are efficient overall.

The mechanism involved in terms of what you're referring to is more a management question than a science question, so I'm wondering if my colleague Kate Ladell could add to that.

**Robert Morrissey:** No, that's fine. From a science perspective, would you see, having taken that option, an overall detrimental impact on any species?

**Bernard Vigneault:** What we've recommended in terms of science for offsetting in general, regardless of the mechanism, is to have monitoring and best practices in place so that we can measure the efficiency of the measures overall, regardless of what option has been selected from a management perspective.

**Robert Morrissey:** Okay. I didn't sense any concern from a biological or science perspective on following the recommendation.

Mr. Lambertucci, in doing investigative work, what would be the timeline for a typical case from the time a charge may be laid? Somebody doesn't arrive at a wharf and lay a charge when they arrive there. Could you give a bit of an overview on the timeline it would take before a charge would be laid?

**Peter Lambertucci:** The investigative timeline changes based on the complexity and scope of the investigation. It could take anywhere from a number of weeks to a number of months to a number of years, depending on the complexity of the investigation. Once that investigation concludes, that is when the case preparation begins and our consultation with the Public Prosecution Service of Canada takes over. When we refer those investigations seeking charge approval, that approval can also take a number of months, if not longer.

**Robert Morrissey:** Needless to say, any charge that was laid in the last few days wouldn't have been made, or the information wouldn't have been gathered in the last 24 hours or direction occurred within a week or so.

**Peter Lambertucci:** That is correct.

**Robert Morrissey:** It's correct. Good. That's for the record.

My other question is in the area of DFO officers, maybe at a lower level, receiving direction to not move at a particular time. Were there cases where, at a senior level, looking at a larger case impacting a host of other areas, the direction may be to not move at this time because it could jeopardize a greater case? Would that be a typical investigative process that would be followed?

**Peter Lambertucci:** There are a number of factors with interdependencies between investigations, but this also speaks to the interdependencies we enjoy with some of our municipal, provincial and federal law enforcement agencies. There are moments of deconfliction where the cadence of an investigation is paced to ensure that we are working hand in glove—

**Robert Morrissey:** A local junior officer could get a particular direction from a superior because of the superior having understanding from other forces that, for lack of a better term, now would not be the best time to move.

**Peter Lambertucci:** There would be governance over that.

**Robert Morrissey:** Good. It's the overall enforcement and the protection of that.

In the time I have left, you made reference to the reassignment of resources. How is the department resourced today for enforcement versus even five or six years ago? When I first came on this committee, the whole protection division was severely depleted for personnel. What's it like today?

**Peter Lambertucci:** We experienced a reduction in resources over prior years. We're currently resourced at a state and level where to bring support to the officers and capacity to our core priorities, we augment those resources. As a national institution, we have the luxury of being able to relocate officers for indeterminate periods of time.

• (1000)

**Robert Morrissey:** What is the number of personnel in the field today versus a number of years ago?

**Peter Lambertucci:** That is approximately 700 fishery officers.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Morrissey.

[Translation]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lambertucci, I'd like to request some documents. I can send you the request in writing.

I would like you to provide the committee with the following information for each of the last five years: the number of reports received, the total number of investigations conducted, the number of investigations that led to one or more sanctions, the number of investigations that led to the termination of proceedings without sanctions, the number of offences listed by species, and summaries of the most recent interventions.

In addition, I would like to have the operational guidelines related to lobster fishing for food, social, or ceremonial purposes, as well as the operational targets for the last five years.

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** I welcome those requests in writing. Much of that information can certainly be provided, and we will endeavour to return that to the committee as soon as possible.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Lambertucci.

I'd like to come back to my questions. You mentioned the enforcement continuum. As I understand it, when a fisheries officer arrives on the scene, he or she can do a number of different things.

Are you familiar with the directive that requires fisheries officers to hand out promotional materials, rather than a ticket, when they see someone committing an illegal act?

I am told that gifts are handed out. If someone has a female lobster carrying eggs, for example, they will be given a cap and even a waterproof bag.

Are you aware of this practice?

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** I am not aware of that practice.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** That directive was reportedly given to fisheries officers prior to the operation. When they approach an indigenous harvester who, while fishing for lobster for food, social or ritual purposes, is breaking the law, they are told to give them promotional items instead of enforcing the law.

We can check on that together, but that's how it was presented in the testimony.

Do you think that's a good way to enforce the law?

