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Chair: Patrick Weiler



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

• (1535)

[*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 16 of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting to continue its study on the review of the Fisheries Act.

[*Translation*]

Today's meeting is taking place in hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. The members may attend in person or through Zoom.

[*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, including the interpreters. Pursuant to our routine motions, I would like to advise the committee members that all witnesses appearing virtually today have conducted the required technical testing.

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

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

[*Translation*]

For the interpretation, the participants using the Zoom platform can choose floor, English or French at the bottom of their screen. The participants in the room can use the earpiece to select the desired channel.

[*English*]

This is a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[*Translation*]

If the members in the room wish to speak, they must raise their hands.

The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience.

[*English*]

With that, I'd like to welcome our witnesses today.

[*Translation*]

We're joined by Jean-Sébastien Vacher, a commercial fisher and a former fishery officer. He's taking part in the meeting by video conference.

[*English*]

By video conference, we have Nigel Buote, fisherman.

[*Translation*]

Lastly, we're joined by Réjean Noël, president, and Marcel Hébert, director general, from the Association des crabiers acadiens.

We'll start with the witnesses' opening remarks. Each witness will have no more than five minutes.

Mr. Vacher, you have the floor.

Jean-Sébastien Vacher (Commercial Fisherman, As an Individual): Good afternoon. My name is Jean-Sébastien Vacher. I was a fishery officer from 2001 to 2008. I've been a commercial fisher since then.

You asked me to speak today about barriers preventing fishery officers from enforcing the Fisheries Act. Before getting to the heart of the matter, I would like to remind you of the purpose of the Fisheries Act. The act provides a framework for the proper—and I emphasize proper—management and control of fisheries and the conservation and protection of fish and fish habitat.

I see two major barriers preventing fishery officers from enforcing the Fisheries Act.

The first barrier is the increasing number of rules. The Fisheries Act has so many associated rules and regulations. One regulation sets out, for example, licence conditions for licenced fishers. These licence conditions are written and drawn up by public servants, who aren't legislators. For instance, as a zone 16 crab fisher, I must follow about 200 rules on 16 pages to carry out my commercial fishing operations. I think that this increase in the number of rules is a serious issue for the enforcement of the act. Fishery officers can't apply all these rules. They must start by making a choice that isn't always the most appropriate option. They often make an easy choice. They apply the easiest rules for the licence conditions, at the expense of rules that may be harder to apply but that make more sense for fishery monitoring management, especially in the fight against poaching networks. The fishery guardians will often focus on analyzing the compliance of commercial fishers by checking whether they actually followed the multiple rules set out in their licence conditions. However, the fishery guardians will let many poachers in particular slip through the cracks.

The second barrier concerns a form of discrimination in how the act is applied to non-indigenous fishers compared to indigenous fishers. Of course, I don't mean to speak against the indigenous nations. The government rightly recognized their ancestral rights. Fisheries and Oceans Canada also rightly helped integrate them into the commercial fisheries. This is a great improvement for their communities and for the other communities around them.

However, in the enforcement of the act, I faced a situation as a fishery officer. We were told to let indigenous people go unchallenged. They were new to the fisheries and challenging them could lead to legal disputes. The authorities didn't want to deal with these types of situations. We overlooked offences and never reported offences committed by indigenous fishers. In contrast, we were mandated to report offences committed by other non-indigenous fishers, particularly commercial fishers.

The issue lies in the fact that most poaching networks are operated by indigenous fishers who don't necessarily have the authorization of their band council. Sometimes, they aren't even associated with a band council, but they have the title of indigenous fisher. They often run networks that engage in poaching and the illegal sale of seafood products. This undermines both the enforcement of the Fisheries Act and proper fishery management, because we don't have all the catch data. Moreover, other non-indigenous fishers, who aren't treated the same way, feel a sense of injustice. Yet they too have a public right to fish in tidal waters. They have traditions and a culture.

● (1540)

In short, these are the two main obstacles that I can identify when it comes to fishery officers enforcing the Fisheries Act. The first is the excessive increase in the number of rules, particularly licence conditions. These rules could benefit from a review to ensure that they're applied properly, since this doesn't always happen. The second concerns discrimination in how the act is applied to non-indigenous people compared to indigenous people.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vacher.

[English]

Next we're going to go to Mr. Buote for five minutes or less.

Go ahead, Mr. Buote.

Nigel Buote (Fisherman, As an Individual): Hi. I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for the opportunity to present today.

I'm a commercial fisher, and I make my living off the sea in LFA 25 on Prince Edward Island. For more than a decade, commercial fishermen in LFA 25 have worked tirelessly to rebuild, protect and stabilize the lobster fishery. Our industry has taken responsibility financially and operationally to ensure the long-term health of the resource.

The success of the fishery today is not accidental. It is a direct result of disciplined conservation measures, industry-funded buybacks and strict compliance with regulations. However, these hard-won gains are now being undermined by ongoing and increasingly widespread abuse by some fishers within the FSC fishery and unauthorized fishing for a moderate livelihood. This situation threatens conservation objectives, weakens proper management and erodes trust in the regulatory system.

Commercial fishermen in LFA 25 have invested heavily in buybacks over the past 15 years, reducing the number of active licences and traps in the water. These buybacks were not refunded by government; they were paid for by the fishers themselves because we understand the long-term value of protecting the stock. Fewer traps and fewer licences created real, measurable conservation gains.

Our fleet has embraced strict science-based conservation practices that include trap reductions, escape mechanisms, returning all 115-millimetre or larger lobsters to the water, mandatory seasonal closures, detailed logbook catch reporting and compliance requirements. We fish only in regulated seasons. We are monitored through e-logs. We are inspected at sea, and we operate under enforceable reporting requirements.

