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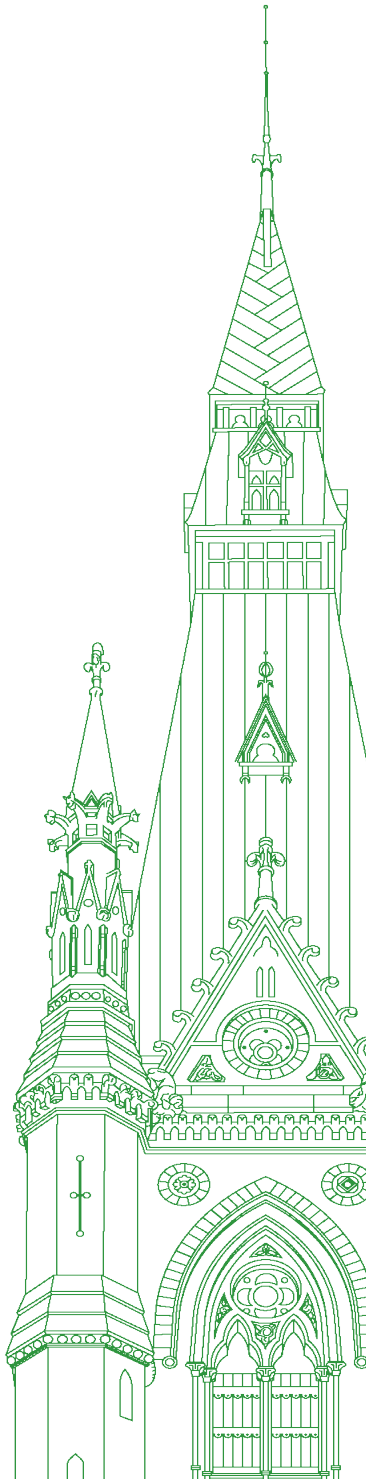

Chair: Patrick Weiler

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

● (1610)

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

[*English*]

I want to start by acknowledging that we are gathered on the ancestral and unceded territories 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 continue its study of marine and coastal protections.

[*Translation*]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room 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 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.

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.

[*Translation*]

To access interpretation services, simply insert your earpiece and select the appropriate channel.

[*English*]

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[*Translation*]

Members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak.

[*English*]

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

We have with us Jim McIsaac, executive director, BC Shrimp Trawlers' Association; Michael Barron, president, Cape Breton Fish Harvesters Association; and Diana Barkley, president, Little Campbell Hatchery Society.

With that, we'll go to opening remarks for five minutes or less, starting with Jim McIsaac.

Jim McIsaac (Executive Director, BC Shrimp Trawlers' Association): Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for the invitation to speak here today.

The BC Shrimp Trawlers' Association is made up of small-scale, independent trawl fishermen. We run either a beam trawl or an otter trawl, and all are under 65 feet, and fitted with bycatch reduction grates and LED lights to further reduce bycatch. We are by far the cleanest shrimp fishery on the planet.

Canada's 2023 MPA standards exclude all trawl, including shrimp, from new MPAs. These standards treat beam, butterfly and otter trawl nets just like super trawlers that can hold BC Place in its mouth.

Shrimp is one of Canada's favourite seafoods. If we do not get our wild shrimp from our ecosystems, we will get it farmed from much less pristine ecosystems.

I've spent tens of thousands of hours in fisheries planning, ocean planning and marine protected area planning processes, and these are vastly different processes. I have worked to protect harvesters, fisheries, marine ecosystems and our coastal communities. Over the last 10 years, the number of B.C. harvesters has declined 25%, the processing jobs have declined 35% and our rural coastal economy continues to spiral down.

MPAs do not stop the major threats to our ocean. Pollution, climate change, acidification, oil spills, illegal, unregulated, unreported fishing and invasive species do not stop at the boundaries of MPAs. MPAs cannot hide from global drivers.

The Great Barrier Reef in Australia, perhaps the best global example of an MPA, was created when oil drilling and coral mining threatened to destroy the reef's $9-billion tourism, fisheries and aquaculture economy. After 50 years of protection, the reef is not entirely dead. It is in a state of crisis, facing severe, rapid decline and pushing the reef towards a critical tipping point. Drawing a line around the reef is not saving this ecosystem. MPAs will not solve the complex reconciliation issues we face either, but they sure can exacerbate them.

Canada is no longer a country where citizens are equal before the law. We now treat knowledge as sacred and based on race, not integrity. Our development of MPAs over the last 10 years exposes this new paradigm.

I was appointed to the Haida Gwaii marine advisory committee in 2011. The council of Haida Nation co-manages several MPAs with Canada. One village chief told our advisory that the CHN does not have the authority to close fishing areas without village approval. As a result, when Canada enters into agreements with the CHN on MPAs, Haida villages are exempt. There are hundreds of other race-based closures on the west coast, including most IPCAs and all 164 RCAs. Don't get me wrong, there should be way more than 50 fishermen in Haida Gwaii, at least 500 with associated full fisheries economy.

For the last 35 years, Canada has focused on protecting corporate access on our coast, not harvester, first nation or coastal community access, but that is another story.

To manage the NSB MPA network, $335 million was granted to a private first nations entity, including $200 million from Canada. In the NSB network action plan, indigenous fisheries are exempt. DFO refused to grant the same exemption to small-scale fishermen, many who have operated in the area for five generations. Local non-indigenous communities were not invited to co-manage the area nor were they given funding to protect their well-being linked to the area.

Twenty-five years ago, most B.C. harvesters supported MPAs, but they do not today. Initially, in creating MPAs, fishermen gave freely of their ecosystem knowledge only to be lied to and deceived by bureaucrats, have their fisheries data shared without consent and have their knowledge used against them. Hard fought-for agreements have been changed at the last minute, some after they were announced. In at least one case, closures were announced after fisheries plans were approved with harvesters on the water. Small-scale harvesters have been fined heavily for fishing in new MPAs. Most had no idea that the areas they had fished for decades were now closed.

MPAs do have a place in our marine ecosystem, but they are not the silver bullet to protect biodiversity. Montreal's CBD has 23 targets, not just one. MPAs must have measurable objectives and targets, and closures must apply to all users. MPA planning should be done inside of larger ocean planning processes or fisheries planning processes.

Thank you for your attention. Hopefully this has been useful.

I look forward to your questions.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

With that, we're now going to go to Michael Barron for five minutes or less.

Michael Barron (President, Cape Breton Fish Harvesters Association): Good afternoon, honourable Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Michael Barron, and I am president of the Cape Breton Fish Harvesters Association. I'm here not as an academic or a policy expert but as a commercial fisherman from Nova Scotia, someone whose livelihood and whose community's future depends on healthy oceans and fair, workable management.

No one in the fishing industry is opposed to conservation. In fact, our livelihoods depend on it; if the resource fails, so do we. Since 2015, however, marine coastal protection in Canada has changed rapidly. While some of that change has been necessary, much of it has left fishers wondering whether conservation is being measured in ways that actually reflect what is happening on the water.

In 2015, less than 1% of Canada's marine waters were protected. Since then, DFO moved quickly to meet an international target of 10% by 2020, but by 2019 that was actually exceeded at 13.8%.

On the water, the picture is more complicated. From a fisherman's perspective, success has been measured mostly by how many square kilometres are drawn on a map, not whether fish stocks are rebuilding, habitats are improving or fishing communities are more secure. The gap between policy and reality is where a lot of frustration comes from.

In Nova Scotia, there are two areas that stand out: St. Anns Bank and the Eastern Canyons.

St. Anns Bank has supported commercial fishing for generations. It's a working area, not a pristine one, but productive, and it matters to the people who fish there. Since its designation as a conservation area, fishers have been left with uncertainty. Some activities are still allowed but others aren't, and many of us still don't know what success looks like in DFO's eyes. We don't know what baseline is being used, what's being monitored or what would trigger changes—either more restrictions or fewer. From where we sit, it feels like we're being asked to accept limits without being shown clear evidence of what those limits are achieving.