[English]

**Peter Lambertucci:** I don't want to hypothesize on what I'm not aware of, and I'm not prepared to render an opinion on that. It is something I will take away from your questioning and make inquiries about.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

Next, we're going to move to Mr. Gunn for five minutes.

**Aaron Gunn:** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Lambertucci, this committee has heard from numerous witnesses that there have been widespread instances of illegal fishing and trafficking of fish happening in plain sight and in full knowledge of local DFO enforcement officers. We have heard of fishermen being intimidated by certain armed groups out of areas DFO has open to fishing.

Do senior DFO officials know who is responsible in many of these instances, and are they making a conscious decision in certain circumstances not to enforce the law or not to enforce the Fisheries Act?

**Peter Lambertucci:** Whenever officer safety is involved, as I stated earlier, we work with our Public Safety counterparts to ensure that is rooted out and addressed in the most efficient and immediate of circumstances.

I apologize for some other elements of your question in terms of the trafficking of the species and it happening in plain sight. We engage in surveillance on land, on sea and in the air, and through that intelligence support and information, this is where I talk about re-deploying our resources on a priority basis to the most serious of those offences.

**Aaron Gunn:** There are no instances, to your knowledge, where political directives have been given to not enforce, in certain circumstances, certain aspects of the law or the Fisheries Act. Is that correct?

**Peter Lambertucci:** As I stated earlier, we enjoy law enforcement independence in terms of how we implement our enforcement and judgment in these instances. That independence is free of political interference.

• (1005)

**Aaron Gunn:** Does DFO make or has DFO ever made subjective decisions on whether or not to enforce the law or the Fisheries Act or to conduct an investigation based on the ethnicity of the offender?

**Peter Lambertucci:** Unauthorized is unauthorized. There are instances where we are preserving rights-based fishing, and there are instances in industry where, if it's unauthorized, we enforce it. Where is it? I guess in terms of the other element of your question, we don't render opinion on when to enforce and not enforce.

**Aaron Gunn:** We've been inundated with testimony, as many of the other members of this committee have already mentioned, from witnesses who have said that there are gross violations happening in plain sight. Local DFO officers know that it is happening, want to do something about it and have testified to many of us privately that they are basically being told that they cannot enforce the Fisheries Act, cannot enforce certain laws. In many of these instances, it is because of the ethnicity of the offender. Have you come across that?

**Peter Lambertucci:** No, I have not.

**Aaron Gunn:** You've never come across that or heard about that happening?

**Peter Lambertucci:** Decisions on when we enforce and don't enforce or investigate and don't investigate are based on capacity and our ability to respond based on that capacity. We don't make that decision based on ethnicity. That is immaterial to how we approach an investigation or enforcement.

**Aaron Gunn:** Would you be interested in hearing testimony from frontline DFO officers, if that contradicted what you just said—if something is happening on the front lines that's not making its way back up to you?

**Peter Lambertucci:** As I stated earlier, if the committee is inviting fishery officers to present for various in camera sessions, that testimony would be welcome.

**Aaron Gunn:** Mr. Burns, or whoever is best suited to answer this question, in my riding there are thousands of people who derive their livelihood from the aquaculture industry. This is an industry that this government—throughout this department—has promised to transition out, in contradiction to their own science conducted by DFO. This was a plan that was promised years ago. Nothing has been presented to the industry.

I'm not as concerned about the individual companies, but what would you say to the thousands of people who, both directly and indirectly, derive their livelihood from it, whose lives have been put into turmoil? They don't know what this transition plan is. They haven't heard anything from this government. They've had to put off buying homes. They've had to put off making key life decisions. They don't know where they might be living in a couple of years. Where is this transition plan, and what is it going to include? What would you say to all of these people and young families whose lives have been compounded by this uncertainty?

**Adam Burns:** I'll pass it to Kate Ladell.

**Kate Ladell (Director General, Ecosystems Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** I understand there has been quite a lot of interaction on the transition plan. The interdepartmental task force, which is led by ISED, convened over 120 meetings and round tables and received written submissions to inform the Government of Canada on options for potential measures to support the transition. We are currently reviewing all of the different perspectives and considering how we can best move sustainable aquaculture forward in British Columbia.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Gunn.

Next, we're going to go to Mr. Klassen for five minutes.

**Ernie Klassen:** Thank you very much to all of the witnesses appearing here.

Mr. Burns, and possibly Mr. Lambertucci as well, given that the Coast Guard is no longer working within this industry, what kind of an impact do you see that having on enforcement in the waters?