These measures have improved stock health and contribute to long-term sustainability, even during years of environmental stress. The commercial sector has done everything asked of us to protect the fishery. Lobsters caught in the FSC fishery, which is intended for food, social and ceremonial purposes, have increasingly been used for unregulated commercial sale. This has been documented and reported by harvesters and community members for many years.

Some catch levels far exceed traditional or food-related requirements, and substantial volumes of lobsters taken under FSC are entering the commercial market illegally. Commercial fishermen have been raising these concerns through advisory committees, letters, emails, calls and meetings with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and members of Parliament, and we feel that repeated requests for action have been ignored.

We are asking for monitoring, transparency, conservation-based limits and eco-enforcement. We seek the same rules for everyone. The single most important principle in fisheries management is fairness. Conservation cannot succeed when different groups operate under different sets of rules. The lobster stock does not distinguish between sectors and neither should the enforcement of conservation measures. FSC fishing either occurs during the commercial fishing season, or it must have 100% third-party independent dockside monitoring. This ensures legitimately harvested FSC lobster is respected while preventing illegal commercial sale and protecting lobster stock health.

Communal commercial licences issued to indigenous communities are intended to benefit the community directly. Leasing these licences to third parties undermines transparency, fair access and conservation-based management. DFO must enforce the prohibition on licence leasing consistently across all sectors.

In closing, the commercial fishing industry is not asking for special treatment. We are asking for equal treatment and equal enforcement. Commercial fishermen have spent over a decade sacrificing income, reducing effort and funding the conservation measures that built the fishery into what it is today. We are proud of that work, but we are deeply concerned that current mismanagement and unequal enforcement threaten everything we have built.

If the Government of Canada and DFO want a sustainable, stable and fair fishery for all harvesters, indigenous and non-indigenous, then we must return to the core principles that have always protected the resource: one fishery, one resource and one set of rules; and equal treatment and responsibility for everyone.

The future of the fishery depends on balanced, conservation-first fisheries management. This is something we should all agree on.

Thank you.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Hébert for five minutes or less.

Marcel Hébert (Director general, Association des crabiers acadiens): Good afternoon. Thank you for the invitation to appear before this committee to discuss a sensitive subject of great concern to our snow crab fishers in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence.

As you know, the snow crab fishery is certainly one of the best managed fisheries in the world. A few of the current management measures include the weighing of all landings at the wharf, 20% at-sea-observer coverage for fishing trips, the closure of quadrants in cases of significant soft-shell crab presence and area closures when right whales are observed. Only adult snow crabs with a carapace

size of 95 millimetres or more are harvested. An annual survey allows us to estimate commercial biomass and monitor population trends. The quotas for the snow crab fishery in the southern gulf are based on a decision-making framework incorporating the reference points from a precautionary approach to ensure that stocks remain in the healthy zone at all times.

As you know, illegal landings of snow crab aren't included in the official landing data of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Illegal landings lead to overexploitation of the stock. This undermines its reproductive capacity, particularly during the declining phase of the population when the residual biomass is decreasing. It should be noted that the snow crab fishery in the southern gulf is a recruitment fishery. It depends on annual recruitment of 75% or more. The snow crab fishery is very dependent on annual recruitment. As a result, additional pressures on recruitment could have a negative impact on the profitability of our fleets and the economy of our coastal regions. Remember the impact of the collapse of landings in 1989, when yields were only 6,950 tonnes in zone 12.

Following Radio-Canada's *Enquête* broadcast on lobster poaching, we're concerned about the extent of illegal lobster landings and the sophisticated means employed by poachers to carry them out. In fact, the same players have access to the snow crab fishery following the decision to share the resource in 2003.

Illegal landings are underestimated in the snow crab fishery in the southern gulf. Normally, in a healthy population, the natural mortality rate for commercial-sized adult crab is between 20% and 25%. In the southern gulf, the natural mortality rate is 35% to 45%. One of the reasons mentioned in the annual review by the science sector is illegal landings. These illegal landings increase the exploitation rate and reduce the residual biomass year after year. This affects the reproductive capacity of the stock by skewing the ratio of large spawners. This will lead to long-term genetic changes in the population and will significantly reduce future recruitment.

What concerns us most is the incentive for these inshore fishers to land illegal catches of snow crab. The quota is allocated to non-profit associations. These associations then distribute the quota annually through a lottery to some of its members. The inshore fishers selected to fish part of the association's allocation receive a very small portion of the market price. The association keeps most of it. As a result, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is funding non-profit inshore associations to the tune of millions of dollars annually, while the mid-shore associations receive no revenue at all.

For example, in 2025, the price paid to fishers ranged from \$7 to \$8 per pound for snow crab. The inshore fisher made \$1.50, and the association received \$5.50 to \$6.50 for each pound. Doesn't this create an incentive to sell snow crab under the table in order to receive the full market price?

At any rate, the lobster fishery has become highly lucrative. They no longer need this allocation, which was meant to support a fleet reorganization in 2003. This objective was achieved only minimally, if at all.

We're working very closely with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Discussions are currently under way on how to limit illegal landings of snow crabs. We request that the number of wharves designated as landing sites be limited to improve the dockside monitoring, given the limited number of fishery officers. We're asking for an increase in the number of fishery officers and for the installation of cameras on all designated wharves so that fishery officers can observe them at all times. We're also calling for the use of drones and the installation of cameras on inshore vessels or for 100% at-sea-observer coverage for inshore fishers' fishing trips.

• (1550)

In the Acadian peninsula, as in other regions of the maritime provinces and Quebec, lobster and snow crab are the only major commercial species remaining that generate millions of dollars for the economy of our coastal regions. Harsher fines are necessary for fishers who break the rules in order to significantly reduce this illegal activity, which affects the resource for future generations. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hébert.

[English]

That concludes our opening remarks.

We're going to get into the first round of questioning of six minutes.

We'll start with Mr. Small.

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

First, I'm going to start off with some pictures.

Mr. Buote, I don't know if you're familiar with these pictures taken somewhere not far from your fishing area 25, perhaps in late June or maybe early July.