The Eastern Canyons marine refuge raised similar concerns. No one disputes the importance of protecting deep-sea corals. Fishers understand sensitive habitat better than most, but this refuge also highlights a bigger issue: Very large areas are being counted towards conservation targets while much of the activity continues as before. At the same time, there's little public reporting to show whether the habitat is actually improving.

The question for fishers becomes simple: Are these measures about real protection or are they about meeting international targets as quickly as possible?

For commercial fishers, especially in the inshore owner-operator fleets, these designations have real consequences. We deal with increasing spatial restrictions, uncertainty about future access and layers of regulation that keep piling up. Meanwhile, consultation often feels like it happens after decisions are mostly made.

We're told what's coming, not asked what will work. That erodes trust, and without trust, conservation becomes harder, not easier.

Enforcement and monitoring are other concerns. We're told areas are protected, but many of us don't see consistent monitoring or enforcement on the water. There is limited baseline data and even less long-term reporting that shows whether these areas are healthier today than they were before protection. Fishers are being asked to shoulder responsibility without being shown results.

Climate change is also changing everything we know. Fish are moving, water temperatures are rising and productivity is shifting, yet most protected areas have fixed boundaries that don't move with the ecosystem. From a fishing perspective, that raises a real concern that we're locking in management decisions that won't make sense 10 to 20 years from now.

Finally, there's an issue with coordination. Offshore protection is federal, but what happens along the coast—habitat loss, shoreline development, pollution—often undermines what we are trying to protect. Fishers see that disconnect clearly, even when policy doesn't.

In closing, fishers want healthy oceans—we always have—but conservation has to be more than lines on a map. It has to be measured by real ecological results, clear rules, meaningful involvement of people who work on the water and management that can adapt as conditions change. Right now, too many fishers feel that marine protection is something being done to us, not with us. If DFO wants conservation to succeed in places like Nova Scotia, that needs to change.

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

● (1620)

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

We're going to conclude now with opening remarks from Diana Barkley for five minutes.

Diana Barkley (President, Little Campbell Hatchery Society): Good afternoon.

I would like to start by thanking Fisheries and Oceans for 40-plus years of not only financial support, but for the hands-on DFO involvement that has been invaluable to our hatchery.

Today, I thought I'd give you a bit of a background on our organization, tell you about the work we do and the importance of Canada's marine protection efforts, and I'd like to share with you our ambitious plans going forward.

Salmon conservation, stock assessment, and community stewardship and public outreach have been key objectives since our organization was founded in 1957. Our 29-acre property, which we own, is located on the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish people, the traditional territory of the Semiahmoo First Nation. We have a long-standing relationship with the Semiahmoo First Nation.

We've been a partner of the DFO salmonid enhancement program since 1982. Our hatchery is committed to protecting and enhancing salmon habitat and salmonid populations in our area of the Little Campbell River watershed in British Columbia.

Our dedicated volunteers monitor our fish fence daily and during spawning season are there from dawn till dusk. As an example, one Sunday this past November, the coho decided it was time and more than 1,300 came through the fence that day. It caught us a bit by surprise, but our hard-working volunteers were up to the task. This year was a record year and we counted 4,475 coho and 1,134 chinook.

We enumerate all returning fish, distinguishing species, wild from hatchery, male from female, and we share all that data with DFO. We collect broodstock, taking eggs and managing incubation. This year our egg take was over 103,000. After rearing, we put them back into the Little Campbell River. Each year we release approximately 100,000 salmon. Over 40-plus years we estimate our small hatchery has raised and released some four million salmon.

Community hatcheries like ours complement marine protection efforts by rebuilding vulnerable stocks that depend on healthy estuaries and coastal waters, particularly for populations such as the threatened Boundary Bay chinook. The success of our freshwater enhancement work depends heavily on what happens once these fish reach the estuary and nearshore marine environment, where habitat quality, water conditions and bycatch management play a major role in survival.

Protecting the Little Campbell estuary and Boundary Bay nearshore habitats is crucial to ensuring that the fish we release have a meaningful chance to survive and return as adults. Education is also a primary focus for us. We provide eyed eggs every fall for the salmonids in the classroom program and we conduct tours for the students and seniors, as well as the public at large. Last year alone our volunteers conducted over 80 school tours. More than 4,000 children, parents and teachers learned about the important work we do. Over the decades, we have provided tours to hundreds of thousands of people.

Our 100% volunteer-operated hatchery is funded through DFO, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, our club memberships, rental revenues from a banquet hall and fundraisers such as our annual Salmon Sessions outdoor music festival.

Before I close, I want to share with you our ambitious plans to replace our 46-year-old hatchery building and to double our enhancement breeding program. The current building represents health and safety concerns due to water damage caused by frequent floods and the aging hatchery infrastructure is at an ever-increasing risk of failure. With climate change and increased urban development in the Little Campbell watershed, these catastrophic flood events are expected to become more frequent and severe. A new hatchery building built on higher ground will help make our programs resilient and adaptable to these changes.

In 2022, we applied for the BC salmon restoration and innovation fund, but we were much too early in our planning process. The SRIF program has been most successful on many levels, and we urge you to consider bringing back this valuable fund to further support salmon recovery. Ultimately, our objective is to continue our salmon enhancement and stock assessment efforts to ensure the ongoing health of coho, chinook and steelhead populations in the Little Campbell River. With 100% of our coho and chinook being adipose fin clipped, the fish raised in our hatchery contribute to a robust sports fishery on the Little Campbell River, as well as recreational fisheries in the marine approach areas.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. I'm happy to answer any questions.

● (1625)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Barkley.

With that, we're going to begin our opening round of questions, the six-minute round, starting with Mr. Arnold.

Mel Arnold (Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, CPC): Thank you to all three witnesses for your opening remarks.

I'm going to start off with Mr. McIsaac.

So far in this study we've heard some interesting testimony. Some have stated that when it comes to coastal marine protections and fisheries, we can have both. It doesn't have to be a binary choice of one or the other. Conservation and fisheries can coexist.

What is your take on this?

Jim McIsaac: I certainly think they have to coexist. If we want to have fisheries, we can't wipe out stocks from the ecosystem and intend to have an economy in the future down the road.

Mel Arnold: Should the conservation protection areas coexist with fisheries or can we have conservation and fisheries at the same time?

Jim McIsaac: If you're talking about conservation areas, with our fisheries on our coasts, we've had protected areas for decades or more—for 50 or 100 years. The mainland inlets where sablefish spawn have been off-limits for the sablefish fishery for decades. It's not written on any map or anything like that, but it's there. We do all different kinds of protected areas inside of fisheries planning.

Mel Arnold: Would you say there was a balance, possibly, with the protected areas that had been established and the fisheries? Is that balance changing, in your take on this?

Jim McIsaac: The ecological management of our coast is certainly changing. This is new. We didn't do marine protected areas for ecosystem objectives 20 years ago. Fifteen years ago, less than 1% of our coast was in MPAs. Now 35% of our coast is in MPAs with these ecological targets. That's vastly different than targets for fisheries.

Mel Arnold: Previous witnesses for the study had varying testimony on the notion of the spillover effects of protected areas. What's your take on the so-called spillover effect under the previous protected areas that we had or if we go to this 30 by 30 plan that the Liberals are proposing?

Jim McIsaac: Under fisheries management, the structure that we use for our fisheries is biomass modelling. We use that to develop harvest control rules across space and time. There are no current mechanisms to incorporate spatial closures or spatial protections into those models. That means that the areas outside don't benefit from spillover. The quota is determined prior to that.

As a matter of fact, in the pinch species realm, we get punished. An example of that is something like Frederick Island and yelloweye. It's a rockfish conservation area and has been one for 24 years or something like that. The yelloweye is pushing the fishery out rather than further. It's making a de facto larger closed area. It's not changing the quota for yelloweye.

