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# Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 014**

Tuesday, November 25, 2025

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Chair: Patrick Weiler





## Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Tuesday, November 25, 2025

• (1530)

[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 14 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

[English]

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting to hear from the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development on its report entitled "Establishing Marine Protected Areas" and to hear from the three audited organizations in this report.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Pursuant to the Standing Orders, members are attending in person and 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 and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, but particularly the interpreters. You'll also notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

Pursuant to the routine motions, I'd like to advise committee members that all witnesses appearing virtually today have successfully conducted their required technical testing.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefits 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]

For interpretation, those on Zoom have a choice at the bottom of the screen: floor, English or French. 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.

[Translation]

Members in the room who wish to speak, please raise your hand. Members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience.

[English]

With that, I would like to welcome our witnesses. I won't name all 11 officials with their titles, but I would like to start by welcoming Jerry V. DeMarco, commissioner of the environment and sustainable development since 2021; and the other officials from the Office of the Auditor General.

We also have officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, from the Department of the Environment and Climate Change, and from the Parks Canada Agency.

[Translation]

As we did during the commissioner's last appearance, in February 2024, we will begin with opening remarks from each organization, which will be five minutes each. We will start with Mr. DeMarco.

Mr. DeMarco, the floor is yours.

**Jerry V. DeMarco (Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Office of the Auditor General):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to be here to discuss my report on establishing marine protected areas, which was tabled in Parliament on November 6.

I would like to acknowledge that this hearing is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I am accompanied by Susan Gomez, Jessica Johnston and Carey Agnew.

[English]

The report was one of three related audits on protected areas that were tabled together. The other two were on establishing terrestrial protected areas and on federal indigenous management of protected areas, including marine areas.

In our audit on establishing marine and coastal protected areas, we looked at whether Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada were on track to establish protected and conserved areas covering 25% of Canada's marine and coastal ecosystems by 2025. We also examined whether these organizations were planning to protect and conserve areas covering 30% of marine and coastal ecosystems by 2030, ensuring that these areas are ecologically representative and important for biodiversity and ecosystem health.

We concluded that Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada were not on track to meet the 2025 target of 25%. During the audit period, the marine and coastal areas that were protected and conserved increased from 12.5% to 15.5%.

While this is far from the target of 25% by the end of this year, it is still a significant improvement from the less than 1% that was protected and conserved as of 2015.

• (1535)

[Translation]

We found that the three organizations had not developed a plan to meet the 2030 target of establishing a network to cover 30% of marine and coastal areas, including zones important to biodiversity and ecosystem health. Although the audit found that the three organizations had completed some important steps, such as identifying candidate areas for protection, they had not updated their collaborative framework to achieve the quantitative and qualitative elements of the 2030 target. This includes areas being well connected and representative of ecological diversity.

We also found that the three organizations had not developed clear guidance to implement the federal marine protection standard. This standard is intended to prohibit harmful activities in marine protected areas, such as oil and gas exploration, mining and bottom trawling.

Even though Canada is not on track to meet the 2025 target, the organizations made progress during the audit period. They undertook foundational work to protect and conserve marine and coastal areas, including identifying areas of interest for protection, and undertaking feasibility assessments.

[English]

At a time when the federal government is seeking to expedite approvals for major projects of national importance, providing certainty about which areas are protected and conserved will support informed decision-making.

Marine and coastal areas play a critical role in addressing the biodiversity and climate crises. The federal government must continue building on the actions taken to date if it is to complete a well-connected and representative network that protects and con-

serves 30% of marine and coastal areas by 2030, even if it misses the 2025 target.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening statement. We would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Commissioner DeMarco.

With that, we're going to Kathy Graham, director general of marine planning and conservation at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

You have the floor for five minutes or less.

**Kathy Graham (Director General, Marine Planning and Conservation, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for inviting me to speak today.

I would also like to acknowledge that I'm speaking from the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe.

Commissioner DeMarco, thank you for presenting the audit findings. DFO agrees with the recommendations and recognizes their role in strengthening the department's work and accountability.

DFO is committed to conserving and protecting Canada's oceans through partnerships with indigenous people, provinces and territories supported by robust science and thorough consultations with stakeholders, including industry. We continue to consider best available science and knowledge, carefully assess economic impacts and ensure thoughtful and inclusive decision-making, which takes time.

Canada's oceans are vital for our economy and livelihoods, contributing nearly \$52 billion in GDP and sustaining 420,000 jobs, including more than 66,000 in the seafood industry. Oceans are also critical in our efforts to fight climate change and biodiversity loss.

Marine protected and conserved areas help protect species, habitats and ecosystems that support our sustainable fishing industry. They also provide social, cultural and economic benefits and enhance recreation, tourism and research opportunities. Investing in marine conservation helps keep the ocean healthy, supports sustainable growth in the ocean industries and ensures these benefits last for future generations.

Since 2015, Canada has advanced from conserving only 1% of marine and coastal areas to over 15%. This remarkable achievement is based on collaboration, partnerships and significant engagement with stakeholders as we design site-specific marine protected areas that minimize impact.

Canada has also signed the Great Bear Sea and SINAA historic agreements to support large-scale, indigenous-led conservation projects using an innovative financial model known as project finance for permanence, PFP. These agreements leverage government and private funding to combine conservation with support for local economies, forecasting significant dividends.

The Great Bear Sea PFP off the coast of B.C. is expected to create 3,000 jobs and 200 businesses and conserve highly valuable and biologically productive marine areas. The SINAA PFP in the Qikiqtani Region of Nunavut will support Inuit-led conservation and regional governance, including much-needed community infrastructure, projecting 50 new jobs with potential areas that anticipate to contribute up to 3.68% towards marine conservation targets.

Additional investments through grants and contributions have resulted in more than 6,700 collaborative partnerships, over 1,700 jobs, nearly 18,000 people trained and more than 1,200 new research and technical products developed. These partnerships provide a strong foundation for achieving 30% by 2030.

In addition, there are other benefits that are being delivered through investments in marine protected and conserved areas. As an example, 10 years in, monitoring Eastport marine protected area in Newfoundland showed larger lobsters and more egg-bearing females inside the MPA, with benefits extending to the surrounding ecosystem.

The Banc-des-Américains marine protected area in Quebec supports whale-watching activities and helps promote tourism and recreation in the region.

The SGáan Kínghlas-Bowie Seamount marine protected area in B.C. spurred deep-sea research innovations such as remote-operated vehicles, multi-beam sonar, eDNA sampling and livestreamed expeditions.

These many benefits are tied to Canada's approach, which is based on the three guiding principles of science-based decision-making: consideration of indigenous knowledge; transparency and meaningful consultation with partners and stakeholders; and advancing reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

We are recognized internationally for our thoughtful, collaborative approach and our innovation. We use peer-reviewed science evidence to identify sites that warrant protection. We prioritize areas that are important for biodiversity, like, for example, areas that are home to species at risk, glass sponge reefs and spawning or nursery grounds, which contribute to a sustainable fishery.

DFO also invests heavily in collaborative science, funding hundreds of projects annually. Many involve commercial fishers providing real-time data. We use advanced geospatial tools to ensure decisions are data-driven, and we continue to work with industry to improve our baseline data to address any gaps.

Canada's protected and conserved areas aim to maximize conservation outcomes while minimizing economic impacts. We consult early and extensively with industry to assess potential socio-economic impacts and often adjust site design and boundaries. Transparency and meaningful consultation are at the heart of our work. We strive for a no-surprise approach, sharing information about

proposed sites early and providing opportunities for input at every step in the process.

In the past five years, we've conducted more than 6,800 engagement meetings Canada-wide, which included large-scale consultations on both the west and east coasts of our country. We also participate in industry-led initiatives, like the coastal MPA blueprint in the Maritimes, because there is tremendous value in collaborating with the fishing industry.

● (1540)

Partnerships with indigenous people are central to our approach. Co-management agreements are in place for many protected and conserved areas. We remain committed to supporting lasting partnerships through indigenous-led conservation.

I trust this reflects the work we are undertaking to meet the commitment of this government. Canadians can be confident that marine conservation is being pursued in a way that delivers lasting ecological outcomes.

Thank you, Chair.

I am open to questions.

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

Next we're going to go to Tara Shannon, the assistant deputy minister of the Canadian wildlife service at Environment and Climate Change Canada.

You'll have the floor for five minutes.

**Tara Shannon (Assistant Deputy Minister, Canadian Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

At the Canadian wildlife service, our mission is to protect wildlife and the places they call home, especially migratory birds and species at risk. Canada's oceans and coasts are vital to that work. They support biodiversity, help fight climate change and connect communities across the country.

We have reviewed the commissioner's recent audit on marine protected areas and are working closely with Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada to respond. We are improving how we apply federal protection standards and how we share information with Canadians.

Right now, the Canadian wildlife service manages 55 marine sites, including the Scott Islands off Vancouver Island, Canada's first fully marine national wildlife area. It protects nesting grounds for 40% of British Columbia's seabirds. We are also exploring a new protected area in Haida Gwaii, an ecologically rich and culturally significant place, working closely with the Haida Nation council every step of the way.

Our priority is to protect nature, build partnerships and make sure that Canadians can see and understand the progress we're making.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to any questions.

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

Next we're going to go to David Millar, vice-president of protected areas establishment and conservation at Parks Canada.

Mr. Millar, you have the floor for five minutes.

• (1545)

**David Millar (Vice-President, Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation, Parks Canada Agency):** Thank you for the invitation to join you today. It's a pleasure to join the members to discuss Parks Canada's national marine conservation areas.