Do you know if that is when these pictures were taken?

Nigel Buote: Yes, I'm quite sure that's when they were taken.

Clifford Small: Mr. Buote, who could legally fish during that time? Was the area 25 commercial lobster fishery open then?

Nigel Buote: No, it was not.

Clifford Small: Have you heard of any pursuit by DFO to get to the bottom of these dumped lobsters? By the looks of it, many of them were female, in fact.

Nigel Buote: Yes, by the look of the pictures they were. However, I haven't heard any feedback on DFO and what they have done.

Clifford Small: Okay. It's shocking to see that waste of lobster.

We had the Public Prosecution Service of Canada here on Thursday, and they denied that maintaining prosecution ratios based on ethnicity could possibly have the effect of watering down the number one objective of the Fisheries Act, which is conservation.

Do you agree with that?

Nigel Buote: No, I do not.

Clifford Small: To Mr. Vacher, in terms of the objective of maintaining prosecution ratios, what kind of effect do you think that could have on the number one objective of the Fisheries Act, which is conservation?

• (1555)

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Please repeat the question. I didn't quite understand it.

[English]

Clifford Small: Pardon. I had my earpiece off.

Could you repeat that, Mr. Vacher?

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I didn't quite understand the question. Please repeat it.

[English]

Clifford Small: We had the head of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada here witnessing on Thursday past. They were asked if the intention not to over-ratio certain ethnicities could have a negative effect with the Fisheries Act, in terms of the Fisheries Act not being able to do what it's supposed to do in terms of conservation.

What do you think of that?

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: This can indeed create a serious issue. If the Department of Fisheries and Oceans fails to take action against people because of their race and if poaching allegations remain uninvestigated, the conservation of the resource is at risk. Moreover, the managers lack a great deal of the data needed to set quotas properly. Clearly, this negatively affects resource management.

[English]

Clifford Small: Monsieur Vacher, in your opening statement you mentioned discrimination in law enforcement and poaching networks. It sounds to me like it could be possible that large volumes of fish could be caught and sold.

What's the impact of that on the productivity of the fishery in Atlantic Canada?

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I can't give you a specific answer. You would need someone with more expertise to respond. However, if the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' data fails to include a significant portion of the resource fished, scientists and managers will find it quite difficult to determine the catch amounts required to ensure the sustainability of the resource.

[English]

Clifford Small: To Mr. Buote, do you have any theories on how those lobsters got into the woods there in the pictures that I put up at the opening of the meeting?

Nigel Buote: From stories I've heard, they come from the FSC fishery, which couldn't sell them. They could not move the lobsters. Nobody wanted to buy them because they were FSC lobsters, so they were dumped in the woods.

Clifford Small: Do you find it odd that DFO hasn't laid a charge yet regarding the dumping of those lobsters?

Nigel Buote: Yes, I find that very odd.

Clifford Small: How widespread is this lobster dumping along the shores of area 25?

Nigel Buote: I'm not quite sure. There were two or three different places, but they were all pretty close to one area, I'm quite sure. I'm not real sure where they were, but they were all pretty close together from what I was told.

Clifford Small: We were told by the Public Prosecution service of Canada that it considered the ethnicity of those who were committing infractions.

Are you disturbed by that?

Nigel Buote: Yes, I am.

The Chair: I'm afraid that completes the time here.

We're going to move to Mr. Cormier for six minutes.

• (1600)

[Translation]

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

Mr. Vacher, you said that you were a former fishery officer. Is that right?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes.

Serge Cormier: What region were you in?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I was in the Côte-Nord region of Quebec.

Serge Cormier: You said earlier that you were told not to arrest indigenous fishers for illegal fishing offences, for example. I have a simple question. Who gave you these instructions?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: It was our supervisors. They told us that this wasn't recommended because there had been Supreme Court rulings. They didn't want any more court cases. So they told us to ignore the issue because the indigenous fishery was starting up.

Serge Cormier: When you talk about your supervisors, do you mean the supervisors in the region or the supervisors in Ottawa?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: It was the immediate supervisors, meaning the supervisors in the region.

Serge Cormier: Thank you. I'll come back to this matter later, Mr. Vacher. First I have some questions for other witnesses.

Mr. Hébert and Mr. Noël, thank you for joining us today. You touched on a number of points. I know that the fisheries are familiar to most of my colleagues around the table. However, I want to ask you a question so that everyone understands one thing.

The total allowable snow crab catch can be 20,000 tonnes, 30,000 tonnes or 40,000 tonnes. During the fishing season, are all snow crab landings weighed at dockside?

Marcel Hébert: Most of them are, barring any illegal landings.

Serge Cormier: I'm talking about landings under normal circumstances.

Marcel Hébert: Everything is weighed at dockside.

Serge Cormier: However, lobster landings aren't weighed at dockside. Is that right?

Marcel Hébert: That's right.

Serge Cormier: In your industry, when fishers arrive at the dock with their cargo to unload their boat, what happens? Who keeps track of data on crab landings? How does this work?

Marcel Hébert: First, the fishers must call one to three hours before arriving at the dock. When they arrive at the dock, a witness may stay on board while a dockside landing company takes the cargo from the hold and brings it to the surface for weighing, one landing at a time, until everything is weighed.

Serge Cormier: Mr. Noël, if you want to bring back crab for yourself or to sell to others, can you do so?

Réjean Noël (President, Association des crabiers acadiens): No. Harvested crabs must be weighed by the company unloading them. We are not allowed to remove a single claw before unloading begins. At the end of unloading, the boat must be inspected to ensure that no crab claws are left behind and no crabs are hidden in the boat.

Serge Cormier: Once all the crabs have been weighed, if you decide to take some of them for your own consumption or for other people, are you able to do so? Is there a procedure for doing this?

Réjean Noël: Once the catch has been unloaded from the boat, it is impossible to take any crab.