Mel Arnold: In the northern shelf bioregion and that network of MPAs, there are conditions and prohibitions that have been established for fisheries. I've heard that fisheries exemptions have also been established for the NSB network.

Is that correct? Can you shed some light on that for us?

● (1630)

Jim McIsaac: There is a set of exemptions in the network action plan, which is one that's been approved. That's the one I referenced. We asked for an exemption for small-scale, independent harvesters in the area. That wasn't granted, but the exemption that exists in there is for indigenous harvest and traditional use, including practices for FSC—food, social and ceremonial—and will continue in accordance with legal rights and obligations. Indigenous harvest is allowed in the NSB.

Mel Arnold: That's even though it's recognized as a protected area.

Jim McIsaac: Yes.

Mel Arnold: What trend do you see in the amount of foreign control of fisheries in B.C.? Is that compounding what's happening with these tentative closure areas?

Jim McIsaac: I don't know how to associate those two.

Mel Arnold: I'm just wondering if the overall industry is declining.

Jim McIsaac: Oh, there's no doubt about that. The number of fishermen is declining. The number of processing jobs is declining. The economy in rural coastal communities is declining.

Mel Arnold: Is that a combination of multiple effects?

Jim McIsaac: Yes, there are definitely multiple effects, but I would say that the largest impact over the last 10 years was going from 1% of our coast in MPAs to 35% in MPAs.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to Mr. Cormier for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here today.

Look, as I've said many times, my father was a fisherman all his life. I truly know how important fishing communities are for some of those people. It's not because we're sitting on the government side that we agree sometimes on what we're trying to achieve. This is why we have you here. We want to know what's wrong with these MPAs that are being developed.

Mr. Barron, you were saying that you feel this thing has already been decided. Did you attend some of those meetings with DFO officials about those MPAs? Did you see some maps? Did they tell you that you wouldn't be able to fish in those areas? What was the sense at these meetings? What was the vibe?

Michael Barron: I was on the original working group between 2012 and 2013 for St. Anns Bank, which is just off Cape Breton. There were two what I would consider to be fairly good consultation meetings. After that, it was just “check the box”, because they had to have so many. What we put forth as recommendations wasn't even close to what we asked, because—

Serge Cormier: Can you give me an example of a recommendation you gave to the committee in the meeting?

Michael Barron: They gave us three specific areas that they were going to allow us to take from. We asked them for certain latitude and longitude coordinates so that we could harvest within there. We didn't get them in take zone 3. That has the most lucrative halibut fishing grounds. It ended up pretty much displacing some of the fleet that was able to venture a little bit further offshore than others were. It put it outside the realm to even make it worthwhile going.

Serge Cormier: Were you ever told by officials that the zone or the area that you were being told would be an MPA would be closed to fishing, no matter what?

Michael Barron: In zone 1, yes; there are four zones within St. Anns Bank. We were told that there would be places we'd be able to harvest. They wanted our recommendations.

Serge Cormier: That being said, it would prevent a lot of fishermen from being able to fish for halibut, I think you said, or was it lobster as well?

Michael Barron: Zones 2 and 4 are mainly halibut. There's some snow crab in zone 3. Zone 2 is all lobster traps, with a little bit of a fall halibut fishery.

● (1635)

Serge Cormier: Did they talk about any compensation, for example, if—

Michael Barron: No.

Serge Cormier: Zero. Did you put that as a recommendation, for example?

Michael Barron: No. As an industry, we're not looking for compensation. We're looking to maintain a way of life that we're used to making. We're not looking for handouts, which is what compensation is.

Serge Cormier: I totally understand, but the automobile sector, for example, is taking a hit right now. The government is giving them some help. Let's say an MPA will impact some fishing community. Don't you think some kind of help needs to be going to these communities as well?

Michael Barron: Yes, but this was an already established MPA. If there were any future MPAs—

Serge Cormier: Yes. I'm talking about the future.

Michael Barron: —it might have to be a discussion that takes place then.

Serge Cormier: Okay.

Mr. McIsaac, you were talking about your shrimp fisheries. I think B.C.'s is a little bit different from ours in Atlantic Canada; I don't know the area that well. Is the zone you're talking about close to shrimp fisheries? Is this a proposed MPA?

Jim McIsaac: The Canadian MPA standards that came out in 2023 have four prohibitions. One of those prohibitions is to trawl. All trawling in new MPAs is excluded. For any new MPA that comes up, it's excluded.

Serge Cormier: There's no fishing?

Jim McIsaac: That's across the country, not just in B.C. but everywhere.

Serge Cormier: Did you put in your recommendations when you had those meetings with the officials?

Jim McIsaac: We tried to have that changed when ECCC put it forward in 2022.

Serge Cormier: There was nothing done?

Jim McIsaac: No.

Serge Cormier: It was closed.

What was the impact on your fishers?

Jim McIsaac: Well, all future MPAs—and there are quite a few still in proposal on the west coast—are off-limits for shrimp, so we have to be very careful about which ones we support and which ones we don't. They're also looking backwards to MPAs that were already approved, to implement those four exemptions—so yes, they're going backwards.

Serge Cormier: Do you think you're being put in front of something without even knowing the benefit of doing an MPA, for example? Yes, of course, we want to predict the ecosystem. We know that—blah, blah, blah—but is there some real, tangible way to see this?

Jim McIsaac: Canada's a big country, and we're painting with a very big brush. You're talking about putting small owner-operator trawlers that are less than 60 feet—as compared to those that are almost a kilometre—into the MPA standards, so we're all painted with that same brush.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur Cormier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you may go ahead for six minutes.

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

Good afternoon everyone. Good afternoon to our witnesses.

I read yesterday that Newfoundland and Labrador tore up a memorandum of understanding for a marine protected area. The provincial government said the procedure didn't work.

Do you feel something like that could happen in your sectors?

Mr. McIsaac can answer first.

[*English*]

Jim McIsaac: For British Columbia, I think it's very unlikely that they're going to tear up an agreement on the northern shelf bioregion. The federal government has entered into a funding agreement, along with the province, with a first nations entity on the north coast for $335 million, so I think that's highly unlikely.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Barron, do you have anything to add?

[*English*]

Michael Barron: In my area now, with this one already in place—St. Anns Bank—and with the Eastern Canyons already in place, I don't see one happening off Cape Breton.

In another part of Nova Scotia, down off the eastern shore, they're looking at taking away all of LFA 32 as an MPA. They would definitely want to see that agreement not be there.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: It seems to me there's a lesson to be learned from the situation in Newfoundland and Labrador. Without social licence, a government could pull out and block an agreement.

Mr. McIsaac, you said you think a setback is unlikely in your sector, but how would you recommend the process be improved?

● (1640)

[*English*]

Jim McIsaac: We've made multiple proposals to improve the process. We've offered to be part of the collaboration in designing it. That has not been accepted. We've made multiple proposals on how to change it so that local fishermen are part of that and part of the exemption.

I co-chaired a session at COP15 in Montreal of small-scale fishers. We had small-scale fishers from across the planet talking about MPAs. Two of the bright spots around the planet for small-scale fishers come from Indonesia and Chile. Both of them involve having protected areas for small-scale harvesters. Indonesia has about 80% of their EEZ protected for small-scale harvesters. In Chile, they have what are called territorial use rights for fisheries, which protect the area inside the MPA for local harvesters, so corporations and multinational fishers have to be outside of that, and their government enforces that.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Basically, it's about paying more attention to what inshore fishers have to say and following their recommendations.

[*English*]

Jim McIsaac: The fishermen need to be part of the process. They need to be collaborating on the process.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: I'd like to understand the process. Were you consulted? How did things play out?

[*English*]

Jim McIsaac: The MPA network discussion started in 2010. The federal government and the province drafted an agreement on MPAs. We've had probably hundreds of meetings about it since. I would say our key recommendations have been ignored or dismissed through the process.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Who made the recommendations that were retained? Which groups?