I'd also like to begin by acknowledging that we're meeting on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[*Translation*]

Parks Canada was pleased to participate in the marine protected areas audit. The commissioner's findings will help guide us as we establish new protected areas and strengthen the management of existing ones. We agree with the recommendations and will be working with our colleagues to implement them.

National marine conservation areas play a vital role in conserving biodiversity, protecting culturally significant places and supporting the long-term sustainability of the ecosystems that coastal communities, industries and future generations rely on. They can also create opportunities for tourism and recreation and bring new investment and economic activity to coastal communities.

[*English*]

As impacts from climate change grow, the need for well-designed, effective marine protected areas has never been greater. These areas host natural features that help sustain resilient ecosystems.

Creating these areas is not something government can or should do alone. Success depends on meaningful collaboration. Working hand in hand with indigenous peoples, provinces and territories, industry partners, local communities and other stakeholders is essential to ensuring these national marine conservation areas, NMCAs, are both ecologically strong and socially viable.

By bringing these perspectives together early and consistently, we can design national marine conservation areas that achieve both conservation and socio-economic benefits for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

We acknowledge that working in this way takes time, but it is the right way to proceed. The commissioner noted in their report on federal-indigenous management of protected areas that if we are to achieve our goal of building a resilient network of protected areas that covers 30% of Canada by 2030, we will need to continue to prioritize the co-operative management of protected areas in keeping with the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Parks Canada is committed to doing so.

[*English*]

Ultimately, national marine conservation areas are about creating a future where healthy oceans create the conditions for both thriving ecosystems and vibrant indigenous and local communities. That future is only possible when all partners sit at the table, shape the vision and help to turn it into reality.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

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

That concludes our opening remarks. With that, we're going to move right into the first round of questioning, the six-minute round, starting with Mr. Small.

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

First of all, I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming out today for this meeting.

Ms. Graham, are you familiar with the St. Anns Bank marine protected area off Cape Breton?

**Kathy Graham:** Yes.

**Clifford Small:** Are you familiar with the promise that was made to halibut fishermen that they be allowed to continue fishing halibut in all of that area?

**Kathy Graham:** I'm not, sir.

**Clifford Small:** You're not familiar with the promise that was made to the fishing industry stakeholders?

**Kathy Graham:** I'm not familiar with that one specifically, no, sir.

**Clifford Small:** Mr. DeMarco, you're wondering what's slowing down these processes. Do you think that a fishing industry that was told that it would have 100% access for longlining halibut in a marine protected area only to find out that that's cut down to 50% when the reality comes...? What do you think that does for trust in the process from fishing industry and other marine stakeholders?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** I'm not familiar with the facts of that specific site, but I would like to comment on the general notion of proper consultation. To not only establish protected areas to meet these targets that we're talking about today but also sustain them in terms of community buy-in and industry buy-in, it is important to properly consult, as we noted in our report. To the extent that the three departments make that effort to achieve that buy-in, the more likely there will be support for the establishment of those areas and for sustaining those protected and conserved areas. I'm fully in support of proper consultation, not only for the short-term gain of establishing the protected areas but also for sustaining them with community support.

• (1550)

**Clifford Small:** Thank you.

In terms of fishing activity in marine protected areas, bottom-trawling gear is constantly cited as fishing equipment to be banned. However, hook and line is banned in the Funk Island Deep marine protected area and in the Hawke Channel.

Ms. Graham, have you ever had a baited cod or halibut hook in your hand?

**Kathy Graham:** I have not.

**Clifford Small:** So, what are you protecting the bottom from? You know, this is a static closure. Oceans have currents; fish have tails. Basically, a baited hook.... You'd have to try real hard to stick that hook in your finger. You'd have to chew on it like a fish. So, why would you ban the most environmentally sensible fishing technology in the world from an area such as the Funk Island Deep, the Hawke Channel or St. Anns Bank?

**Kathy Graham:** Mr. Chair, when we decide and undertake to establish a marine protected area, tremendous effort is put into the design of that area, including understanding what the conservation objectives are that we are seeking to actually achieve. Based on those conservation objectives, all the human activities that are occurring within that area are put through a risk assessment to understand if the activities that are currently taking place in that area will pose a conservation risk. In the examples that are being raised, if those types of fishing gear have been deemed to pose a risk to that conservation objective, then the conservation measures are tailored to only limit the activities that pose the risk to the conservation objectives.

**Clifford Small:** Ms. Graham, under this Liberal government's 30 by 30 policy and this tremendous push to keep up with a numbers game.... Thirty is a number and 2030 is a number as well, so it's a numbers game. If you had to evaluate the trust from the fishing industry, from the oil and gas industry, from those who transit through certain areas of the ocean, what do you think the trust is in your process on a scale of zero to 10 right now?

**Kathy Graham:** I would say, Mr. Chair, that we've worked extensively with all of the—

**Clifford Small:** You must have a feel for it, Ms. Graham. You're dealing with the fishing industry stakeholders.

What's the trust level? Could you rate it from zero to 10?

**Kathy Graham:** Based on interactions we've had with all of the actors, there is a strong level of confidence and trust in terms of the work we're doing.

**Clifford Small:** Actors? I don't think fishermen are actors. They go to sea in Canada's most dangerous and deadly industry and their livelihoods are being stripped out from underneath their feet. To come to this committee today and have fishermen and the fishing industry stakeholders be termed "actors".... Do you know what? I think an "actor" might be something like the Atlantic Salmon Federation.

Are you familiar with—

**The Chair:** Mr. Small, we are over time here. There will be another opportunity to ask questions.

With that, I'm going to go to Mr. Klassen for six minutes.

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

Thanks to all the witnesses for appearing here today.

There is a lot of great information in these reports. I'm looking forward to—hopefully—meeting our targets in 2030.

This question is for Kathy Graham, please.

The report mentions the importance of "healthy oceans" and the risks of the "loss of biodiversity". Can you tell us some of the economic benefits that an area may see because of the creation of a marine protected area? You mentioned some numbers about what kinds of job creation we could be looking at.

**Kathy Graham:** Some of the economic benefits that we are starting to observe are, for example, as I referenced in the speech, with the lobster industry in the Eastport marine protected area.

We're also observing an increase in innovation in terms of some of the research and development that is happening with respect to the emergence of new technologies associated with, for example, the monitoring or remote sensing for marine protected areas. As well, there are new opportunities for job employment, associated with monitoring and sampling and those types of activities with respect to management in the marine protected areas.

• (1555)

**Ernie Klassen:** You also talked a bit about the west coast in particular and the numbers you referenced.

**Kathy Graham:** With respect to the project finance for permanence agreement that was signed with the Province of British Columbia and 17 first nations, as well as philanthropic organizations, the estimates are projecting the creation of approximately 3,000 jobs and the onset of approximately 200 businesses, in addition to actually achieving the conservation benefits.

**Ernie Klassen:** Thank you.

Mr. DeMarco, what is the process of creating an NMCA and does the consultation process exclude harvesters?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** I'll touch on that before turning it over to the departments that actually carry out that work.

Ideally, the consultation process for any marine protected or conserved area, including an NMCA, would include all affected communities and stakeholders.

I'll turn it over to the departments for more specifics on that.

**David Millar:** That's great. Thanks.

Certainly, for national marine conservation areas established by Parks Canada, there's an extensive consultation process. We typically undertake a feasibility study before moving towards the actual negotiation of the establishment of a national marine conservation area. That process, that feasibility study, is done in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including, of course, the fishing industry, as well as any other industries that may have an interest in the area. These include local communities, indigenous partners and municipal and provincial governments, etc.

It's a fairly extensive process. We often will establish advisory committees with impacted stakeholders and industries, as well as community meetings, direct engagement with industries and online engagement. We try to run as extensive a consultation process as we can to get all the feedback to inform the best decision.

**Ernie Klassen:** Thank you.

I'm going to come back to Mr. DeMarco one more time.

There's a lot of concern about the 30 by 30 target impacting the fishing industry, but Canada has the third ocean, the Arctic Ocean. How is DFO using that in relation to reaching our goal of 30 by 30?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Well, all three Canadian oceans are important from a conservation perspective. How is it using the Arctic Ocean in terms of contributing to the 30%? Of course, a good portion of the increase in protected areas, from 2015 to now, has included marine protected and conserved areas in a variety of regions, including the Arctic.

One, in particular, is significant in size. I can show you the largest one under consideration in exhibit 5. That one would contribute 5.6%, just on its own, so that would currently be the largest candidate site. It's quite advanced.

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

Mr. Millar, could you talk to us a little bit about how the consultation happened? Was there any push-back from the consultation with all the advisory committees with which you were meeting?

**David Millar:** You mean in general, or with respect to a specific area?

**Ernie Klassen:** I would mean in general.

**David Millar:** We always get a range of different views. We try to work with communities that want to work with us, and are enthusiastic about establishing a national marine conservation area. However, you know, we live in a diverse country, and there are always different perspectives. We try to listen to those perspectives to see if there are ways to accommodate the interests or to mitigate any concerns that exist.

Very often, we find, through conversations, that although there might initially be concerns, once we listen and look at ways to adapt to address those concerns, we find we can reach a place where most of the concerns can be addressed and where most stakeholders are comfortable.

Like I said, everyone is entitled to their own opinions. That's not to suggest that everyone is going to have the same view.

• (1600)

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

[*Translation*]

I will now give the floor to Mr. Deschênes for six minutes.

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

Good morning, everyone.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here.

My first question is for you, Mr. DeMarco.

In 2019, quite solemnly, the federal government announced its intention to protect 25% of ocean waters by 2025. Was there anything binding in that commitment? When we read the Oceans Act, we do not see anything about that. Is that formal statement binding in any way?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** In exhibit 1 of our report, we can see the progress made on the Government of Canada's commitments. First, the government has committed to a target of 10% by 2020. Then it committed to 25% by 2025 and 30% by 2030. The 2025 target was announced in the federal budget. It was a progression toward the Aichi targets.