Serge Cormier: Okay.

Réjean Noël: If we want some crab, we have to say so before it gets weighed.

Serge Cormier: It is deducted from your allocation, is that right?

Réjean Noël: The deduction is noted in my log book.

Serge Cormier: Yes.

Réjean Noël: It is added to my daily landings.

Serge Cormier: I know we are touching on this topic quickly and briefly, but would you say that illegal landings are much harder to undertake in the crab industry than in the lobster industry?

Marcel Hébert: It's a bit of a double standard. When the landings are not weighed at the dock, you can go to two different docks and there will be two different weigh-ins to get around it one way or another. That's the case with lobster fishing. With crab fishing, it's very limited. Any illegal landings really have to be done outside the designated docks or by some other means.

Serge Cormier: In your industry, among your traditional harvesters, have any of your harvesters ever been caught making illegal landings? Has this ever happened?

• (1605)

Marcel Hébert: Not to my knowledge. There have been cases of three or four crabs being taken, but not large quantities. It was not a major issue and it really is a small minority. With the penalties currently in place, there's no possibility of that happening.

Serge Cormier: I only have six minutes of speaking time, but I will come back to this subject later and ask you the question again.

Do you think the fines are high enough when someone is caught with crab, lobster, or anything else? Do you think these fines are high enough to deter people from doing it again?

Marcel Hébert: Not at all. The impact of illegal landings on the stock is truly harmful in the long term. Illegal landings affect the reproductive capacity of the stock and future recruitment. Every crab removed from the population is a crab that will not be able to reproduce. Snow crabs reproduce in December, with moulting in February and March. When illegal activity occurs and large spawners are removed from the crab population in addition to the allocated quota, the stock is over-harvested. In the long term, this results in reduced recruitment and genetic weakening of the stock.

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

Mr. Deschênes for six minutes.

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

Good morning, everyone. I want to thank the witnesses who travelled here, as well as those joining us remotely.

Mr. Vacher, I want to advantage of your observations, because you are a crab and lobster fisherman in the Sept-Îles sector, and you were a fisheries officer for seven or eight years. When you go to sea, do you see any illegal fishing?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I regularly see illegal lobster fishing. It's common.

Alexis Deschênes: What do you do when you see it?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I often report illegal fishing to Fisheries and Oceans Canada. I have called fisheries officers to tell them that so-and-so is out there in such-and-such a boat. Quite often, I know the person's name. I simply report them.

The only time fisheries officers intervened was in the case of a person who did not have indigenous status. Most of the people who do this are people who have indigenous status. They are not necessarily associated with a band council. They do not live in an indigenous community. It's not fishing—

Alexis Deschênes: How do you know they are not associated with the band council? What checks are you doing to determine this?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I call the director of indigenous fisheries in my region and ask him if a certain person is fishing for food for him, and he tells me that he doesn't even know that person, that they do not fall under his band council's jurisdiction.

Alexis Deschênes: Once the band council informs you that these fishermen are not authorized, you contact the fisheries officers. What happens next?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Quite simply, no action is taken, no investigations are being conducted, and fisheries officers are leaving the case closed, as if we had not filed a complaint.

Alexis Deschênes: Do they tell you why they are not intervening?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: There are often reasons. I asked this question at the lobster advisory committee's most recent meeting, and the fisheries officer told me they had limited resources and they were therefore unable to work on all the files.

Alexis Deschênes: You said that, once, there was an intervention.

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes. In this case, however, it was not someone with indigenous status.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay.

You were a fisheries officer. When you were a fisheries officer, what directives were you given regarding illegal fishermen?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: We had to deal with fishermen who were fishing illegally, unless it was too complicated. Our supervisors often told us to do what they call "compliance analysis" in industry jargon, which meant going to see the fishermen at the dock, the commercial fishermen with licences, and checking the boxes for compliance with regulations. Was their logbook filled out? Were their licence conditions on board? Had they made their hail outs and hail ins? That's what we did instead of working on poaching cases, because they are more complicated and require more resources.

Alexis Deschênes: When you were a fisheries officer, what directives were you given on poachers or smugglers with respect to their ethnic group or race?

• (1610)

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: It was clear that we weren't to touch indigenous people. That was the directive: We weren't to get involved with them, we didn't want any problems with them, we didn't want any new binding court rulings.

Alexis Deschênes: Even if it was an indigenous person not authorized by the band council who was fishing for food but who, for example, caught a female lobster, your directive was to do nothing and to let it go.

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Exactly.

Alexis Deschênes: Were there times when you or other fisheries officers had to intervene nonetheless?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Not to my knowledge. I never saw any intervention, at any time, at least not while I was a fisheries officer.

Alexis Deschênes: Your immediate supervisors told you not to intervene in cases involving an unlicensed fisherman from a first nation, even if they were not authorized. Was that a strict guideline?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes, exactly.

Alexis Deschênes: Were you also a union rep?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes, I was the union rep.

Alexis Deschênes: What did the department do when one of your officers had a crisis of conscience with these directives?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I cannot really tell you about that, because it did not come up. I do not remember having any cases when I was a union rep, where a fisheries officer wanted to intervene. No, normally, we obeyed our supervisors.

Alexis Deschênes: Were you aware of any cases where a fisheries officer was made to sign a non-disclosure agreement?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Not in this respect.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay.

When it comes to subsistence fishing, when you contact the band council—in your case, the Innu—to explain there are people fishing illegally, how co-operative are the Innu band council or the bands in question?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: We have a very good working relationship, meaning that all the leaders I know from Innu organizations in my region are very co-operative. They are against poaching, whether it is being done by indigenous or non-indigenous people. They do not support it in any way.

Alexis Deschênes: First nations and commercial fishermen would then like us to take action, but the department is telling its fisheries officers not to take action against poachers.