[*English*]

Jim McIsaac: The MPA network process is an ecological process. It has what I would call a one-dimensional objective: it's ecological. The social and economic objectives are not. They don't have the same weight. If you want to do this, you have to do it inside integrated planning on the coast where multiple objectives can happen. That is where MPA planning should be.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Were the decisions that were made, the ones that went against your recommendations, tied to environmental groups?

Would you say decision-makers paid the most attention to what they had to say?

[*English*]

Jim McIsaac: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Barron, what are your recommendations for improving the process and bringing fishers onside?

[*English*]

Michael Barron: Instead of providing lip service, like the department does sometimes, and saying they want to weigh in and use fishers' local knowledge on how to operate and stuff, actually use it. We're the boots on the boat. We're the ones who see what happens day to day. It's not the NGOs who are going to sit in front of you and argue that we want to destroy the ocean as an industry, because they don't understand what we see day to day. There has to be real-time, meaningful consultation, and we actually have to be heard and be part of the process, like Mr. McIsaac said.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Do you think it's possible to balance your interests as fishers with conservation targets?

[*English*]

The Chair: Give a very brief answer, because we are at time.

Michael Barron: Yes, but there has to be clear, concise communication in order to come to those decisions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

That completes the first round.

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

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

Welcome to the witnesses.

Mr. Barron, on this marine conservation strategy of 30 by 30, even eco experts claim that results can't be measured. It seems a little like the Liberal carbon tax plan that was supposed to put money in people's pockets and clean the air at the same time.

● (1645)

Michael Barron: To me, it seems like they're more or less trying to match or meet what the UN was looking for. Without any really meaningful consultation, they were just charging full ahead.

However, the one thing they seemed to forget when they put these in place is that if we can't fish within a certain area in an MPA, and we're required to travel further, well, we're creating a greater carbon footprint.

Clifford Small: That brings me to something here. Have you had your livelihood either negatively or positively affected by the closed areas? You referenced St. Anns Bank earlier.

Michael Barron: It has definitely not been positive. We've had to change the way that we fish certain areas at certain times of the year.

Clifford Small: What year was that protected area put in place?

Michael Barron: It was in 2015.

Clifford Small: That's just over 10 years ago. To your knowledge, have DFO scientists or any other scientists or ENGOs gone out there and measured whatever it was they were trying to protect, to see if it's actually been protected or if there's been an improvement? I'm assuming it's coral or something, or sponge?

Michael Barron: Our association has been contracted by the department a couple times over the 10 years to do a little bit of monitoring, but the amount that's being done has not been beneficial or consistent.

Clifford Small: Before the government moves ahead further down the journey of 30 by 30, as it's been instructed to do by the United Nations, do you think it would be better for everyone and better for ecosystems and whatnot if there were measurements taken to check out and make sure that the things that are supposed to be protected are being protected, and that these marine protected areas are delivering the desired outcomes?

Michael Barron: Yes, that goes without saying. Without any real, proper monitoring for what they are trying to protect, we don't know if the growth of what they're trying to protect has actually been successful.

Clifford Small: If fish harvesters were told that 30% of Canadian waters had to be closed to fishing, would you be able to give some advice on where those closed areas should be, as a real partner?

Michael Barron: Yes, of course, because as fishermen we make our livelihoods on the water, so we know what times of the year to move for certain species.

Clifford Small: Some group says that this area here is more precious than this area over here—over here, there's nobody fishing. The more precious areas of the ecosystem—the organisms and all God's creatures—are over in an area, but no one knows what exists there in these depths and in these areas. Do you think the setting up of these marine-protected areas is a measure to protect ecosystems or a measure to stop fishing?

Michael Barron: To be honest, at times it feels like it's to stop fishing. However, there's one thing that these people have to take into consideration, especially in areas like where I'm from and where you're from, MP Small. Some of our seasons only operate for two months of the year, so there are 10 months of the year when there's nothing actually happening on the water in certain locations. That should be taken into consideration in the percentage somehow.

Clifford Small: Thank you.

Mr. McIsaac, funding streams flow from various organizations. We've heard talk that some funding sources to support the setting up of some of these marine closures to economic activity are foreign. Have you heard anything to that effect coming from the B.C. coast?

Jim McIsaac: Certainly part of the $335 million that is going to the first nations entity on the north coast for the NSB is from a foreign entity.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm afraid we're at time here.

Next we are going to go to Mr. Klassen. You have the floor for five minutes.

● (1650)

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I don't think there is anybody in Canada who doesn't want us to make sure that fishing and conservation can exist side by side and that we protect the industry and the livelihood of the people who are on the waters.

Mr. McIsaac, you were talking about some of the other countries that have MPAs. I'm just wondering if you can give us a little bit of a comparison of how they are structuring them versus the way Canada is structuring them.

Jim McIsaac: I'm certainly not an expert on that, but from the COP15 panel that I chaired, I would say that the majority of small-scale harvesters around the planet are deeply concerned with the objective of 30 by 30. We had examples from Africa of small-scale harvesters being shot at by enforcement people to get them off the water in areas that had been protected without their knowledge. Yes, I think there are much better ways to protect biodiversity than doing it the way it's being done currently.

Ernie Klassen: Thank you so much.

Mr. Barron, I think you were saying that in British Columbia the MPAs are already at 35%. I'm wondering if you know in Atlantic Canada what percentage of the goal has been reached there.

Michael Barron: I'm pretty sure that I didn't say anything about B.C.'s, MPAs, because I wouldn't know too much about what's going on out there. As I mentioned, in 2019, Canada as a whole was at 13.8% when they were looking at 10%, so they exceeded it in four years.

Ernie Klassen: Mr. McIsaac then that said that in B.C. we were on 35% of the waters. You were talking about exemptions for first nations fishers. I'm wondering if there are any exemptions for non-first nations in any of the MPAs.

Jim McIsaac: There are certainly MPAs that allow fisheries, sports fishing and commercial fishing, so there are a variety of different ones. As I was saying, it's like the rockfish conservation areas. They allow some sports fishing, some trap fishing and even mid-water trawl. They don't allow commercial longline for rockfish or halibut, but indigenous fishermen are allowed to do that in all 164 areas.

Ernie Klassen: Thank you.

Ms. Barkley, MPAs are often discussed in isolation, but your testimony points to a broader tool box. From your perspective, how should MPAs be aligned with fish management plans and fishers out in the open waters?

Diana Barkley: Our success and the success of other hatcheries depends heavily on what happens once juvenile salmon reach the river. Estuaries and nearshore areas are critical transition zones for us where young salmon can acclimate from fresh water to salt water, feed intensively and then grow before heading offshore. These areas provide sheltered habitat and rich food sources that are essential during this vulnerable stage.

On MPAs, from our perspective—and I feel like I'm a really little fish in a big pond here today—I think our voice is an important one. MPAs help safeguard these estuaries and nearshore habitats, improving the chances that the fishery release will survive, return as adults and contribute to the conservation of fisheries. This will help support the sport fisheries industry and provide a food source for the various marine animals and mammals out there.

Ernie Klassen: Are you aware of or were you part of any consultations as part of the hatcheries group? There are many all over B.C. run by a lot of volunteers. Was there any input provided from hatcheries on the effects that this would have on MPAs?

● (1655)

Diana Barkley: I'm not aware of any.

We work closely with the Pacific Salmon Foundation, so often our voice is heard through such organizations such as that.

I will say that DFO is a really important source for us. I know that there have been various talks of cutbacks in personnel and in financing and funding. I would like to emphasize to the committee the important work your DFO officers as well as our community advisers do on the ground in helping and supporting organizations like ours for the last 40 years.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you may go ahead. You have two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McIsaac, you talked about the differences in how your members, fishers and first nations are treated.

Can you clarify what you mean?

[*English*]

Jim McIsaac: What exact line were—

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Can you give us any examples?