**Peter Lambertucci:** There is a very robust program and planning in place whereby our reliance on Canadian Coast Guard platforms continues to exist as it has existed historically. That is an ongoing relationship that we will be maintaining into the foreseeable future. Not only is that platform sharing something that we rely on, but that interdependency with the Canadian Coast Guard is also extremely material to the effectiveness of C and P.

**Ernie Klassen:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ladell, could you talk to us a bit about ensuring that habitat protection measures are enforced consistently across the regions?

**Kate Ladell:** I can speak to consistency. In terms of the enforcement component of that, I would turn to my colleague, Mr. Lambertucci.

Certainly, with respect to improving consistency and coherence in the implementation and management of the habitat provisions, that's something that we in the department are working very coherently on right now to ensure that there is that coherent implementation of the fish and fish habitat protection provisions.

With respect to the enforcement of those, that would fall to my colleague's area of responsibility.

• (1010)

**Ernie Klassen:** Okay, thank you.

I would ask Mr. Lambertucci about enforcement in that area.

**Peter Lambertucci:** Habitat protection is an essential part of what we do in the Fisheries Act, and we do allocate a tremendous number of resource and resource hours to inspecting, patrolling and enforcing that habitat protection.

**Ernie Klassen:** Thank you.

There has been a lot of innuendo around DFO officers not performing their duties. I'm happy to hear that there have been a lot of opportunities for the public to see that there is more enforcement happening right now.

What actions would you say have been taken over the last year to address some of the concerns for officers on the ground?

**Peter Lambertucci:** The actions have been substantial in terms of making sure we revisit what our core priorities are and allocating resources to those core priorities. Officer safety and wellness is another function of how we augment those core priorities.

With my leadership team, I have the ability to redeploy resources and augment teams through priority fisheries to ensure that there are a number of fishery officers available over and above what may be allocated to a particular region. We do move resources between provinces to do that.

**Ernie Klassen:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Burns, what progress has been made on integrating indigenous knowledge and co-management into regulatory decisions?

**Adam Burns:** Certainly, the department works closely with indigenous rights holders and indigenous communities with interests in various fisheries. We seek their traditional knowledge through a variety of mechanisms, including through advisory committees but also through bilateral engagement with them in order to ensure that we and the decision-makers benefit from that traditional knowledge.

**Ernie Klassen:** Mr. Vigneault, could you talk a bit about indigenous involvement in the areas that you work within?

**Bernard Vigneault:** In addition to the advisory process, through the full continuum of delivery of science, we engage indigenous people to gain insights from indigenous knowledge. Some collaborative projects include the designs of the monitoring program and having indigenous knowledge-holders invited to our pre-review science advice committees, where they provide insight into the interpretation of data and contribute to the provision of science advice in support of decision-making.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Klassen.

Just owing to our later start time, I'm going to put in an abridged third round of questioning. We'll have two minutes each for the Conservatives and Liberals and then a minute and a half for the Bloc.

With that, we'll go to Mr. Arnold for two minutes.

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

Mr. Lambertucci, could you provide the committee in writing with how many C and P personnel the department has had over the last 10 years and how many C and P frontline officers there were by year over the past decade?

My next question is for Mr. Burns.

Mr. Burns, we've heard of hardship on both coasts in testimony here, regarding fleet separation not being enforced on the east coast and beneficial ownership not being addressed on the west coast. These are not new problems. The committee studied this in 2019, six years ago, and these issues were coming up. We heard from Mr. German this morning that the money-laundering issue was apparent in this area.

You spoke about that this morning, but your words were extremely vague, and, I guess, unaffirming to the people out there whose lives depend on this happening. What is being done, and how soon can they expect these issues to be addressed by your department?

• (1015)

**Adam Burns:** On the east coast, inshore licences are subject to the inshore regulations, which means that when we issue a licence, we turn our minds to whether or not that individual to whom the licence will be issued is eligible, pursuant to the inshore regulations. We do that through a variety of mechanisms. There are various triggers—

**Mel Arnold:** Why is it not being enforced? We hear a lot about work towards compliance, but not enforcement. Why is that?

**Adam Burns:** A number of licences have been put under review since the regulations were brought into effect. The way the regulations are crafted is meant to bring people into compliance with the regulations. It is not seeking to take away the livelihood from individual licence-holders, but rather to ensure that they are compliant with the regulations so that they have—

**Mel Arnold:** It's not the fishermen, the actual “on paper” holders of the licence, but the people over them who are holding the financial noose on them, who need to be addressed. We've heard that. You've heard that. You know it. Why isn't it being addressed?