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I cannot tell you this is what they are saying right now, but I have noticed that when a complaint is made about an indigenous poacher, nothing happens. In any case, in my area, I can tell you one thing: It has a ripple effect. One poacher starts doing it, makes some undeclared cash under the table, which is very attractive, and someone else decides to do the same thing since nothing bad happened. Why wouldn't they? It snowballs and there are more and more of them.

In my sector, I had the only commercial fishing licence in my zone. These are small zones. Suddenly, I estimated a number of cages equivalent to another licence, but it was illegal.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Deschênes. This concludes the first round of questions.

[English]

We'll now move to the second round.

Mr. Arnold, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for their honesty and for appearing.

Mr. Vacher, in your training as a conservation officer or fisheries officer, was there an oath that you took to swear to protect the resource or anything like that?

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes, absolutely. I swore an oath to the Queen—at the time, it was the Queen—to uphold my duty as a fisheries officer to protect the resource.

[English]

Mel Arnold: You and your colleagues would be very dedicated toward protecting the resource, first and foremost. Would that be a correct statement?

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes. Normally, when you want to become a fisheries officer, it's because you are committed to protecting the resource. That's the fundamental mission of a fisheries officer: to protect fisheries management, the resource and fish habitat.

[English]

Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

Does the Fisheries Act, and the resultant regulations from the act, cover off all the potential conditions of licence and season-opening specifics for fisheries operating in Canada?

• (1615)

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes, to my knowledge, it covers pretty much all the fisheries in Canada.

[English]

Mel Arnold: Are you aware of any other agreements that may be signed or agreed to by the Government of Canada that may allow other fisheries to operate outside of what is in the Fisheries Act or the conditions of licence in the act and regulations?

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I have no knowledge of that in my region.

[English]

Mel Arnold: Are you aware of, or have you heard of, any of this in other regions of eastern Canada?

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes, I have heard that, in Chaleur Bay, in Gaspésie, agreements were made between Fisheries and Oceans Canada and indigenous communities without consulting other fishermen or other communities.

[English]

Mel Arnold: Would the fisheries officers in those areas have been trained or been provided the details of those agreements?

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Honestly, I could not tell you, because it happened after my term as a fisheries officer. Since then, I have lost contact with my former colleagues.

[English]

Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

Again, do you sense that organized crime may be involved in some of these illegal fisheries?

[Translation]

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes, there is no doubt about that.

When there's money to be made, it attracts those who want to make money. There are people in this business who have fewer morals than others and who have no problem poaching and forming alliances with indigenous people whom the authorities are not bothering. It's like an alliance between "criminal" organizations that do not respect the law and indigenous fishermen.

[English]

Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

I'll switch over to Mr. Hébert now.

Mr. Hébert, you talked about legal landings and dockside monitoring—I believe that's what you were referring to—or specific docks where off-loading takes place so that the catch can be monitored and reported. Do all the landings occur at those designated docks, or are there landings that occur at other docks where there is no monitoring?

[Translation]

Marcel Hébert: That's exactly right: at designated docks, there are probably no illegal landings; illegal landings take place at undesignated docks.

These people have certain ways of doing things. For example, one boat will dock alongside another boat to transfer the crab. The other boat will then leave for an undesignated dock. That's how illegal landings are made. People can also go close to shore and place the goods in shrimp bags, which they will collect later. So there are several ways to make illegal landings.

We even heard there might be collusion with crab processors. One of my harvesters told me that if he went to a certain spot, 50% of his catch could go under the radar. He refused the offer. However, with a large quota like that, if there are several fishermen, 50%

of the total catch can be landed illegally. To do that, you need to partner with a fish processing company.

Mel Arnold: Thank you very much.

[English]

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

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

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

My first question is for Mr. Buote.

Mr. Buote, how long have you been fishing in LFA 25, which is the fall lobster fishery shared between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick?

• (1620)

Nigel Buote: It's been 15 years.

Robert Morrissey: Over that period, the catches were increasing for a period of time. Am I correct?

Nigel Buote: That's correct.

Robert Morrissey: This past fall, as a fisher, what did you observe in terms of lobster landings in this fishery during the season that just closed?

Nigel Buote: Catches were down, I think, approximately 11% overall for all of the LFA. Mostly in the north end of the fishing area, they were down.

Robert Morrissey: As a fisher and according to fellow fishers you may have spoken to, what would have been observed in this particular zone over the summer, prior to the season opening? Was there any lobster fishing going on?

Nigel Buote: Yes, there were thousands of traps out there this summer. I think there were traps out there in May until sometime in July.

Robert Morrissey: Were DFO protection personnel advised by fishers of fishing occurring there and asked to check if it was following an authorized fishery?

Nigel Buote: Yes, we did so multiple times.

Robert Morrissey: What was the response that you may have received?

Nigel Buote: There was no response.

Robert Morrissey: This came from numerous fishers all over the particular area.

Nigel Buote: Yes, this came from New Brunswick and P.E.I. fishers.

Robert Morrissey: These traps that were fishing for lobster, to your knowledge, what fishery may they have been a part of?

Nigel Buote: It was food, social and ceremonial fishery.

Robert Morrissey: Food, social and ceremonial fisheries are supposed to be negotiated between the first nation community and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans with trap limits imposed. Do you know if this occurred?

Nigel Buote: I'm not sure.

Robert Morrissey: You don't have any idea if this fishery was taking place in any pre-approved arrangement between DFO and—

Nigel Buote: Yes, actually. It was approved by DFO.

Robert Morrissey: But you are unaware if—

Nigel Buote: I'm aware that it was.

Robert Morrissey: For the number of traps that would be allowed in this fishery, were they following those regulations or stipulations?

Nigel Buote: Not that I'm aware of.

Robert Morrissey: Was this the first season that this particular fishery recorded an overall decline in the catch?

Nigel Buote: No, it has been going down for three years, probably, overall—three or four years.