[*English*]

Jim McIsaac: Do you mean between organizations and fishers?

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: I'm talking about examples in relation to the rules for marine protected areas.

[*English*]

Jim McIsaac: I'll use the example that I gave for rockfish conservation areas. In Haida Gwaii, there's a national marine conservation area, NMCA, in the southern part of Haida Gwaii. About 40% of the area is closed to all fisheries, but indigenous people are exempt from that.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Is it related to the food, social and ceremonial fishery, or are first nations allowed to engage in commercial fishing?

[*English*]

Jim McIsaac: That's a good question. In the language that's in the NSB, the network action plan that I read out, it's questionable whether it means just FSC, because it's prefaced with, and I quote exactly from it, “indigenous harvest and traditional use”, so including FSC. So that, to me, goes well beyond FSC. The way that that language is actually written is well beyond FSC.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Barron, can you give me examples of accommodation measures that you, as fish harvesters, requested but that you were not granted?

[*English*]

Michael Barron: As previously mentioned, when we asked for the zones that we were able to fish in, we asked them to be a certain size, and those sizes weren't met by the department. They actually still ended up protecting over 3,300 square kilometres, and we only ended up getting, through the three zones, a little over 600 square kilometres worth of take. I know it sounds like a lot, but to put it in perspective, the no-take zone is two-thirds the size of Mr. Morrissey's province.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

The last two speakers will have four minutes and four minutes.

I'll pass the floor over to Mr. Gunn.

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

Mr. McIsaac, do you believe DFO has adequately consulted fishermen and coastal communities with regard to their current proposals to close 30%, even maybe more than 40%, of B.C.'s coast to various forms of fishing as part of these underwater parks or marine protected areas?

Jim McIsaac: I definitely think that they haven't done enough and they haven't listened when they have consulted.

They did a survey after draft two of the NSB, the network action plan, in the coastal communities. Their comments on that survey were that they've been left out of the discussion. They see the NSB as creating instability, threatening their way of life. It's a distrusted process. Community impacts have not been considered.

Those are their comments from the survey that DFO did.

Aaron Gunn: And just to clarify, how long has this process, the NSB process, with regard to these marine closures been going on for? This is six or seven years now.

● (1700)

Jim McIsaac: It started in earnest, engaging, in 2018, I guess but it dates back before that. They were doing consultation on the MPA networks going back to 2010—

Aaron Gunn: But you still don't really know what's going on, like what's coming next. What I'm trying to get at is—

Jim McIsaac: If you look at the network action plan and you read the drafts that they put out before, you have a good idea of what's coming and it's pretty hurtful for commercial fishing.

Aaron Gunn: It's interesting that you bring up these drafts because when we've had DFO officials here—and I feel like this has been confusing to some of my Liberal colleagues as it has been for all of us—they have downplayed or downright denied the fact that these marine protected areas would include what's known as no-take areas or significant closures to fishing, but we have since heard other testimony that has showed us these draft scenarios and we have heard about other pre-existing MPAs that have been put in in recent years in British Columbia that are no-take areas or are essentially no-take areas.

Has that been your experience? What kind of light can you bring to this?

Jim McIsaac: There are two areas I'll talk about that don't give me any faith in what they're doing. One is the glass sponge reefs. The fishing industry was involved in the glass sponge reefs in first identifying them in the 1980s and then protecting them voluntarily in the early 2000s and then pushing them into the IFMP process in 2005 and then supporting the whole process of going to MPA. We did seven years of consultation on that. We drafted a core protection area, an adaptive management zone around it and a vertical management zone, and it was put into Canada Gazette I that way.

When it came to Canada Gazette II, all of the fisheries opportunities in there were denied. After all of the consultation that we did, all of the work that we did, it was all thrown out.

It was the same thing on sablefish and tuna on Bowie Seamount, which is 187 kilometres off our coast. We went through a process of protecting the fishery there, and now 2018, 10 years after it was established, there is no fishery there.

Aaron Gunn: Really quickly, how devastating would the impacts be on your industry and your fishery if these changes went in as they're laid out in the draft proposals?

Jim McIsaac: Are you talking about the NSB one?

Aaron Gunn: Yes.

Jim McIsaac: The estimates are a hit of something like $120 million to the industry. It's pretty significant.

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

Next, we'll go to Mr. Morrissey for four minutes.

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

Mr. McIsaac, you referenced a roughly 60-foot trawler for shrimp. What would that inshore fisher gross in a season, generally?

Jim McIsaac: It would be pretty low. Most of the trawlers are way smaller than that, and the current management plan is not supportive of the fishery.

Robert Morrissey: Why is it not supportive of the fishery?

Jim McIsaac: That's a good question.

I would say that there's a difference.... The department has been managing the shrimp fishery for the last 27 years as if there were 36 individual stocks. Last year, after almost a decade of trying to get them to do a science review of that, they've identified that there's one stock on the coast, which means they've been managing it incorrectly for 30 years.

Robert Morrissey: I appreciate the testimony all three of you have provided today.

Would it be fair to say that the industry recognizes there is a need to evaluate fishing efforts and there could be some value in restrictions to some areas, but that candid trust within the department to enforce it that way and respect the input of the fishery is preventing buy-in from fishers?

That is for Mr. McIsaac and Mr. Barron.

Jim McIsaac: When you work in good faith in a process for seven years and have it upended by....

What ended up happening was 1,450 form letters were sent in to the Canada Gazette part I process to say we want more protection. All of the collaborative process that—

● (1705)

Robert Morrissey: Who did the form letters come from?

Jim McIsaac: They came from three ENGOs.

Robert Morrissey: Were they consistent form letters?

Jim McIsaac: They were the same. The department identified that there were 1,450 identical letters.

Robert Morrissey: Mr. Barron.

Michael Barron: When St. Anns Bank was in the process of being formed, we had letter writing as well. It was one generic letter sent in by all of LFA 27.

Robert Morrissey: What was in the generic letter in relation to that?

Michael Barron: To be honest, it was a long time ago. I have it on file. I can definitely send it to you.

Robert Morrissey: Was it supportive or did it raise issues?

Michael Barron: It raised issues, but it was also supportive and showed understanding that we need to have the conservation, but we were asking them to listen to our recommendations because we felt the no-take zone was more than sufficient.

Robert Morrissey: That goes to my question earlier. What I'm hearing from witnesses is that there is fisher support out there for conservation measures, but the negotiation style between the department and fishers is pushing fishers away.

Is that what you're telling this committee?

Michael Barron: Yes. There isn't a fisherman who's going to sit here and tell you that we don't support conservation, because without conservation there's no product and no livelihood in our coastal communities, so yes, we support conservation 100%.

Robert Morrissey: In some areas, fishing styles or methodology may have to be adjusted to protect the future of the fishery. Is that correct?

Michael Barron: Yes.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm afraid that's the end of the time we have for this panel.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today and travelling long distances to provide some testimony.

Mr. Barron, you can provide that information in writing to the committee. Likewise, for our other witnesses, if there's anything else you'd like to provide in writing, please send that to the committee.

You're welcome to stay in the room for our second panel.

We're going to briefly suspend while we welcome our new witnesses.

● (1705)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1715)

The Chair: Colleagues, we're back.

I would just like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses—although I think they might have been here for the last panel, so they might have already heard this.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

[*Translation*]

To access interpretation services, simply insert your earpiece and select the appropriate channel.

[*English*]

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

With that, I would like to welcome our second panel of witnesses.

We have Mark Carr, professor from the University of California at Santa Cruz; Fraser MacDonald from the University of British Columbia; and Keith Sullivan, the executive director of the Newfoundland Aquaculture Industry Association.

With that, we're going to jump right into opening statements for five minutes or less starting with Professor Carr.

Mark Carr (Professor, University of California, Santa Cruz, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this committee's study of marine and coastal protections, and more specifically the application of spatial management approaches to achieving those protections.