**Alexis Deschênes:** My question is whether that objective was binding. Is there a legal penalty for non-compliance? Is the objective set out in legislation to force the government to achieve it?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** It is a target set by the government, but it is not enshrined in the Oceans Act or any other legislation.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Okay.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Even the 30% target is not set out in legislation.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you for your work. We can see that you have really taken the time to provide us with information that we would not have had without you.

We can also see that we are a long way off. We are at 15.5%, and we need to be at 25% by December. Your report says that your data is from March 2025. We can see that the government is making some efforts. It is moving at a snail's pace, but it is moving forward.

Is the picture today, in November 2025, different from what it was in March 2025?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** That is a question for the government departments. We had a limited amount of time to complete our audit, and we used the most recent figures available at that time. Has there been any progress since then? I do not know. Maybe the department officials know.

**Kathy Graham:** So far, there have been no changes in the data at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

**Alexis Deschênes:** No changes either at the Department of Environment.

Let us try to explain that to the citizens listening to us.

How do you explain that failure? Why was the 25% target missed?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** There is just 9.5% missing to the protected areas—

**Alexis Deschênes:** Okay, but why?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** —but that is too simple an answer.

The departments have invested a lot of time in consultations. I would be more concerned if we did not have exhibits 5 and 6, where we can see that they invested time in protected areas.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Exhibits 5 and 6 show that, even if we add everything up, we still do not reach 25%.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** If we add everything up, we reach about 9%, and that shows us the gap to be filled.

At the end of exhibit 5, we can see that two of the areas together represent 7.9% of the areas to be protected. A lot of areas will be considered as part of the pipeline process. If they meet the criteria, we will have a good chance of meeting the 2030 target. It is too late to meet the 2025 target, but it is possible to meet the 2030 target.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Talking about pipelines is a strange way to approach that topic, but I understand what you mean.

You expect the 30% protected areas target to be reached by 2030.

• (1605)

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes. If we want to get there, it is possible.

**Alexis Deschênes:** The reason why the 25% target has not been met is therefore a lack of political will. Is that correct?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** It is not that simple. If there were a lack of will, there would not be a lot of candidate areas in the pipeline construction process.

**Alexis Deschênes:** There may have been some political will, but it was not enough to achieve the target.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, perhaps. There is enough will to speed things up, but if we go too fast, it could have harmful effects on the stakeholder and the purchase price.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Are you talking about a stakeholder?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, I am talking about a stakeholder. If the process moves too quickly, it could affect them.

**Alexis Deschênes:** It is a bit upsetting, though. I was a legal aid lawyer representing individuals for 10 years. When they did not meet a target or received too much old age security, they were clawed back quite heavily by the federal government.

However, in this case, we are formally setting a target. Under the Oceans Act, the Minister of Fisheries is responsible for doing that. I understand that there was a bit of political will and that things were done. We cannot say that nothing has been done. However, there was a lack of political will. The minister did not give herself the means to achieve the target when hundreds of millions of dollars had been given to achieve it.

Do you agree with me on that?

**The Chair:** I am sorry, but your time is up.

Mr. DeMarco, you can provide an answer in writing or answer in the next round.

[English]

That completes our first round.

We're going to move into the second round, starting with Mr. Arnold for five minutes.

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

I think this is the first time in my 10 years on the committee that the witnesses have outnumbered the MPs. Thank you all for being here.

I'll start with Mr. DeMarco.

I know that your recent report on MPAs is not your first foray into the world of fisheries and oceans. Are you familiar with the Oceans Act and with the Canadian Environmental Protection Act?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes.

**Mel Arnold:** The reason I ask is that these two acts, and other federal laws and regulations, like the Fisheries Act, contain provisions that protect and conserve Canada's marine waters, ecosystems and coastal areas. Are you aware of this?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, I am.

**Mel Arnold:** Basically, 100% of Canada's marine waters, ecosystems and coastal areas are already protected by existing federal statutes and regulations. Would you agree with that statement?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** They are not protected in the sense of this report. There are some protections in those pieces of legislation but not to the standard that would qualify as a protected area across the entire waterscape.

**Mel Arnold:** There are some protections for 100% of Canada's waters. Is that correct?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, there are protections, for example, against depositing deleterious substances or harming fish habitat. Those apply across the board.

**Mel Arnold:** These are all protections in place to protect fisheries and the future of Canada's fisheries.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** I agree that those levels of protections are in place and are of general application, as opposed to site-specific application, like individual protected and conserved areas.

**Mel Arnold:** Your report defines protected areas as including “clearly defined geographical spaces, recognized, dedicated, and managed through legal or other effective means, to achieve...long-term protection...established under legislation.”

All of Canada's marine waters are defined geographical spaces, recognized, dedicated and managed through legal or effective means for other objectives, including long-term protection of all this and it's based on federal statutes.

Would it be fair to say that 100% of Canada's marine waters are already protected areas?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** The areas outside of the recognized, protected and conserved areas that are subject only to the laws of general application, like the Fisheries Act, for example, are not sufficiently protected to qualify for that definition under internationally recognized standards.

I see what you're getting at, though, in terms of the general language, which is that there is some degree of protection, but the level is not sufficient to qualify as a protected and conserved area, outside of the sites that we're talking about, which add up to the 15% right now.

• (1610)

**Mel Arnold:** The ever-increasing targets announced by the Liberal government are not establishing protection where there is no protection. The new targets are simply adding layers of prohibitions to meet international standards. Is that correct?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, a new protected area would add a higher level of protection within the boundaries of that protected area, as compared to the baseline level of general protection under the Fisheries Act, for example.

**Mel Arnold:** That level of protection is to meet international standards. Is that correct?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** In the example that I just gave, it's to meet international standards as well as the definitions in the various enabling statutes for those protected areas domestically, whether that's the marine conservation act, the Oceans Act and so on.

**Mel Arnold:** Mr. DeMarco, the Liberal government has increased marine conservation targets from 10% to 15% to 20% to 30%. The increases have been delivered with the government stating that establishing more MPAs will aid Canada in fighting climate change, which is an objective I believe all members agree with as being worthwhile.

How do MPAs help Canada fight climate change?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Any efforts to protect marine biodiversity help in what's called nature-based solutions to climate. If you have a healthy stock of aquatic life, it's storing carbon, in terms of its biomass. That is one example.

For example, fish, plankton and all of those aquatic organisms in a healthy ecosystem will be storing within their body mass large portions of carbon. They'll also be assisting in various natural cycles, like the carbon cycle as well.

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

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

**Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.):** Ms. Graham, I'm going to give you an opportunity because you used the word “actors” in the statement. I just want to clarify that it was nothing derogatory against any fishermen in the Newfoundland, Labrador or anywhere.

**Kathy Graham:** I appreciate that opportunity.

I should have referred to the fishing industry as our primary stakeholders.

**Paul Connors:** I'm going to stay with you for a second there now.

You mentioned in your opening remarks about 3,000 jobs and a number of new businesses. These are statistics that you have used or found from marine protected areas or conservation areas.

What is the feedback on, or have you done any research on, any economic loss from fishermen or fishers along those lines?

**Kathy Graham:** As part of the regulatory process in terms of establishing marine protected areas in Canada, there is a socio-economic analysis that's undertaken through the regulatory impact assessment statement, which is a publicly available document that is part of the regulatory packages that are published, both through Gazette I and also through Gazette II. And what we've learned is that in 10 of the 14 MPAs, we have found that there's little to no measurable economic impact on existing fisheries under the final boundaries once we have worked with stakeholders to establish them, following negotiations and many consultations with the industry.

**Paul Connors:** Some of the feedback I get from Newfoundland fishers, especially around the marine conservation area proposed for the south coast of Newfoundland but even for any marine protected areas that are being considered, is around the consultation process.

This question will be for Ms. Graham and Mr. Miller.

In the consultation process, I get fishers who say that they weren't consulted. How can we ensure that they are consulted? I heard Parks Canada say that they have a comprehensive consultation process, but how can we ensure this when I'm hearing that people are saying they don't feel like they're consulted?

• (1615)

**Kathy Graham:** Once an area is identified, the regulatory process goes through five phases. We do the preplanning to understand, for that site-specific location, what human activities are occurring there; to identify the stakeholders who have a vested interest so that we have a better understanding of who they are; and learn about the potential economic impacts.

We then undertake a feasibility assessment to understand the likelihood of success, the conservation objectives that are being sought and what economic activities may pose a risk to those conservation objectives.

As part of that regulatory development process where we're really trying to be very surgical in our intervention and understand the exact activities that do pose a risk to those conservation objectives, at the point we undertake a very thorough socio-economic analysis and conduct consultation with all those who are interested and invested in that, with a goal of eventually understanding the management protocols we'll have in place and a long-term management and monitoring of the site in the future.

Throughout that entire process, stakeholders and partners are engaged. We seek feedback and comments on the regulatory proposals, also through the formal consultation process, through the regulatory process itself. And, as I noted, we have undertaken approximately 6,800 activities across the country with a goal of reaching and engaging with all the stakeholders who have a vested interest in that specific site.

**Paul Connors:** Mr. Millar, do you have anything to add to that? You have about 20 to 30 seconds.

**David Millar:** I can just say briefly that to date we've had 14 different community meetings on the south coast. We've had 10 dedicated meetings with the fishing industry. We've invited the industry to set up a specific advisory committee with us. Having said that, it doesn't mean that every person knows about every meeting. We know we have to do more to get out there and make sure that everyone knows what's going on and that's certainly our intent, to make sure that everyone feels heard.