Robert Morrissey: Has there been a larger effort put in under fisheries outside of the regular commercial fishery in that area?

Nigel Buote: Yes.

Robert Morrissey: Are you familiar with how, recently, the Government of Nova Scotia established an enforcement and protection division to enforce regulations as they relate to lobster when it hits the wharf?

There is a bit of an issue between two levels of government. As lobster lands on the wharf and then moves to buyers, it is controlled by provincial regulations. You'd think that, if the other provinces had similar enforcement agencies, they could follow the path of lobster when it hits the wharf—to use that terminology—and makes its way to buyers, and then goes from buyer to buyer.

Would ensuring it follows a documented path help avoid something occurring in your area?

Nigel Buote: I think so, yes.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you for giving very good testimony here today as a young fisher in this particular area, one concerned about the future of this.

One point unique to your fishery is this: You release large female lobster. Do you think that's something the department should enforce across all the lobster fisheries in Atlantic Canada?

Nigel Buote: Yes, I really think it helps. After we started doing that, catches started going up a few years later. It would help other areas, for sure.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you for your testimony and for agreeing to appear here today.

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

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Deschênes for two and a half minutes.

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

Mr. Vacher, I would like to come back to when you are at sea interacting with poachers. I would like to know how that goes. Have you ever intervened? If so, how did they react?

• (1625)

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes, I have often intervened. I talk to them first to try to get them to co-operate. So, rather than starting by reporting them, I start by talking to them and finding out what they are doing.

Their attitude they adopt is very clear. They basically tell us to leave them alone: It's their territory and they can do what they want. They also add that, if we ever start playing hardball, they'll simply break our fishing gear or cut our buoys. These are threats. You can imagine that a fisherman like me does not want to have his fishing gear, which costs between \$50,000 and \$60,000, destroyed. So, it's clear that our initial approach is to ignore them, and then we intervene when we realize that it's hurting our lobster sales. These people can sell their lobster much cheaper than I can, they do not have to declare anything to the tax authorities, they do not have to comply with anything. So, it's a big difference, not to mention the negative impact on resource management, given that the fishing data is not being recorded by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Perhaps one day, this will have an extremely negative impact on the resource.

Alexis Deschênes: To summarize, you go out to sea, you fish legally, you comply with your licence conditions. You see poachers, you go to the band council, which confirms that they're not allowed to fish, and you try to talk to the poachers, who threaten you. Then you call the fisheries officers and ask if they can do anything, but they do nothing.

You continue to fish; you're an honest fisher living in a certain climate. Actually, how do you cope with that? Do you have concerns for your safety when you're at sea?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: No, I'm not afraid for my safety. However, to avoid conflicts with fishers, I end up abandoning the areas where they're present. So it's as if my fishing area is becoming smaller and smaller because I'm giving them space. I try not to disturb them, because I don't want to be negatively impacted in terms of my fishing rig.

Alexis Deschênes: Right now, poachers are winning at every level.

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Yes.

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

[*English*]

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

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

I have questions for Mr. Buote.

Before being elected as a member of Parliament and serving on this committee, I was a documentary filmmaker. I interviewed an individual one day about the drug crisis in Canada. We had stopped recording, but he had a line that stuck with me. We were talking about open-air drug use. He said, “You get what you tolerate as a society.” I thought that was a really interesting line that stuck with me.

I want to ask you if you believe DFO is tolerating illegal fishing by certain groups or individuals in our society today.

Nigel Buote: Yes.

Aaron Gunn: Do you believe that is a result of a conscious decision being made at DFO to not enforce the law in certain situations or for certain offenders, based on their ethnicity? If so, could you describe those situations that you've witnessed, and why you believe DFO is fully aware of what is happening?

Nigel Buote: Well, I haven't witnessed it myself—I'm from P.E.I.—but, from what I'm told, it's happening a lot in New Brunswick that certain ethnicities are not getting fined and charged for breaking the law.

Aaron Gunn: Do you believe this has created an increase in the amount of resentment between indigenous and non-indigenous fishermen and communities?

Nigel Buote: Yes, for sure.

Aaron Gunn: Do you think that the lack of monitoring or the two-tiered enforcement of the Fisheries Act limits our ability to conserve this important resource and maintain the sustainability of the fishery?

Nigel Buote: Yes, I agree.

Aaron Gunn: Can you describe in what way it does that?

Nigel Buote: The FSC fishery is supposed to be monitored...or it's supposed to be a quota. I don't know what that quota is. Nobody knows what that quota is, but it's not regulated. Nobody knows how much lobster is being caught in LFA 25 and other areas. I don't know. If it were monitored, they would stop the fishing at a certain time—do you know what I mean?—when this quota they supposedly have is caught.

• (1630)

Aaron Gunn: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hébert, you were talking about the snow crab, the illegal landings that you were concerned about. Can you expand on what you're most concerned about—the illegal landings—and whether you believe that, if this continues to go unenforced or unmonitored, it could undermine the ability to conserve this important resource and maintain its sustainability going forward?

[*Translation*]

Marcel Hébert: That's for sure, and it depends on the size of the illegal landings. At some point, the impact becomes really significant. In 1989, landings collapsed to the tune of 7,000 tonnes, 6,950 tonnes. Prior to 1990, it was a competitive fishery that led to overfishing, which is why landings are at the lowest level ever seen in the history of this fishery. At the time, we didn't know the consequences.

Starting in 1990, fishers agreed to pay observers at sea. At the time, they had 30% coverage. They also decided to pay for dockside weighing of all landings. Fishers put a lot of effort into it and paid for a trawl survey not only to estimate the positive commercial biomass, but also to see the dynamics of the crab population. So we were able to observe in the 1990s that, even though landings were low, there were a lot of prerecruits, and that increased the population again. With a much lower catch rate, we were able to cyclically maintain the snow crab biomass and the current quotas.