My background in the science and policy of marine protected areas is summarized in my nomination biography, so I won't spend time repeating that beyond emphasizing my experience in the planning process and subsequent monitoring and evaluation of California's state-wide MPA network and as a scientific adviser to the Great Bear Sea MPA Network design process and the ongoing development of the monitoring and evaluation program. I am less familiar with the processes elsewhere, such as in Canada.

For further context, I want to emphasize that I hope to help inform your study and not to advocate either for or against marine protected areas. In part, it would jeopardize my continued involvement in conducting the evaluation of California's network if I were to convey a perceived bias on this topic.

To that end, I have put together a document that summarizes responses to the three overarching questions I was asked to address. I don't know when you'll receive that, as I'm still finishing it, but it includes references and summaries of documents and publications relevant to each of those questions.

I will make one or two overarching comments for context to the responses in that document and today.

California has developed a very robust ecological monitoring and evaluation program to assess how well the conservation goals of the network are being achieved. However, as reflected in the state's decadal review of the network, that program has not given sufficient attention to socio-economic consequences, including for both fisheries and first nations, nor has the development of the monitoring program engaged those stakeholders. In contrast, my experience to date in the design of the Great Bear Sea MPA Network evaluation program indicates that that process intends to do a much more inclusive and better job of addressing how it will evaluate those socio-economic consequences. I understand that this is also the case in some provinces, but I'm not as familiar with them. However, because many of the MPAs and the existing monitoring programs in the Great Bear Sea are younger than the California network, there are simply fewer results to be able to point to.

I'm going to stop there so that we have time for your important questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Carr.

If you could send that document to the committee, we'll make sure that it gets translated and circulated to all members.

With that, we're going to Mr. MacDonald for opening remarks of up to five minutes.

Fraser MacDonald (University of British Columbia, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the members of this committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear today to speak of my direct experience with the marine planning process on the Pacific coast and how the implementation and the uncertainty surrounding the many ongoing draft processes are affecting families, jobs, investment and community health in the Pacific region.

My name is Fraser MacDonald. I am from Vancouver. For the past 15 years, I have owned and operated a commercial fishing business with my wife. Over the last 20 years, I’ve participated in many of the fisheries on our Pacific coast and have learned a great deal during my time on the water.

I currently serve as the president of the Pacific Prawn Fishermen’s Association and, for the last three years, I've had the privilege of working with UBC's Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries as an adjunct professor.

My comments today, however, are my own, and are shaped by my experience in the industry and throughout the MPA planning process.

I spend about six months a year at sea, so I know first-hand why we need protections for ecosystems and biodiversity. The wildlife and natural beauty of our coast are incredible. Canada’s coasts are worth protecting and fishermen understand this better than most. Our livelihoods depend on doing our work sustainably over the long term.

Please hear my voice today not as an argument against marine protected areas, but as a call for a made-in-Canada implementation method—one that recognizes our international commitments, but doesn't shackle us to a standardized international implementation plan that doesn't reflect the reality on our coasts. We can protect what is currently unprotected without undermining a sustainable industry and the coastal economies that depend on it.

Last week, a witness in this committee mentioned that some fish stocks in Canada need rebuilding. What he didn't mention were the many world-leading examples of co-management that currently exist in Canadian fisheries.

It's my opinion that rebuilding stocks or protecting biodiversity should not be approached in a Canadian context by drawing two-dimensional boundaries on a chart with static implementation. Canada's international commitments were based on global templates designed primarily for countries with little or no fisheries management or monitoring. That's not the Canadian reality.

For countries without management systems, static no-take-style MPAs may be a fast way to protect unprotected biodiversity, but Canada already has extensive fisheries management, monitoring and enforcement in place. Thirty per cent protection of a country's EEZs with weak oversight—even with half of it designated as no-take—would still be far less robust than what we currently have in the Pacific region.

Our coast already has approximately 35% protection through existing static MPAs and our wild fisheries are further protected through our IFMPs. Despite this, the previous federal government has been pursuing significant additional static protected zones throughout our coast, many with no-take provisions that would devastatingly reduce landings in some fisheries from 20% to 50%.

If we want to protect static benthic ecosystems, then static protection can be the right tool—targeted to specific sites addressing specific threats that are not already being managed—but fishing effort impacts should be managed through IFMPs, not blunt spatial closures.

Instead of celebrating collaborative success and fixing identifiable gaps, Canada is on course for a future where we have voluntarily legislated our wild capture fisheries out of business and have risked our coastal communities' survival by applying a standardized international solution to a uniquely Canadian coast.

In October, I attended a lunch with Minister Thompson where she expressed a concern at the lack of people under 35 years old in fisheries. In 2018, I had the privilege of addressing this committee and I spoke about the looming labour gap in B.C.'s fisheries. I can say now with confidence that we're living in the midst of that shortage.

The MPA process in B.C. is a main driver of an exodus from our industry. Three of my boats were purchased from multi-generational fishermen who retired and sold, not because their children lacked interest or skill, but because they chose other careers—tugboats, ferries or coastal pilots. They loved fishing, but why gamble on a future with such uncertainty of access?

The same is true for many of my young captains and crew. My fishing operation employs up to 25 people during our peak fishing season. They are talented and committed, and many could become boat owners one day, yet I fully expect that most will leave the industry. I don't blame them. Why would someone borrow over $1 million to buy a boat and licence that could be devalued to nearly nothing within 10 years? Why commit to a 15-year bank mortgage on an asset that may not exist before it's paid off?

If Canada is serious about building a blue economy and a strong economy that works for everyone, and strengthening domestic industries, I'll say the current policy is doing the opposite of it. It's impeding investment and forcing the next generation of fishermen out. We need certainty of access, plain and simple.

Fishing requires years of mentorship, skill building and local knowledge. We cannot fix this labour shortage overnight, but we can at least start now.

What I would like to see is a transparent, made-in-Canada approach to meeting our international obligations with meaningful industry collaboration. By that, I mean actually seeing industry advice incorporated into outcomes, not just being allowed to speak at consultation meetings. This would go a long way to restoring trust and, with it, investment.

● (1720)

Fishing is already a hard life—months at sea, months in shipyards, market volatility and global trade pressures. Fishermen face adversity with resilience because it's our job, but the added stress that's been imposed during the prolonged uncertainty of the MPA process in B.C. has exhausted an already stretched workforce. Fishers who engage with DFO in this process do so as volunteers, donating immense amounts of our time, energy and resources. I can tell you, our industry is exhausted from the last 10-plus years of this, with little to show for our effort.

I hope this committee will examine the path that Canada is on, advise the government to be brave internationally, change course, use the tools that we already have for fisheries and use MPAs where they truly will add protection to protect the unprotected.

Thank you.

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

We're going to conclude with opening remarks from Keith Sullivan, for five minutes.

● (1725)

Keith Sullivan (Executive Director, Newfoundland Aquaculture Industry Association): Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity.

NAIA currently represents 130 members, comprising aquaculture farming companies and suppliers to the industry, with a vision to promote excellence in the aquaculture industry of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's proud of the work of its members and the 2,500 people who depend on aquaculture in the province. Our members produce salmon, trout, mussels, oysters and seaweeds, and 2024 was the highest value ever for aquaculture in the province's history.

This past year, I've had engagements with at least three different federal departments regarding development of MPAs. Much of my career, I've been engaged in the management of marine fisheries under a broad scope of conservation, protection and marine spatial planning processes.

NAIA members believe strongly in marine protections. They require a healthy marine environment and invest significantly in responsible environmental practices. Instituting a closed area is hailed as protecting the ocean. This is an oversimplified way to look at ocean protection. Many of the threats to marine environments don't come from any ocean activity. Our oceans are impacted by global warming, all sources of pollution or waste and runoff from land. I feel that Canada has simply taken a terrestrial model of protection and applied it to marine areas.