Like I said, we've encouraged the industry to work with us on setting up an advisory committee too and we'll certainly keep going out there and talking to people and using every communication method we have to make sure people know about the consultations and can get out and participate. We know people are busy too. They're working. They're out fishing. They can't always come to a meeting. We want to give people every opportunity they can to participate.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Deschênes, you have two and a half minutes.

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

Mr. DeMarco, I will give you the opportunity to answer my question about the lack of political will.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** You wanted to know if there were any consequences.

Neither the Oceans Act nor the Fisheries Act provide for consequences when the federal government fails to meet such a target in one of its policies. The consequences may be a rather negative audit report or a committee report whose conclusion I do not want to speculate on, but, from what I understand as a lawyer, there are no legal consequences for failing to meet the 2025 targets.

**Alexis Deschênes:** I am going to use my seconds to discuss with you another aspect that you raised, which is the concern about major nation-building projects.

When the government determines that a project is a nation-building one, it wants to move very quickly and disregard many laws. Just yesterday, we heard about an agreement with Alberta to build more pipelines. That will be confirmed on Thursday.

In the current context, and given the government's direction, what is your view on our ability to meet our marine protected area targets?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** As I said briefly in my presentation, completing the map of protected marine and terrestrial areas will give decision-makers certainty. I think it is possible to do both things at the same time: approve new projects on the one hand, and create and establish new protected and conserved areas on the other.

Completing the map will provide a lot more certainty and perhaps cool down the debate on each project.

• (1620)

**Alexis Deschênes:** It is possible, but based on your understanding of Bill C-5, isn't it possible that, if a project is considered a nation-building one, marine protected areas will be ignored because the government will decide that it is going to carry out the project anyway?

**The Chair:** I am sorry, but I have to cut you off again. The time is up.

If the witness does not have time to answer in the next round, he may be able to answer you in writing.

[English]

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

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

The questions are for Ms. Graham.

Has the department done a study of the economic and social impacts of the marine area closures or underwater parks on fishermen and their families?

**Kathy Graham:** Mr. Chair, we've done socio-economic assessment as areas are established.

**Aaron Gunn:** You're trying to meet a 30 by 30 arbitrary decision put out by the United Nations.

Has the department done an economic study of how many jobs will be lost from these marine area closures that have to be created to meet that number?

**Kathy Graham:** As part of our site establishment process, once we understand what conservation measures will be put in place, we will do that socio-economic analysis to generally understand—

**Aaron Gunn:** You are putting forward a policy that has the potential to cripple an entire industry before doing a socio-economic assessment of how many jobs will be lost? Is that correct?

**Kathy Graham:** We're bound to follow the regulatory development process, which requires that at the drafting stage we develop a regulatory impact assessment, which is meant to understand what the potential socio-economic impacts will be.

**Aaron Gunn:** You don't know how many jobs will be lost.

Has the department done a study of the social impacts on families and coastal communities of jobs that will definitely be lost as a result of marine area closures and underwater parks?

**Kathy Graham:** We have not but we do work very closely with industry—

**Aaron Gunn:** That's fine.

Has the department done a study on the impacts to Canada's food security as a result of these jobs being lost as a result of these marine area closures?

**Kathy Graham:** The work that we do in terms of understanding those potential economic impacts is to work very closely with the fishing industry to try to minimize—

**Aaron Gunn:** My time is limited, sorry.

Earlier you said that you thought you had a strong relationship with the stakeholders in the fishing industry. With all due respect, I have many fishermen in my riding, and again, with all due respect, there is nothing but deep resentment for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. They feel like they were not consulted. You're sitting here and telling me that for this large plan that has the potential to close 30% of Canada's fishing grounds, 40% in the Northern Shelf bioregion, you don't even know how many jobs are going to be lost. You don't even know what's going to happen to the coastal communities like Port Hardy, Prince Rupert and Campbell River that rely on these industries. You don't even have a plan.

What would you say to the fishermen and their families whose ability to put food on their table to feed their families and whose ability to earn a livelihood has been put at risk by some arbitrary international ideological policy that this government's blindly pursuing without even looking at the economic consequences? What would you say to them if you were sitting down at a meeting in one of these coastal towns? They're mad and they're frustrated.

**Kathy Graham:** We work with the fishing industry. We really do strive to ensure that the impacts are as minimal as possible. We have, as a result, adjusted boundaries in a manner to actually minimize those socio-economic impacts.

**Aaron Gunn:** You say that, but in B.C. there's a group, which I'm sure you're familiar with, supported by fishermen and industry. That's the marine planning team. They came together, basically out of desperation, with a counter-proposal to meet your same closure requirements, but to reduce economic impacts by 77% and projected job losses by 80%. They actually did the work on what the job losses were going to be. That was back in 2020. They never heard

back. A couple of years later, you came back with another proposal that ignored everything they suggested and was actually even worse.

You say that you're listening to stakeholders, but it doesn't seem like you're listening to stakeholders if you're ignoring all the advice they put together. Why did you ignore everything the marine planning team put together?

**Kathy Graham:** In terms of what we have shared with the fishing industry with respect to the work the fishing industry has done on the west coast, we have reassured them that the work they have done will be really critical in understanding the socio-economic analysis that will be undertaken as we advance to specific sites.

**Aaron Gunn:** Okay. That's.... I mean, you guys obviously haven't done your work.

I want to switch now to Mr. Millar with Parks Canada.

You talked about working hand in hand with indigenous partners, but probably the two most active fishing first nations, two of the most successful, are the We Wai Kai and the Lax Kw'alaams. They think MPAs are a terrible idea. One of them is suing the federal government in court. Chief Ronnie Chickite of the We Wai Kai First Nation is probably the most successful commercial first nations fisherman on the entire coast. He thinks MPAs are unscientific, misguided, economically damaging and won't work.

How are you working hand in hand with first nations that oppose marine planning areas?

● (1625)

**David Millar:** Almost every area we're working to establish these days is done through some sort of co-operative management process with indigenous groups. We work in partnership to examine the proposals on the table, look at how they would meet shared interests and discuss co-operative governance mechanisms that can be put in place for making decisions. There are numerous examples of this across the country, such as Gwaii Haanas in B.C., which I'm sure your committee members would be familiar with, where we try to make sure we understand the interests.

As I mentioned earlier, there's always a diversity of perspectives. We don't expect that our indigenous partners will all speak with exactly the same voice, but we try to work with leadership, to consult with as many members as we can and to come up with solutions that we think meet everyone's interests. We do that really through a collaborative process. We're not deciding on behalf of first nations unilaterally.

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

Next we will go to Mr. Cormier for five minutes.

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

First, Ms. Graham, I just want to reiterate what my colleague Paul Connors said earlier. We all know what you meant by “actors”. The industry also knows what you meant by that. If someone deserves an Academy Award for this little stunt, for best actor in the room, I think we all know who it is.

Ms. Graham, fishermen are scared. Industry is scared about those MPAs. My Conservative colleague just said that it's going to be the apocalypse, with closings of everything. Can you clarify what it actually is? When we're doing an MPA, how are we going to go ahead with that? Does it mean that, for example, all fishing will be closed in every MPA or around it?

Can you also explain the process before we get to an MPA, for example, in a certain area? As you know, and as you probably heard during your consultation with the industry, some have legitimate questions, and they're scared, but I think they're not getting the full picture that it will not be a full closure in some parts, and if there is some closure, there's good reason for it. Can you expand on that, please?

**Kathy Graham:** Once an area is identified, as I was noting earlier, it's very important for us to understand what the conservation objectives are that are being sought. Based on that site-specific understanding, all the human activities that are occurring within that geographical area are assessed to understand what activities would need to be managed and where measures would be required. In Canada, because we take a site-specific, tailored approach to each of our areas, there are many marine protected areas where fishing actually continues. The ones that have been limited are those where there is a relationship and risk associated with the conservation objectives.

When we engage with stakeholders, our objective is to try to present the areas that we're considering for protection and then begin consultation to understand and to draw on the knowledge that the fishing industry has in order to adjust boundaries to achieve conservation objectives and limit potential economic impact. We've seen over time that this collaboration has led to really good results in terms of minimizing those impacts, thanks to the advice and insight we've gleaned from our consultations and work with the fishing industry.

**Serge Cormier:** Thank you very much for those clarifications.

[*Translation*]

Earlier, my Bloc Québécois colleague talked about political will and the fact that not enough effort had been made to achieve our

targets. It is all well and good to always criticize the policy, but at the end of the day, industry stakeholders are asking to be consulted and to be part of the solution to define new marine protected areas.

Based on your observations in the report, do you feel that there was more collaboration than usual with industry to come up with new measures for marine protected areas? As I said earlier, this would not only protect the livelihoods of these fishers, but also protect our oceans so that the fishery is sustainable for the next generation. Did you feel that the department was working more closely with the industry?

● (1630)

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** All three departments have said that they have invested time to work with stakeholders. Is it possible to have a consensus every time? No, because there are a variety of interests. Consultation is not a recipe for consensus, but it is better than nothing.

Given today's debate, a consensus would be much better. That is why, at the end of our report, we recommend improving public information on the size of no-take zones in sites, areas where all activities are prohibited and other areas where there may be sustainable fishing, for example. Better information for the public will improve the situation with stakeholders.

I am encouraged to see that all three departments have agreed with our recommendation to improve information sharing and the database on protected and conserved areas.

**Serge Cormier:** Thank you.

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

[*English*]

That completes our second round.

We're going to start the third round with Mr. Dawson for five minutes.

**Mike Dawson (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for Commissioner DeMarco and his colleagues at the Office of the Auditor General.