**Adam Burns:** The department has done a lot of work over the last number of years in terms of access to capital and trying to enable legitimate mechanisms for access to capital in order for harvesters to acquire their access, but, certainly, we look at each and every transaction that is brought to us, in terms of transfers in particular, in order to ensure that those are compliant. In cases in which they're not, we do not issue the transfer, and we work with the harvester to ensure that they are not subject to control that is contrary to the regulations.

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

Next, we go to Mr. Morrissey for two minutes.

**Robert Morrissey:** Thank you, Chair.

My question is for Mr. Lambertucci. The Government of Nova Scotia recently announced an establishment of a “protection branch”, as I'll call it, to enforce more areas that come under provincial jurisdiction. Is this a step in the right direction to curb a lot of the cash in illegal sales that we keep hearing about?

**Peter Lambertucci:** I am looking forward with enthusiasm to working with this new compliance unit that's been stood up to help us on those interdependencies between the federal and provincial responsibilities.

**Robert Morrissey:** Good. So am I, and I wish other provinces would follow suit.

Because fishers, especially lobster harvesters, have the ability to store their catch in holding facilities before they sell it, how does this impact the department's ability to enforce the movement of lobster or validate where it's coming from at any given time? Could you give a brief opinion on this? Does it negatively impact your ability to enforce?

**Peter Lambertucci:** I can't submit an opinion, but I can say, factually, that we inspect a number of holding facilities throughout the season and off-season to monitor—

**Robert Morrissey:** These are fisher-owned, not the buyers. The fishers can hold their own before they move it to a buyer. Some people feel that impacts the ability of the department to enforce where that product is coming from.

**Peter Lambertucci:** We do monitor, but we do not enforce. You are correct.

**Robert Morrissey:** Does it impact your ability to enforce illegal activity, then?

**Peter Lambertucci:** To some degree, it does, yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Morrissey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for one minute and a half.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you.

Mr. Vigneault, in the report aired on the program *Enquête*, certain facts were presented based on an internal document from Fisheries and Oceans Canada. It was alleged that up to one third of the lobster stock had been illegally removed from the sea.

How does that situation affect your department, given that you are responsible for monitoring ecosystem management and ensuring that harvesting efforts are in keeping with existing resources?

**Bernard Vigneault:** Thank you very much for the question.

Obviously, this is a concern in terms of resource conservation. From a scientific standpoint, lobster stocks in the Gulf of St. Lawrence region are assessed based on landings. If there was an impact on stock stability or a major change in this regard due to illegal fishing, we would see it over time, based on our annual scientific assessments and the landing index.

Currently, stocks are healthy. They are in what we call the “healthy zone”, according to the precautionary approach. Scientifically speaking, we can say that there is no evidence of any impact on the lobster population. We can say so based on landings.

Yes, it is a concern, but we will be able to monitor it over time based on our scientific assessments.

• (1020)

**Alexis Deschênes:** Am I right in saying that, in essence, there is a risk of overfishing?

**Bernard Vigneault:** In all cases, we hope to have the best possible data on actual landings. Based on that data, we produce a scientific opinion and make decisions about the fisheries.

If there are unreported landings, there will indeed be an impact on the state of the lobster population.

From a scientific standpoint, if natural mortality or unreported landings are constant over time, it presents less of a problem, since scientific assessments are conducted annually and we can make comparisons.

However, if there were a significant increase in unreported landings, it could have an impact on the lobster population. It would take a few years before we saw that signal in the scientific assessments.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you, Mr. Vigneault.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deschênes.

That concludes the second hour with this panel and our meeting today.

[*English*]

I want to thank all our witnesses for being here in person. We may be seeing you again on December 4, when we have the minister appearing.

Our next meeting is going to be on Tuesday, November 25. We're going to have a briefing from the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development on his recent report, entitled "Establishing Marine Protected Areas", as well as from the three federal organizations that were audited.

With that, I'm going to adjourn today's meeting.

Mr. Small.

**Clifford Small:** Mr. Chair, have you had any indication yet as to when the minister is going to appear here on the estimates?

**The Chair:** Yes, I just mentioned that earlier. It is on December 4. The minister will be appearing then.

That's great. With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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