In Canada, there are significant environmental oversights for projects and very strict fishing standards. We must find balanced and advanced methods to conduct marine spatial planning in Canada where we already have robust marine protections. Canada has significant opportunities to responsibly grow marine sectors and protect marine life, but we must do better than racing to close large swaths of ocean to Canadians, especially those who work and live on our coasts. It can't be a race to hit an arbitrary number—"30 by 30"—which is a proxy for protection, and do irreparable harm to our coastal communities now and into the future.

The UN hopes to see a 35% growth in aquaculture by 2030. The World Bank, in "Harnessing the Waters", finds that:

> Aquaculture could generate as many as 22 million new jobs by 2050, if stakeholders capitalize on the $1.5 trillion investment opportunity in the sector

Canada's blue economy strategy states:

> It was...recommended that we should support the economic development of new aquaculture species and promote the essential role of aquaculture in sustainable domestic and global food production—and the future economic prosperity of coastal communities.

We have the longest coastline in the world. Globally, including Canada, there are struggles with food security, especially high-quality healthy seafoods. Canada has been consistently falling behind in seafood production. We were once a top five producer of seafood globally, and now we are not in the top 20. Right now, Canada is ignoring the needs and opportunities, and the approach of simply closing marine areas will see our country fall further behind.

The growth in areas protected went from 0.9% to around 16% in a decade, a 1,600% increase. It is important to consider the pressure already placed upon coastal communities. Closing areas to industries and activities can impact us by losses of livelihoods, traditions and future opportunities. In many cases, it will concentrate activities in other areas, so fish harvesters will have to move to other areas, use more carbon, increase costs, diminish food security—often based on uncertain conservation goals.

Parks Canada has been involved in the process of pushing to implement a large NMCA on the south coast of Newfoundland. It was to be larger than P.E.I., and would have serious negative economic impacts for the region, ceasing investment activity and curtailing future opportunities. Parks Canada refused to engage in any socio-economic review of potential impacts. This was inadequate. The obvious failure to properly consult was felt by all sectors: fisheries, mining, energy, aquaculture and municipalities. The goals were not clear, and public trust has been lost because of the approach taken to MPA development.

The sweeping protection standards are rigid. Regardless of the specific reasons for developing an MPA, Parks Canada emphasized finfish aquaculture will not be allowed. Many activities have automatically been excluded from operating in MPAs, regardless of the circumstances or goals of the MPA. Such an unreasonable standard can only be detrimental to Canadians.

● (1730)

I have listed some recommendations.

Number one is that a thorough, independent socio-economic impact review must be completed in the first stage of considering an MPA.

Number two is to revamp the consultative process. More consultation must be done with provincial governments, municipal governments and communities, and especially with major industry stakeholders, whose livelihoods are going to be impacted.

Number three is to focus on a strategy that allows responsible marine farming within protected areas that does not impede specific conservation goals.

Finally, number four is to consider having one federal government department lead marine protections and modern marine spatial planning while focused on balanced Canadian values.

Thank you.

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

With that, we're going to go into the first round of questioning, the six-minute round, starting with Mr. Small.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'd like to thank the witnesses. I found each of your opening statements very interesting. Thank you very much.

I'm going to start out today with Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Sullivan, Mr. McIsaac mentioned earlier that MPAs are being created with a view of the past. I should say that in your experience as the former president of the Fish, Food and Allied Workers union in Newfoundland and Labrador, you're fairly familiar with the Hawke channel closed area and the Funk Island closed area.

Keith Sullivan: I am, relatively, yes.

Clifford Small: An argument that we get from people who are against the closing of marine space to economic activity is that outcomes can't be measured.

What was the reason that those two areas became closed?

Keith Sullivan: Going back to that, it preceded my time with the FFAW to a certain degree, but in most of the consideration for the closures of those areas, particularly in the Hawke area off Labrador, fish harvesters wanted to protect their very valuable crab resource. Closing the area to bottom-impacting gear, like bottom trawling and even gillnets, would obviously have an impact on crab there, so that's what harvesters certainly believed was the goal of the Hawke closure in particular.

Clifford Small: What has been the trajectory of the snow crab resource biomass in the Hawke channel since that area was closed to bottom trawling?

Keith Sullivan: I don't have the latest science, but generally the trajectory has been that over that 2G region in general, there's been a significant decrease in crab. It's been a tough time for people fishing and depending on the area there. I'm not aware of any significant differences inside and outside the closed area.

Clifford Small: Would you agree that this is a measured outcome?

Keith Sullivan: I suppose it could be a measurable outcome.

As I said, I don't have the fully comparable stats, but absolutely, one way to measure it is if there is no obvious difference in what the main issue was there.

Clifford Small: Recently you've been involved in the push-back on the south coast fjords national marine conservation area, NMCA.

To your knowledge, were any foreign forces at play, either financially or otherwise, in the influencing of public opinion about that conservation area?

Keith Sullivan: I'd just say very generally, on the higher level, that the NMCAs were run through Parks Canada. Most of my experience in the past had been with DFO through marine protected areas. The consultation here from Parks Canada left a lot to be desired, and we can look at opportunities to deal with that.

There definitely seems to be a strong input from the ENGO community. We know that their parent organizations and a lot of their funding and money come from international sources, particularly the United States, absolutely.

Clifford Small: Your industry is blamed for the demise of wild salmon stocks on the south coast. To my knowledge, there's a wild fishery that's not that regulated in Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. Could they be taking some of the wild fish that your industry was blamed for?

I understand that some of the great supporters of that marine conservation area were supporting it because they wanted to shut down net-pen salmon farming to save wild fish, while a foreign country, France, sitting 20 or 30 miles offshore, has a wild salmon fishery.

What do you think of that, Mr. Sullivan?

● (1735)

Keith Sullivan: Again, I would say, first of all, to your point about salmon, I grew up commercial fishing in a home that depended on wild salmon harvest to put the bread on the table and keep the lights on. We all know that before 1990, the trajectory of salmon for a century had been declining. We had big declines in the eighties and nineties before there was any salmon farming in the area. We've seen similar trajectories in areas where there is no aquaculture. I think it's clear that there are much bigger issues involved in dealing with wild salmon stocks, so we're legitimately concerned with it. The other sources of impacts have not got the same attention, whether it's predation or impacts from other fisheries, like the extent of the fishery in Saint-Pierre and Miquelon or other places.

Clifford Small: Thank you.

I've got a couple of more seconds and a really important question, Mr. Chair.

To Mr. Carr, we've had ENGOs come to this committee and say that the harvesting of seals would have no impact on biodiversity and that the outcomes of culls are never measured, or oftentimes not. If they do arrive at some kind of a discovered outcome, it's not what was desired in the first place. Have you have you heard groups say that culling of species doesn't really protect other species?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Carr, but I'm going to have to jump in here as we're well over the time. It is a very important question. If you'd like to submit an answer in writing, it would be much appreciated by the committee.

With that we're going to move to Mr. Connors for six minutes, please.

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming out.

I just want to point out that I'm not here to blame anybody. I'm here to find and study what can be done to make sure we have a sustainable fishery and conservation with it as well.

I want to start with Mr. Sullivan. Over the past years—I guess since the cod moratorium—fish management and how we manage our fish stocks has become very important. It was probably in the industry prior to that, but that's when the main focus on it came. I know the industry is concerned with the conservation and the sustainability of the species. If we don't protect our food source, or the food source for our food source, what will happen to the healthy ocean or ocean habitat?

Keith Sullivan: First of all, I think we'd all agree that conservation is paramount and very important. Some of the other witnesses put it very eloquently that we have very robust and detailed fisheries management plans to manage those fisheries generally. When you're talking about protecting those species, that's the primary way to do it. I think protecting, as you say, the food source of our food sources is really important.

I'm not sure if I'm fully answering your question, but I definitely agree that it's paramount.

Paul Connors: What I'm getting at is this. Do you think that we can have marine protected areas or conservation areas and a sustainable fishery at the same time?