First and foremost, did your audit identify any unique challenges in the Atlantic region that may explain slower progress regarding the establishments of MPAs?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** I'm not aware of our going into that depth, region by region for unique challenges, so the answer would be no, we're not aware. It doesn't mean that they don't exist, but we did not become aware of them in the course of this audit.

**Mike Dawson:** How well did the federal organizations incorporate perspectives from locals that may have affected these areas such as but not, of course, limited to fishermen, community leaders and stakeholders?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** We have examples of the collaboration focusing mainly on this report and the sister report on co-operative management with indigenous communities, so we did touch on that.

The audit was not about the quality of the consultation process; it was evaluating their progress towards meeting the targets of 25 by 25 and 30 by 30. It is possible to do an audit of the quality of the consultation processes, but that was not the focus of this particular audit.

**Mike Dawson:** In your review, are New Brunswick's marine ecosystems adequately represented in the national conservation plan? If so, can you explain how that is?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** We touch on the qualitative elements in our report, including well-connected and ecological representation, which you're talking about; the importance of biodiversity and the importance to ecosystem functions in paragraph 31 and later in the report; and the need for an updated collaborative framework for achieving those qualitative as well as quantitative targets. We did not do an analysis region by region of how well they have met those qualitative targets. The departments may have done so.

I know that Parks Canada has done some analysis regarding ecological representation, so perhaps they can assist with answering that question.

• (1635)

**David Millar:** Our bioregions don't necessarily align with provincial boundaries, so I wouldn't necessarily be able to say how they align with New Brunswick specifically.

Lori, do you want to speak to how we're doing relative to the network plan and the bioregions?

**Lori Macadam (Director, National Marine Conservation Areas Establishment, Parks Canada Agency):** We are currently not working around New Brunswick. We are looking at completing the sites that are listed in exhibit 6. Once those sites have been deemed feasible or not feasible at this time, and the negotiations have been completed to establish these sites, then we would look at expanding to make sure that we have representativity in all of the 29 marine regions that Parks Canada has identified, and where we strive to have one representative site per those 29 marine regions.

**Mike Dawson:** Is there any reason why you're not looking at New Brunswick?

**Lori Macadam:** As part of the past Liberal government, we were given the mandate to look at 10 new national marine conservation areas, and we had 10 that we were looking at—actually, we had a few more than that. We're just trying to make sure that we're doing a very good job at the consultation, taking the time needed for the 10 that we originally started with, and then we would move on to complete the rest of the marine regions that we would like to complete, including in and around New Brunswick.

**Mike Dawson:** Thank you.

My next questions are for the representatives from DFO. What modelling or socio-economic studies has DFO conducted to understand how potential MPAs in the Gulf of St. Lawrence or the Bay of Fundy may affect New Brunswick's harvesting seasons, gear types and access to traditional fishing areas? In other words, how is

DFO balancing conservation planning with the economic stability of New Brunswick's coastal communities?

**Kathy Graham:** As mentioned previously, in terms of advancing our sites, we always consult in terms of understanding potential economic impacts with a goal of being able to work with the fishing industry and other actors in order to adjust boundaries where possible and necessary in an effort to ensure that those impacts are minimal.

**Mike Dawson:** Can the department confirm if zone 23D is still a disaster zone?

**Kathy Graham:** I'm unable to speak to that.

**Mike Dawson:** The CESD audit results for DFO show significant delays in creating new Oceans Act MPAs. Meanwhile, the Shediac Valley area of interest right off the coast of Miramichi—Grand Lake has been designated as such since 2011. Does DFO foresee establishing any MPA in or around New Brunswick waters before 2030?

**The Chair:** Give a brief answer, please.

**Kathy Graham:** We're currently working on the strategy for 2030. At this time, I don't have all the sites.

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

Next, we are going to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes.

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

This question is to either Mr. DeMarco or Ms. Graham.

Following up on an earlier question, I want to refer to the small marine protected area on the northern Newfoundland coast, which, I believe, is viewed as a lobster habitat area. Would the existing Fisheries Act or acts that cover the ocean provide the same protection in that area as a marine protected area does?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** I'll start, and then DFO may have something to add.

The baseline protections from the Fisheries Act relating to pollution and habitat loss—and regulation of fishing, for that matter—are not to the same degree of protection as a marine protected area, for example.

**Robert Morrissey:** Am I correct that the regulations in the Fisheries Act or the other acts would not have provided the protection for that vital lobster habitat area in that part of coastal Newfoundland?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Establishing a protected area under the definition in this report and under the definition of the domestic legislation and the IUCN categories internationally increases the level of protection to the point at which it would be recognized as a truly protected area. That's really the focus of this report.

**Robert Morrissey:** I agree, because that was set up, and it's protected and viewed as vital.

Ms. Graham, could you briefly tell the committee about a common misconception—or misinformation—that is spread around marine protected areas?

• (1640)

**Kathy Graham:** Mr. Chair, in my experience, what we're hearing the most is a perception that marine protected areas are no-take zones, which in fact is not the case in Canada. Fishing activities occur in all of our marine protected areas. The measures that are put in place within the marine protected areas are really meant to only apply to activities that pose a risk to the conservation objective that is sought for that marine protected area.

**Robert Morrissey:** If you really wanted to whip up public opinion against something with misinformation, you would use the notion that all fishing would be restricted, which is not the case.

**Kathy Graham:** Exactly. Marine protected areas are not no-take zones in Canada.

**Robert Morrissey:** We often hear questions coming from the official opposition about the economic impact of some of the moves made. We never hear questions coming from them about the economic impact of doing nothing. If there's one party in the House of Commons that is a climate change denier, it is the official opposition, the Conservative Party. We see time and again the consequences that climate change is having on the fisheries and the real livelihoods of fishers.

Could you give an opinion on that? Is there any analysis being done? We hear some caution being expressed on the warming waters of the gulf, all related to climate change, and the economic consequences of doing nothing.

**Kathy Graham:** With respect to the marine protected areas that are identified, they're really driven by science in terms of identifying features in the ocean that merit particular protection. Often, some of the features that are being protected have a relationship with sustainable fisheries—spawning areas, as an example. As a result of that, we are observing a relationship between areas that are protected and the benefits that can arise for the fishing industry. The example that was provided was with respect to Eastport, around the lobster fishery.

**Robert Morrissey:** That is highly guarded by the fishers in the area as critical to the growth of the lobster fishery in that area, correct?

**Kathy Graham:** That is my understanding in terms of the feedback we've received from that industry.

**Robert Morrissey:** Leaving the impression that fishers are opposed to marine protected areas really does a disservice to the overall fishery and the fact that today fishers more than ever recognize the status quo in a host of areas can no longer be the modus operandi, or certain fisheries will be wiped out. Is that fair?

**Kathy Graham:** Our objective through the collaboration is really to understand and work with the fishing industry to set boundaries that make sense in terms of minimizing the economic impacts but in a way that allows us to advance the conservation objectives

and protect the features of the marine protected area that merit that protection.

**Robert Morrissey:** There are only a few seconds left.

Thank you, Ms. Graham.

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

[*Translation*]

We will now go to Mr. Deschênes for two and a half minutes.

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

We have seen setbacks on the environment since the leadership of the Liberal Party changed. In two days, the government will announce the construction of a pipeline to the west coast, a step back on the carbon tax and a step back on incentives to buy vehicles.

What we are seeing today is this government's inability to meet its targets. Twenty-five per cent of the marine area was supposed to be protected by 2025, but we are not going to get there.

Ms. Graham, how do you explain this failure?

**Kathy Graham:** Our efforts to meet the 2025 interim target for the identification of areas of interest to be protected required a number of elements. First, it required a good understanding of the operating context in which we find ourselves in order to be able to collaborate, work and conduct the necessary consultation with stakeholders. It was also necessary to build trust with indigenous peoples, who are also often involved in consultations on protected areas.

As Mr. DeMarco mentioned, if the pace of consultations is too quick, that can sometimes affect trust. Sometimes, it is more important to take the time needed to ensure that collaboration and trust are established in order to obtain the support of the people involved when designating the location, the site.

• (1645)

**Alexis Deschênes:** When was the decision made to back away from meeting the target that was set in the 2019 throne speech?

**Kathy Graham:** I am not aware of any target being abandoned.

**Alexis Deschênes:** You just said that you had to take your time. You must have known, then, that you would not be able to meet your targets. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans at the time was ultimately responsible. When did you discuss the fact that you would not be able to make it and that you would rather take your time?

**Kathy Graham:** We have always made progress in our efforts to establish sites, as mentioned in the Auditor General's report. The progress we have made on site selection will position us to meet the 2030 targets.

**Alexis Deschênes:** At what point did you abandon the 2025 target?

**Kathy Graham:** I cannot tell you.

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

[*English*]

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

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

My questions are for Mr. Millar.

Is any of your framework for initiating national marine conservation areas built around the open standards for the practice of conservation?

**David Millar:** It's not, to my knowledge.

**Clifford Small:** Okay, thank you.

You were talking earlier about the extensive consultation process that Parks Canada carries out with communities and industry stakeholders.

I'm sure you are well aware of the south coast fjords. Were you expecting a question on that today?

**David Millar:** I thought it was possible that it would be brought up, for sure.

**Clifford Small:** Where's the largest population on the south coast of Newfoundland, other than the Burin Peninsula?

**David Millar:** I don't know the answer to that.

**Clifford Small:** That would be Coast of Bays, Hermitage, Harbour Breton, St. Alban's and Seal Cove and the list goes on.

Why were they consulted last?

**David Millar:** Lori, do you want to answer?

**Lori Macadam:** I was personally in St. Alban's right before the Newfoundland provincial election at the end of September.