However, in the case of illegal landings, it is difficult to determine whether there is a major impact on the population. That then needs to be looked at in terms of reproduction and mature females. Currently, we are seeing a decrease in the average size of mature females, so a decrease in the total fertility of the population. We don't yet know the effects on the genetics of the stock, and it could take several years before they arise.

However, I'd like to say that any factor that contributes to reducing the reproductive potential of the stock then has an impact for 10 to 12 years afterwards, from the moment they start reproducing. For example, a small 3 mm crab takes about nine to 10 years to be market-ready. When there's a lot of illegal commercial crab fishing going on, especially with the larger spawners, it really impacts their ability to reproduce. It gives the smaller males an opportunity to reproduce, which then involves the genetics of the stock.

Although our approach is a precautionary one and we have biological reference points enabling the population to always be in the healthy zone, if we still continue to make illegal landings instead of staying in the healthy zone, we'll return to the cautious zone and then to the critical zone. You don't want the stock embroiled in that cycle.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Cormier for five minutes.

Serge Cormier: Mr. Vacher, I'll briefly go back to you.

You talked about illegal fishing in some indigenous communities. I'm pleased to tell you that I have an article here about my region, which says that the chief of the Pabineau first nation is totally opposed to this. His community fishes during the same season as commercial fishers in our region. We've always collaborated well with that community.

Let's also keep things in perspective. I understand the situation with regard to illegal fishing among indigenous people. In the commercial lobster fishery, there are no landings and there is no weighing or dockside monitoring. That's no secret. Without referring to them as illegal landings, have you seen unreported landings? Is that something you've seen during the span of your career?

• (1635)

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: That's very clear. We mustn't compare lobster fishing with crab fishing, because they're two different ways of managing the resource. It doesn't matter how much is landed, it's not important in lobster fishing, because what counts is the number of traps and licences, as well as the length of the fishing season. That's how this fishery is managed. In fact, it's the best-managed fishery in Canada. Take the Îles de la Madeleine, for example. This region has been collecting data on the fishery since 1875—

Serge Cormier: Which fishery are you talking about, lobster or crab?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I'm talking about the lobster fishery. I'm telling you that you shouldn't think the situation is serious, because landings aren't counted. It's not a problem at all.

Serge Cormier: Okay.

However, if we don't keep data on a given resource every year, how do you expect us to have good data on that resource to know whether it's healthy or less healthy? How can we get an idea of how the lobster stock is doing, for example, if there is no landing or dockside weighing?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: Accounting is done differently. Most harvesters—let's say 99% of harvesters—sell to plants. Plants are required to produce a purchase slip, which they are required to send to—

Serge Cormier: Mr. Vacher, you're talking to a son of a fisherman here. Certainly, my father didn't have the good years of lobster fishing, but I think everyone knows that some catches are unreported in the lobster fishery.

Unfortunately, I think that not having good data on how the lobster fishery resource is doing is a factor that must be considered. That's my opinion, and it may be different from yours. However, I think we need to have an effectively managed fishery in order to have good scientific data, both on the indigenous side and on the commercial side. Both sides are talking about managing the resource with a sustainable fishery. However, how do you want us to have a sustainable fishery for years to come, for generations to come, if we don't have any data?

I understand your point of view, but now I'll ask my other questions.

Mr. Noël, you own a crab fishing licence. In the new Fisheries Act in 2017, it says that the owner-operator must be on the vessel. That was a long-standing request from associations and fishers, precisely because they wanted to avoid questionable funding agreements with plants, and so on. It was to avoid the takeover of a company like the one you worked very hard for, you and all the others who hold licences. That still creates problems, because, as you know, licences are very expensive. We're talking about millions of dollars, whether for the lobster fishery or the crab fishery.

Do you think mechanisms should be put in place in the act, or even on the financial side, to ensure that licences are kept in our regions? We know that permits are going to other regions because of questionable regulations. Given the price of these licences, would you agree to propose solutions to the government so that a group, family members, nephews, nieces, deckhands, whatever, can hold

these licences? Would you be prepared to make a proposal to further facilitate access to these licences and keep them in our communities, instead of them being bought up by companies under agreements that are sometimes questionable?

Réjean Noël: Absolutely. As I was saying, many of our businesses have been moving elsewhere in other provinces for quite some time. Our coastal communities depend heavily on it. If we let the situation continue, certain regions will definitely be affected.

We always think of a family business, which should be created or established according to some really structured rules, where you wouldn't be able to exercise control over the fisheries. There have to be structured rules, where families would be directly established in the business.

Serge Cormier: We agree that it is quite difficult for a young person to get \$5 million to make a down payment on a licence that costs \$15 million or \$20 million.

Réjean Noël: Absolutely. You don't have to go to \$15 million. I know several fishermen whose licences were transferred from father to son at a much lower cost. Nowadays, at the end of the year, there's no profit, and the cost is minimal, so if you want to sell a licence to someone else fairly quickly, it's impossible. There's no financing available.

• (1640)

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

[*English*]

That finishes our second round. We're going to have a short third round of questioning. We'll have three minutes for the Conservatives and Liberals, and then two minutes for the Bloc.

Mr. Small, you have the floor for three minutes.

Clifford Small: Thank you Mr. Chair.

Mr. Buote, your member of Parliament, Mr. Morrissey, has had some trouble believing that controlling agreements exist. Who are the big players out in the Tignish area in terms of processors? Can you name some of them?

Nigel Buote: Royal Star is one of them. Tignish Fisheries Co-op—

Clifford Small: Do you know of any fish harvesters who would have borrowed money from some of the processors out in that part of Prince Edward Island?

Nigel Buote: No, not that I know of.

Clifford Small: It doesn't happen in the lobster fishery in that part of Prince Edward Island?

Nigel Buote: No, not that I know of.

Clifford Small: Okay. I was just wondering whether you've heard talk of any controlling agreements that any of your buddies might have been involved in out there.