**Clifford Small:** When were they informed of this national marine conservation area that was going to be put on their doorstep? What was the date?

**Lori Macadam:** We have been doing consultations for the south coast fjords since 2024. We have met with the community 16 times, including all of the ones you've mentioned. We had plans—

**Clifford Small:** Why would Burgeo be a signatory and Harbour Breton not be a signatory to the MOU?

**Lori Macadam:** That's a great question.

The proposal for the south coast fjords came to Parks Canada about 20 years ago. It was a proposal brought forward by the town of Burgeo. It was the first time that we had a town actually sign the memorandum of understanding. It was at the request of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, because the proposal had been brought forward by the town of Burgeo.

**Clifford Small:** The members of the fishing industry have lost trust in the conservation area process. I would rate their trust as zero or one out of 10, based on the ones I know, other than some associations that have their hand out for some Liberal government money. They're going to suck up a little bit, and do what they have to do to keep their gravy train rolling. However, the members have zero trust in this process.

There are foreign-funded activists, like ASF, Ecology Action Centre and CPAWS and the list goes on. They are mostly funded by American sources that are trying to shut down industry and livelihoods here in Canada and on the south coast fjords NMCA.

What regards were given to the livelihoods on the south coast in fish farming and the fishing industry?

**David Millar:** As Lori was saying, we've been working pretty closely to try to understand the dynamics there and people's interests. We've already taken steps to try to make sure that the NMCA will not have undue impacts on those industries—

• (1650)

**Clifford Small:** I have three ounces of bait on a fishhook, a 70-80 pound lobster trap and a crab trap. Which would have the most impact with the bottom?

**David Millar:** Obviously, gear that touches the bottom is more likely to have an impact on the bottom than gear that doesn't.

I would reiterate that an NMCA is not an area closed to fishing. Our expectation is that many of those fisheries that occur there will continue to occur there.

With regard to the fisheries that potentially would be incompatible, we've already worked to try to remove those areas from the study area so that we won't impact them. We'll continue to work with the industry to understand exactly where they're fishing and where their landings are coming from. We'll try to make sure that the national marine conservation area is designed in a way that does not inhibit people from continuing their livelihoods there.

**Clifford Small:** Then why was the fish farming and fishing industry the last to find out? Why didn't they find out right away? They didn't know until I told them, actually. It was pretty sneaky.

**David Millar:** We have worked with the aquaculture industry. We actually set up a committee with them to advise us on this. We already removed about 30% of the study area to accommodate aquaculture and fishing interests. We've assured them that we'll make sure that this is done in a way that doesn't interrupt their boat traffic.

**Clifford Small:** The ASF statement, that they're supporting this marine protected area in an effort to shut down fish farming.... They're funded by Pew Charitable Trust, the Hewlett and Packard foundations and whatnot.

**David Millar:** I don't speak on behalf—

**The Chair:** Mr. Small, I'm going to have to cut it off there; we're over time.

Mr. Millar, if you'd like to submit a response to that in writing, please do so.

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

**Ernie Klassen:** Thank you.

Mr. DeMarco, in your report "Establishing Marine Protected Areas", you state, "A network of marine protected and conserved areas of high ecological value would enable Canada to meet its commitments to the international community and contribute to its goal to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030."

What would be the implications of Canada failing to meet its commitments to the international community?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** It is good to go to the ultimate goal, rather than the specific target, sometimes. The ultimate goal is to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. A tool in the tool kit, one of many targets, is to use protected and conserved areas, but ultimately, 30% is not necessarily going to fit the bill if the rest of the 70% is managed unsustainably. We should keep our eyes on the final goal, which is to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and to actually sustain the economic activity in the oceans.

If you take a long-term view, then I think everyone will be in agreement if you can sustain the fish stocks and have an allowable harvest level that is sustainable in perpetuity, whether that's supported by some source areas in protected areas or not. Then we have a win-win situation. I think that really is the key to the buy-in on these sites—to take that long-term view and recognize that a protected area can help sustain biodiversity, help it recover, halt and reverse biodiversity loss, and also sustain the economic and social fabric of the communities nearby by ensuring that the fish stocks are healthy enough to sustain economic activity and the livelihoods of those who rely on them.

That long-term view, which is the cornerstone of sustainability—socio-economic and environmental.... Looking at all those things together, I think everyone would agree that that's something that we should strive for. Protected areas are a component of that, but they won't halt and reverse biodiversity loss on their own. It requires a sustainable view across the entire waterscape or landscape, depending on where you're talking about.

**Ernie Klassen:** Perhaps Ms. Graham could answer this one.

Since we haven't met or aren't able to meet 2025 goals, how are we going to shift in order to make sure that we do reach the goals by 2030?

**Kathy Graham:** The effort that we've deployed thus far to advance the interim target of 2025 has really positioned us well to be able to make the 2030 target. The effort that we've put into identifying areas where we have partners who are engaged and where we're collaborating very closely with stakeholders to understand the potential economic impacts, is allowing us to advance and have a really strong foundation to move forward towards the 2030 target.

• (1655)

**Ernie Klassen:** We're pretty confident that we'll be able to achieve the 2030 goals.

Are there any MPAs where the fishing industry would not be affected at all?

**Kathy Graham:** Currently, we have approximately 10 out of 14 MPAs that were found to have little to no measurable economic impact on existing fisheries under the final boundaries that were set as part of the site establishment process.

**Ernie Klassen:** Would first nations communities be included in those numbers?

**Kathy Graham:** Yes.

**Ernie Klassen:** What would be the worst-case scenario we would see on the west coast for the salmon fishing industry?

**Kathy Graham:** Unfortunately, I don't have that information unless my colleague, Tracey Sandgathe, has that.

**Tracey Sandgathe (Regional Director, Ecosystems Management Branch, Pacific Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** I wouldn't consider focusing on the worst-case scenario because we do—like Kathy has mentioned before—our best to reduce the impact of marine protection on fishing, on harvesting. As we move through the progression of establishing sites, it's best to look at the sites we've already established.

On the west coast, we have three marine protected areas that are established. There's some level of fishing in each of those marine protected areas. It really depends on the conservation objectives we are trying to preserve. Again, we tailor the activities or the restriction of activities based on what we're trying to protect.

Going forward, we will do the same thing. We will look again at the objectives for each of the areas of interest we plan to pursue and work with harvesters and all others to reduce the impact to those activities while still meeting our conservation objectives.

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

That completes our third round.

Moving into the fourth round here, we'll hand the floor to Mr. Arnold for five minutes.

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

I'll go back to Mr. DeMarco and pick up where we left off. The government is stating that establishing more MPAs will aid Canada in fighting climate change. I agree that climate change is an issue, and we all need to do our part in fighting climate change. Is there a way of measuring how creating MPAs will address climate change? How will that be verified?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** Scientifically, is there a way of measuring the contribution?

**Mel Arnold:** I think it needs to be scientifically. It can't be ideologically.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** This isn't something in the audit, but from a conservation perspective, one could measure the amount of carbon being sequestered by the living organisms in a protected area and compare it to a non-protected area and see the incremental difference. That would be one method.

**Mel Arnold:** You can't restrict organisms to stay within artificial boundaries drawn on a map. They move. We've heard at this committee how species move due to water temperature changes and so on that could be affected by climate change. How can it be measured and verified scientifically?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** I was just giving an example of a comparison that could be made, but there are a lot of variables at stake, as you've mentioned, in terms of species moving.

**Mel Arnold:** Basically, it would be pretty tough to verify.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** It would be tough to verify with precision—

**Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** —but there is no doubt that biomass stores carbon.

**Mel Arnold:** I want to switch now to Ms. Graham.

In your opening remarks, I noted that you did not mention the economic impact or benefits to fisheries nor the communities that depend on them. You've been questioned on that by my colleague, Mr. Gunn.

When the fishers who could be so incredibly impacted by the Northern Shelf bioregion plan submitted their marine planning suggestion, they felt and still feel absolutely betrayed by the department, because the department simply plans to impose restrictions on the areas those fishers identified as the most productive. Why?

• (1700)

**Kathy Graham:** In terms of the Northern Shelf bioregion and the marine protected areas that are being forecasted as sites that could potentially advance towards a 2030 target, the socio-economic analysis happens as part of the effort to better understand the measures that will be put in place to quantify, at that moment, what we anticipate those economic impacts to be.

We put forward a plan. To date, all of the boundaries of our 14 established marine protected areas have changed as a result of the consultations we've had with the fishing industry. We have an example of the Homayno marine refuge, where we changed the boundary following consultation with the fishing industry. That allowed us to reduce potential losses by approximately 20 tonnes. That was the result of a good exchange and good collaboration with the fishing industry, helping us understand—

**Mel Arnold:** Are you attempting to reassure those harvesters who have identified how significantly and negatively they would be impacted that their input might be heard?

**Kathy Graham:** Consultations that we undertake are genuinely meant to better understand the site-specific criteria or conditions in an effort to adjust boundaries to genuinely minimize economic impact.

**Mel Arnold:** That certainly doesn't sound overly reassuring to me, and it probably doesn't to them.

I don't know who might be able to answer this. What are the costs of marine protected areas to non-marine provinces?

**Tara Shannon:** I don't know. It's not something we have measured.

**Mel Arnold:** What are the benefits of marine protected areas to those parts of Canada?

**Tara Shannon:** I don't know if my colleagues from Fisheries and Oceans or from Parks Canada want to respond. From the perspective of Environment and Climate Change Canada, the benefits go back to that headline indicator in terms of trying to address biodiversity loss.

**Mel Arnold:** Meeting international targets....

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but we're just going to have a quick answer, and then we're going to move on to the next questioner.

**Tara Shannon:** From the perspective of the Department of Environment and Climate Change Canada, the biodiversity loss is actually tied back to our statutory obligations under the Species at Risk Act as well.

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

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

**Paul Connors:** Thank you.

There are a lot of questions for you today. Thanks for your patience.

Mr. Millar or Ms. Graham, I want to inquire about activities that are allowed in MPAs, specifically for me in the MCA on the south coast. Would fishing vessels be allowed to pass through that area, and would there be any restrictions?

**David Millar:** The short answer is yes. Fishing vessels would absolutely be able to pass through that area, as would virtually all vessels in virtually all parts of it.

There could be extremely small areas identified, if the science warrants it, with restrictions on shipping or on vessels, but those would typically be tiny, and there would have to be a very compelling reason that you couldn't have ships in that area.

If you look at other national marine conservation areas, exceedingly small percentages are ever closed to shipping, and it would only be if there's some really dense, localized marine mammal population that warrants it, or something like that. Generally, it would be open to shipping.

**Paul Connors:** Would a recreational food fishery be allowed in that area?

• (1705)

**David Millar:** There's no reason it couldn't be allowed in that area.

**Paul Connors:** Line and hook would be allowed in that area, then.

**David Millar:** We'd have to look at the specific nature, the gear, how it's being undertaken and what the relationship is to the habitat in the area, but there's no reason a food fishery could not be permitted in the area.

**Paul Connors:** Would lobster fishing using traps be allowed in that area?

**David Millar:** Again, lobster fishing is not incompatible with a national marine conservation area.

**Paul Connors:** You mentioned that there's been a certain portion of the aquaculture industry excluded or moved out of the proposed area. Would there be any restrictions or anything placed on that in a marine conservation area?

**Lori Macadam:** For the aquaculture industry, we have removed all existing and potential licence sites from the NMCA and have reduced the boundary by approximately 30% to make sure there's a distance between aquaculture and the national marine conservation area and have assured the industry that they can continue to ship through the NMCA as they go to Stephenville, as long as they're not applying pesticides within the NMCA, which the industry has told us is not their common practice.

**Paul Connors:** There's always concern that the NMCA would be approved now and, then, once the first approval gets put in place, it would move on to larger areas or greater areas. What's the possibility or the likelihood of that once it is approved? Would it expand to take in the aquaculture industry?

**David Millar:** You can't just go and unilaterally expand a national marine conservation area. Typically, it would be established through an act of Parliament. We can't usurp the authority of Parliament. We would have to come back to Parliament to make a change like that if we wanted to actually change the boundaries of the area. There are ways that it can be done through an order in council under specific circumstances, but we typically establish through an act of Parliament.

Do you want to add to that, Lori?

**Lori Macadam:** Any kinds of expansions that take place within national marine conservation areas undergo virtually the same process we use to establish them. There would be a very thorough consultation process with local communities, industry and stakeholders if we were to expand them.

Right now, within the south coast fjords, we are looking to establish that site as per the boundaries that are currently out there, but we are still in feasibility, and we are still able to adjust those boundaries as we meet with concerned stakeholders.

We would look to establish that site, get it up and running and get it to be an established park place, before we would ever consider even expanding that. You're looking at probably a couple of decades away, typically, before we look at expanding our sites.

**Paul Connors:** I know the bottom trawlers are out. Is there any gillnetting or anything like that permitted in marine conservation areas?

**Lori Macadam:** Yes. We have worked to give assurances to the fishermen in the south coast fjords that we would look at restricting less than 5% to fishing—longline fisheries. The halibut and the lobster fishing, which are the two of the main ones, but also anything else that is not bottom trawl, would be able to fish every place else until a management plan is established down the road.

The management planning cycle always takes into consideration industry, and industry participates as part of that management planning. As of right now, there's only restriction in less than 5% of the NMCA as it stands, but we're still in feasibility and those numbers are not finalized until we're at the establishment phase.

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

[Translation]

I now give the floor to Mr. Deschênes for two and a half minutes.

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

Mr. DeMarco, paragraphs 47 and 48 of your report are quite striking. We should also thank you because, without you, we would have had trouble getting a good sense of the situation and the efforts that have been made. What you are saying is quite striking, and I think it should be mentioned.

Parks Canada did not use a reference value, so it seemed to have achieved 45% of the target, even though nothing concrete had been

done since 2019. As for Environment Canada, the department used the total area of protected habitat, without mentioning that it had not expanded its network of marine areas since 2018.

Have you been able to confront the departments to find out what ultimately led them to hide their lack of progress?

• (1710)

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** We did not audit their motivation or their state of mind. We were concerned that a complete picture of progress had not been painted.

Exhibit 3 of my report provides more useful information. You can see the progress from year to year in meeting the target. Telling Canadians that 45% of marine regions are part of the network of marine areas without specifying that it was 45% the previous year as well is not very useful. We are pleased that they agreed with our recommendation to be more transparent when they share information, so that they can truly tell Canadians whether or not progress has been made, or whether the same information as the previous year is being provided.

Some progress has been made since 2015, and if little progress has been made in any given year, they do not have to hide that information. I would like to see much more transparency with Canadians.

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

[English]

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

**Aaron Gunn:** Commissioner, as you know, right now Canada is implementing the UN 30 by 30 policy, which means, as it pertains to oceans, closing off 30% of Canada's waters to various economic activities and turning them into these marine protected areas or underwater parks.

What is the basis for the 30% number? Is it scientific or political?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** The 30% is not about closing off. I'm not going to repeat what the department said, but in paragraph 46 we have highlighted that they should be much more transparent about the portion that actually is a no-take zone, which is the closing off that you're saying. I would like to see them be more transparent about that.

**Aaron Gunn:** I agree.

How did we get to 30%? Is that a scientific number that was decided by marine biologists or is this a political number?

Why not 32%?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** It was the product of negotiations in Montreal, I believe in December 2022, under the auspices of the—

**Aaron Gunn:** Is it safe to say it's political and not scientific? The reason it's 30% and not 35% or 22% seems arbitrary.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** It was a product of international negotiations. If that's purely political.... It depends on your definition. There were delegates there who were politicians and delegates who weren't, so I don't know if it was entirely political, but it was a UN negotiation.

**Aaron Gunn:** It sounds political to me.

One of the reasons I ask is that more than 30% of B.C.'s coast is already conserved under this formula. Why are there additional closures than planned in B.C.? Why is B.C. bearing a disproportionate number of these closures and the economic cost of them?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** I don't have information on the degree of closures. Do you mean the degree of marine protected areas?

**Aaron Gunn:** You're playing with words over there. The entire point is that marine protected areas are closed to economic activities. The department doesn't seem to know, in some cases, which activities, but that's the entire point of the marine protected areas, I presume, or else there would be no point in having them.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** I don't agree with that assumption and that's why we have our recommendation at the end. We would like them to be transparent about the portion that is a no-take zone, which is a closure in the sense that you're talking about, and the portion that is open to activities of various sorts.

As to the percentage in B.C. that is covered by protected and conserved areas, I would turn it over to the departments to speak to that.

**Kathy Graham:** On the west coast, with respect to the Northern Shelf bioregion and the implementation of those areas, noting that the boundaries will likely change once we undertake consultation on the site-specific areas that are identified to advance as part of the network, that would potentially contribute approximately 0.03% toward the target.

**Aaron Gunn:** B.C. is over 30% already. Is that correct?

**Kathy Graham:** I'd have to look at the statistics.

**Aaron Gunn:** It's over 30%. I'll save you the time.

B.C. is now...and for the Northern Shelf bioregion, I believe you're proposing to close up to 40% to various economic activities.

I want to actually turn to Mr. Millar for this.

You claim that MPAs are essential to fighting climate change and for environmental protection, yet every single fisherman that I have talked to has said that by concentrating the same fleet in a smaller area, you risk magnifying the environmental impacts, you increase the risk of overfishing and you decrease the efficiency of the catch, which means you burn more fuel to catch the same amount of fish and create more emissions in the atmosphere.

How is that better for the environment? How is that better for climate change?

• (1715)

**David Millar:** If I'm understanding the question correctly, you're talking about the potential for displacement of fishing out of a marine protected area into the surrounding areas.

**Aaron Gunn:** That is what the department is proposing.

**David Millar:** Again, I would go back to the point that these are not closed areas for fishing. We generally work hard to avoid closing areas that would be high-potential fisheries areas, if there is any closure at all. We accommodate—

**Aaron Gunn:** Let me just stop you there. This is for the whole department and everyone here.

I spent the last year going up and down my riding, talking to fishermen. They're all under the assumption that their livelihoods are at risk because maybe 40% of areas for geoduck harvesting, for example, are about to be closed and 40% of prawn areas are about to be closed in the Northern Shelf bioregion. Either they're lying to me, which I don't think they are, you're lying to me or you've done a horrible job at communicating this.

What is going on? Are these areas being closed? This has been going on for years. These are people's livelihoods that we're talking about. Will there be areas that are closed to prawn fishing and geoduck in these areas, yes or no?

What is the percentage or do you still not know after five years?

**David Millar:** I would agree that we need to do as much as we can to communicate clearly about what these areas actually mean. I think we do definitely have a communications challenge there. We need to do more, for sure.

In terms of the areas that we are contemplating—I think I'm getting the signal from the chair—in B.C. the overlap with shrimp fishing, for example, is tiny. I can't speak to all the other areas that others are contemplating, but I would agree that we need to get out and do more to make sure people understand what's actually proposed in these areas so that it's clear.

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

Next we'll go to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes.