Nigel Buote: Years ago, yes, but there haven't been any controlling agreements around here, that I am aware of, over the last seven or eight years—maybe more.

Clifford Small: Have you heard talk of any controlling agreements anywhere throughout P.E.I.'s LFAs?

Nigel Buote: No, not anymore. I really don't know of any anymore in this area.

Clifford Small: Wow, that's amazing. Thank you.

Monsieur Hébert, we've heard some alarming testimony around this committee over the last few weeks regarding the lack of enforcement based on ethnicity. If that's not checked rapidly in the coming months or years, what's going to be the effect on the public resource, the fishery in Atlantic Canada and Quebec?

[Translation]

Marcel Hébert: In the snow crab fishery in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, all landings are weighed dockside. Indigenous people go to the main docks, either the Lamèque or Shippagan docks or the other main docks, where all landings are weighed. I don't think there's a major problem with illegal landings by indigenous people.

The ability to weigh all landings dockside really has an impact on the illegal landings that are currently taking place. If dockside weighing is introduced for inshore lobster fishers, there will be a significant reduction in illegal landings and activities in this fishery. As for snow crab, landings are done at specific docks, which are very well organized to weigh all landings. Illegal landings are few compared to what we see in the lobster fishery.

[English]

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

[Translation]

Mr. Cormier, you have the floor for three minutes.

Serge Cormier: Mr. Vacher, I'll come back to you because I think we may have misunderstood each other. I just want to make sure that we understand each other. I was talking about the lobster fishery earlier. We'll set aside fishing for food, social and ceremonial purposes by indigenous people. I'm talking about the commercial lobster fishery. There is no dockside weighing, so we don't have clear data.

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: That's not true: The data is very clear. The Fisheries Act requires us to report. All commercial fishers are required to report their catches. We are also subject to audits. That's not the issue.

If you target that and think it's a problem, you're going to turn that fishery into a crab fishery with quotas. That's not the solution. I repeat: This is absolutely not the solution. The solution is to work with those who don't report, those who are fishing illegally. Those who make their declarations are fishing legally. Failure to report catches is illegal.

• (1645)

Serge Cormier: Mr. Vacher, I'm going to come back to this.

A catch is not illegal as long as it isn't reported on the tax return at the end of the year.

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: No.

Serge Cormier: We agree that, without landing at the dock and weighing, there is no clear data.

A Radio-Canada report clearly indicated that there are either illegal landings and unreported catches not only in indigenous fisheries, but also in commercial ones. How can we obtain conclusive data, even good data, to determine the status of the lobster resource? How can we do that if we don't have the real data at our disposal?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: It's the same thing with crab fishing. I used to be a fisheries protection officer and worked with commercial crab fishers who were making illegal landings. It's easy to make an illegal landing.

As I said, it's important not to confuse things. Lobster fishers, like crab fishers, are required to report their catches. Crab fishers are required to have an observer on shore to keep track of the catch, because there's a quota to meet. However, lobster fishing is managed by participants, so it doesn't change anything—

Serge Cormier: I have only a few seconds left, so I'll ask you one last question.

Do you think the fines provided for under the Fisheries Act are high enough, or should they be increased to deter more people from making illegal landings or failing to report their catches?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: I think they could be increased.

However, above all, I think that fisheries guardians and officers should work on these files. That's the problem. There's a resource—

Serge Cormier: You just said that you want to work on these files, but you were told not to intervene. What do you do then?

Jean-Sébastien Vacher: That's the problem. We need to tell the authorities who manage the fisheries that officers must apply the act to everyone. They need to focus on the more important rules that have an impact on resources and their sound management, not on rules about trivial matters. It makes no difference to the resource if someone doesn't put the boat's registration number on their fishing vessel or buoy, or if the number is written incorrectly. There are rules, but judgment must be exercised in applying the act. Ultimately, that's what's missing the most.

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

We'll conclude the round of questions with Mr. Deschênes.

You have the floor for two minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Hébert and Mr. Noël. Based on what you said in your testimony, the mortality rate is higher than it should be. It's thought that illegal fishing could be the cause. How are you working with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to combat illegal fishing?

Marcel Hébert: At the last advisory committee meeting, we shared this concern about illegal landings in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence. It's true: There's a difference between the natural mortality of a resource with a healthy population and the mortality of a resource exploited by a fishery. This is especially the case in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, where there is a big difference in the natural mortality rate.

We've proposed a number of ways to limit the number of illegal landings.

Alexis Deschênes: Is the Department of Fisheries and Oceans listening to your proposals?

Marcel Hébert: We have very good collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. We're trying to find solutions.

There are a number of elements to the crab fishery. In the past, everything went very well with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in terms of managing and sharing the resource. Now we want not only to find appropriate ways to limit illegal landings, but also to ensure everyone fishing for this resource is happy.

Alexis Deschênes: I understand that the advisory committee listens, but is there any action? Are you seeing the Department of Fisheries and Oceans taking action against illegal crab landings?

• (1650)

Marcel Hébert: At the start of the 2025 fishing season, fisheries officers came to meet with our association. We discussed several factors, issues and concerns we had regarding illegal landings. These fisheries officers conducted certain checks, and some fishers were found to be at fault. They're still inshore fishers.

Overall, the proposals we want to make would further limit opportunities for illegal landings. If all coastal vessels were monitored, it would completely eliminate the problem. If cameras were installed on board vessels, it would completely eliminate the problem. There are methods we could develop with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to achieve our goals and limit these illegal landings, which can have a negative impact on the stock.

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

[English]

That will complete our questions for this panel.

I want to thank our witnesses for taking the time to meet with us, both in person and by video conference. Certainly, your testimony is going to be very helpful as we're formulating our recommendations for the report that's going to be forthcoming.

With that, we're going to suspend for a few minutes, so that the committee can pursue its meeting in camera to discuss the preliminary drafting instructions for our current study.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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