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

I want to follow up with whoever was answering questions to get a little more clarity on the consultation process that's under way on the protected area being considered on the south coast of Newfoundland. As I recall, in one of the answers you indicated that there was some resistance from locals to participate. Could you expand on that?

I believe it was Mr. Millar who was addressing that. It was the consultation process on the considered marine protected area on the south coast of Newfoundland.

**David Millar:** I can certainly expand on the consultation process, but I might have missed part of your question. Did you say something about the resistance to participate?

**Robert Morrissey:** Explain the consultation process that's been taking place and how you engage with local stakeholders.

**David Millar:** Of course. Lori can add to this too.

I don't mean to be repetitive, but we've used a combination of different approaches to try to reach as many audiences as we can. As I mentioned, there have been 14 in-person and virtual meetings with—

**Robert Morrissey:** What's been the participation from local people who would or could be impacted?

**David Millar:** Lori has actually been at some of those meetings.

Do you want to speak to that?

**Lori Macadam:** Sure.

As Mr. Millar said, we have used a combination of different consultation processes. We have had in-person community meetings in the communities that are surrounding the national marine conservation area. Those are the communities of Burgeo, Ramea, Francois, Grey River and McCallum. We had planned to go with the assistance of the FFAW into La Poile and Port aux Basques. We're still waiting for the FFAW to assist us to make sure we can get in and talk to the appropriate people in those two communities.

In addition, we have had virtual sessions with the town councils of Harbour Breton and St. Alban's, as well as Mayor Crewe of Hermitage, at least two to three times. The last in-person briefing we had in St. Alban's was requested by the mayor. He invited members of industry, both local and province-wide, to sit down and have a conversation about the NMCA and how that may impact the aquaculture industry, at which point we explained that we're putting everything in place as much as possible to ensure that the aquaculture industry can continue in those particular areas.

● (1720)

**Robert Morrissey:** Thank you.

Mr. DeMarco, going back to the 30% and how it was arrived at, could you provide to the committee your overview of what drove the 30% from an international perspective? I understand that this was driven by protecting the biodiversity of our oceans, going forward. How was the global number arrived at? What was the rationale behind getting countries to sign on to protecting areas? Again, people will often throw out words for their impact. They'll use such commentary as "closing off 30% of Canadian waters to fishing". That's not going to happen, correct?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** It is important, and I think I've said it a couple times now, to at least try to achieve consensus on the facts.

**Robert Morrissey:** The facts would be good to hear.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** That's what paragraphs 46 to 48 are about: Let's have the departments be more transparent, which will help them in their own endeavours to get that buy-in, about the percentage that is a no-take zone, for example, as compared with the areas that are open to fishing another industry. These targets that have arisen over the last several years have increased over time, as we say in paragraph 3, "due to heightening concern internationally about the continued loss of biodiversity and the threat that this poses" not only to nature but also human well-being.

Going back even before our exhibit 1—

**Robert Morrissey:** The threat to human well-being would be the lack of protein harvestable in the oceans. What I would take from that is the oceans' inability to sustain the level of protein that they had in the past. We see all over the place that the number of fish in the oceans is declining.

**The Chair:** Mr. DeMarco, perhaps you could just answer briefly. We're out of time here.

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** There are threats relating to the loss of biodiversity for humans not only as a food source, but also in respect to the capacity of the oceans to mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration.

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

**The Chair:** We're going to have time for an abridged fifth round for two and a half minutes for the Conservatives and the Liberals.

[*Translation*]

Then the Bloc Québécois will have two minutes.

[*English*]

We're going to go to Mr. Dawson for two and a half minutes.

**Mike Dawson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Graham, what ongoing or planned consultations has DFO had with New Brunswick fish harvesters regarding MPAs or OECMs in New Brunswick waters?

**Kathy Graham:** I would have to defer to my colleagues in the Maritimes region.

**Mike Dawson:** Okay, I'm having a difficult time. You're the director general of marine planning and conservation. I've asked you three questions today with no response, no information. It keeps going back to you having to defer the question to somebody else. Why is there no one here to answer the questions? I've asked a question over there, and I think I've asked you a question, and we can't seem to get an answer about New Brunswick. Is there any reason why we can't get an answer about New Brunswick?

**Kathy Graham:** I'm happy—

**Mike Dawson:** We have 10 people sitting at a table here.

**Kathy Graham:** I'm happy to be able to provide a response in writing.

**Mike Dawson:** Well, that would be great.

I'll defer the rest of my time to Mr. Gunn.

**Aaron Gunn:** I have a question for the commissioner.

A new scientific study on MPAs has just come out, which was recently conducted off the coast of California, that showed zero benefit to biodiversity, zero benefit to climate resilience and no evidence for increased regional availability of fishery abundance. What would your response be in the face of such evidence? Is this plan to create a network of underwater parks or marine areas just an exercise in virtue signalling? What does it accomplish, other than risking the collapse of the entire fishing industry, if studies like this are indeed accurate? If they aren't, what evidence do we have before carrying this out that the marine protected areas were actually based in science?

• (1725)

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** I'm not familiar with that particular study, but the point is an important one—let's not focus entirely on the numbers game, as has been talked about today, but also the qualitative elements. Is it contributing to the halting and reversing of biodiversity loss? To do that, you can't just create an arbitrary percentage and put it on a map. You need to put together a system that's "well-connected", "ecologically representative", "of importance to biodiversity" and "of importance for ecosystem functions and services". Those are summarized in paragraph 31.

I would add to that to also keep in mind the socio-economic, as well, not just the environmental...so these are initiatives that contribute to the long-term sustainability of those whose livelihoods depend on marine resources. That holistic view, looking at the quality and not just the quantity, would, I think, benefit not only the—

**Aaron Gunn:** Is there a—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to stop you there. We're out of time here. We don't have time for another question.

With that, we're going to go to Mr. Klassen for two and a half minutes.

**Ernie Klassen:** Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to Mr. DeMarco.

I was pleasantly surprised, when I was doing some research here, to see that the U.S. is actually further ahead than Canada is in identifying marine protected areas. I believe there are 190 countries that have signed on to the 30 by 30. I'm just wondering where Canada sits in relationship to these other countries. Do you know the percentage of the U.S. marine protected areas?

**Jerry V. DeMarco:** I don't have it in front of me in this binder, but I did have a look at that. The U.S. is slightly ahead on marine protected areas than Canada.

The 30 by 30 and the 25% by 2025, for that matter, are the product of international negotiations. The vast majority of countries agreed with them.

Is it pure science that goes into the 30 by 30? No, it's a negotiation. There has been a recognition that the lower percentages that have been agreed to in the past have not yet succeeded in halting and reversing biodiversity loss. There's been a ramping up or an increase in ambition.

I would have to get back to the committee in writing as to where Canada sits if you ranked all of the countries. I believe you may be able to get that information from the secretariat of the Convention

on Biological Diversity. I believe it has an inventory of that information.

**Ernie Klassen:** Ms. Graham, I was happy to hear what Mr. Millar mentioned around the impact of the closure of fisheries.

Would you also talk about the impact the marine protected areas are going to have on the local communities and fishing abilities?

**Kathy Graham:** In terms of ensuring that the fishing industry is impacted the least, we work very closely to understand those conservation objectives in an effort to make sure that any measures that are applied are strictly applied to the fishing activities that pose the greatest risk.

Boundaries often shift and change through the conversations and consultations that we have with the fishing industry. The overall objective is to design marine protected areas that allow us to advance conservation but also minimize any economic impacts.

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

[*Translation*]

We will conclude today's meeting with Mr. Deschênes, who has two minutes.

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

My question is for Mr. Millar from Parks Canada.

You heard the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development say that your department lacked transparency by not providing the right information so that Canadians could know what progress was being made.

Why did you do that?

**David Millar:** Our goal is always to share the best information with our colleagues, partners and stakeholders. That is what we always try to do. If we can do more, we want to—

• (1730)

**Alexis Deschênes:** Were you there when the communications people decided to hide information so that Canadians could not really have a good idea of the progress that was being made or not being made?

[*English*]

**David Millar:** Lori, would you answer this question, please?

[*Translation*]

**Lori Macadam:** It is possible to obtain information by consulting each of our websites. Anyone can ask us for information by email.

**Alexis Deschênes:** You are not answering my question.

Why have you not been transparent enough to really inform people about the progress made, as the commissioner is now recommending?

**Lori Macadam:** I think what the commissioner was talking about was informing Canadians of the progress being made in establishing the protected sites, so that people know exactly where they can or cannot go fishing. Right now, we are in the process of informing Canadians of the progress made at Parks Canada sites.

For sites located near indigenous and non-indigenous communities, we make sure they are aware of exactly what we are doing in the oceans that border their communities.

**Alexis Deschênes:** You understood what the commissioner said, which was that the information you were giving on your website about the real state of things was misleading people.

How do you explain that? How is it that Parks Canada proceeded in this way, by choosing the facts and omitting reference periods?

**The Chair:** Please give a very brief answer.

**Lori Macadam:** We are always working to ensure that the information is available to all Canadians across the country. There are always things we can improve on in our process. This is one of the reasons why Parks Canada took into account all of the recommendations made by the commissioner in his report to improve our process for establishing marine protected areas.

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

[*English*]

That completes our panel today.

I want to thank Commissioner DeMarco and his team, Parks Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada and DFO—everybody—for appearing here today. I know it's not easy to be in the hot seat for a full two hours.

Thank you for your report, Commissioner, and for all of your testimony. This will be very helpful as we start a study next year, it looks like, on marine protected areas.

Before we wrap it up, I'll note that at the next meeting, we're going to resume our study of the Fisheries Act. We'll have officials from the Department of the Environment and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada.

Thank you very much, everybody.

The meeting is adjourned.

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