Keith Sullivan: Yes, I think we can do it. Right now, like I said, there has been 1,600% growth in these boxes that we're putting. Is that the best way to protect our marine environment? There are definitely other ways to do it, and you've got to consult with those who are using the ocean. I think that's been the problem so far. As we have seen, it's gone so quickly to conservation and putting those lines on the map, as others have said, without really giving full consideration to those who are fishing or doing other activities, whether it's mining or aquaculture. We've got to do a better job of dealing with the people who have the most to lose.

● (1740)

Paul Connors: Going back to your former position as well as with your current position now with the aquaculture industry, I note there's been confusion about take and no-take zones within the different areas, the MPAs or NMCAs. From your experience, have you seen areas where there's no take?

Keith Sullivan: Yes, in all the others, there's absolutely no take. There are different degrees of not being able to take any fish, but even in the most recent one that's been in the news the last couple of days, proposed through Parks Canada, they absolutely have to have no-take zones. That's within the protection standards.

What was really troubling to most people involved was that Parks Canada was explaining to people, “Oh, we only want 5% that you're not going to be able to take.” Then, when you went into their document, which was the policy on the management of NMCAs, they said the goal of this was to place the majority of the area in fully protected areas. Their guiding management document was saying we have to have over 50% at least. The majority is over 50%, but they're saying, “No, don't worry about it; it's only going to be 5%.”

It was very hard for people whose livelihoods depended on that to trust their word when their guiding documents told us differently. That was only one of the many problems with the consultation on that NMCA.

Paul Connors: For the consultation or for how MPAs are developed, what would be your recommendation? You spoke about this, I think, in your opening statement, but in particular how should the industry—the fishers—be involved in the process?

Keith Sullivan: Again, very quickly for people who wouldn't be aware, I was a harvester growing up and spent about 20 years with the Fish, Food and Allied Workers doing a lot of fisheries management, stock assessments and things like that.

The involvement is key from the start. I was also involved with the Eastport MPA—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Keith Sullivan: In 30 seconds, the thing is that was a grassroots movement. Harvesters in the area supported it. That's the opposite of what we're seeing with most of the MPAs now. Again, they just don't have the involvement from the local people, either harvesters or people from other industries, and the biggest problem is not getting that buy-in early.

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

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Deschênes. You have six minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us and answering our questions.

Mr. Sullivan, I saw what happened in Newfoundland and Labrador this week. The province pulled out of a memorandum of understanding for a proposed marine protected area.

I'd like to hear your opinion on that development.

[*English*]

Keith Sullivan: The decision by the provincial government and Premier Wakeham to withdraw from this MOU was widely supported in Newfoundland and Labrador. Quite frankly, the consultation was terrible from the start and, as I alluded to, there was no trust in what the final product would be.

As one very direct example, if you're going to do something like this, you have to do a socio-economic review. That's one of my recommendations. They didn't even consider doing a socio-economic review and they ignored people's concerns right from the very start. There was no trust in the process, and I believe it was going to be very problematic for many people who depend on that area, so people are pleased with the decision, generally speaking.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: I took note of your suggestion that socio-economic reviews be conducted. Nevertheless, any effort to protect an area will have socio-economic repercussions. By definition, certain activities will be prohibited.

I'm trying to figure out the right way to proceed.

Are you proposing that the idea be scrapped altogether, or do you think progress can be achieved if a consultation process is put in place and the socio-economic consequences are taken into account?

If the decision is to go ahead, how do we move forward while keeping people onside?

● (1745)

[*English*]

Keith Sullivan: Part of the problem is not having clearer conservation goals. This area was nearly 7,000 square kilometres, which is, again, larger than P.E.I.

If there are benthic habitats or sensitive areas that we want to protect, let's do that and let's have a conversation about that. Let's talk about how we can achieve the goals besides simply trying to get to the target of the 30 by 30.

That's the thing that's clouding the conservation goals overall. It's an artificial rush to get to this without necessarily considering whether we are doing a good job here. I think people would be open to real conservation as opposed to just a massive marine park.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: A more measured approach is needed, then.

The government has allowed oil drilling off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Do you think that could also undermine social licence?

The government says it is protecting certain areas, while allowing oil and gas exploration to go on not that far away.

[*English*]

Keith Sullivan: In that particular area around that NMCA, I don't believe there are any oil permits. There are people on all sides, but I generally believe there are people who are supportive of a responsible oil and gas industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's a very important part of our economy.

At the same time, many people depend on the ocean. If there are areas with sensitive issues or species that we need to protect, let's look at ways of doing that. I think generally that's where people are at—a more sensible, reasonable, measured and balanced approach to marine conservation.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Carr, where do you stand on that?

[*English*]

Mark Carr: I don't know how I understood what you said, but I did.

I think there are two elements to this. One, as you've heard from many people and many of the previous speakers, is this fundamental importance of co-management, the management that engages the industry. I think that speaks not just to fisheries management and conservation efforts, but even down to the details of these socio-economic evaluations.

These are model predictions with all sorts of assumptions of what those protected areas are going to regulate. I think that engaging the various stakeholders, not necessarily to do the modelling but to have input on how those models are constructed and what they consider, would make those models and predictions both more accurate and more acceptable.

I don't want ENGOs doing all the socio-economic modelling. I wouldn't want the fisheries industry doing all the socio-economic modelling. There are questions of the government doing it, as well.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: There will be a socio-economic impact. Adjustments can be made, but there will still be consequences.

How was that issue addressed in California?

Were fishers compensated for the loss in revenue?

[*English*]

Mark Carr: There are two aspects to that. One aspect is the socio-economic predictions, as we said, that emerge from the planning process. There were groups of scientists in that planning process who were doing these evaluations of the trade-off between the conservation value versus the socio-economic impact—explicitly, though, to fisheries, with the metric of yield being balanced with conservation. That helped set up the evaluation of different design possibilities with respect to the trade-offs that emerge from that.

More importantly, too, is what you're getting at, which is the actual evaluation, the collection of socio-economic data that then is used to truly identify what those consequences are. California, as I said, did not do a good job of that. Therefore, the hope is that the Canadian effort will.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

Next, we're going to start the second round of questioning with Mr. Arnold for five minutes.

Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses again for your testimony.

Mr. Carr, what needs to be in place to measure the results of marine and coastal protection plans?

Mark Carr: More than anything, a monitoring program is needed, one that's designed to evaluate the consequences of the creation of that protected area or the network of the protected area, but done in a way where you can clearly attribute the effects you see to the protected area. That's the difficult part.

Mel Arnold: Would that also include having baselines to know what was there initially?

Mark Carr: In part when possible, yes, it would. Sometimes, because you don't know where those protected areas are going to happen, you don't have previous monitoring data to develop that baseline. For that reason, we have developed analytical approaches that only look at responses subsequent to implementation and are rigorous enough to attribute the effects we see to the establishment of the MPA.

Mel Arnold: Could integrated fisheries management plans be as effective in limiting the impact on species and biodiversity?

Mark Carr: Those are very different.

The question is whether fisheries management can do a sufficient job of protecting the species that are harvested by those fisheries, and I think the answer is yes. We see sustainable fisheries along most of the west coast of North America, right?

They're doing a sufficient job protecting those species for that purpose, for the fishery. That's very different from asking whether they're protecting ecosystems.

Mel Arnold: There are overlapping IFMPs for the same area to manage all impacted species. Would that be as effective for managing biodiversity? If you had fisheries management plans for all species that were being harvested or were affected, would—

Mark Carr: That involved monitoring and evaluation on biodiversity effects as well? I think that's what you're asking?

Mel Arnold: Would that be as effective as a closed area?

Mark Carr: It might or might not, and the devil is in the fact that when you exclude fishing from areas, it provides a more robust evaluation of what the effects are.

Mel Arnold: Has any country the size of Canada ever been able to effectively monitor and enforce the direct effects of marine closed areas?

Mark Carr: Well, California has for example. We—

Mel Arnold: It's not the size of Canada.

Mark Carr: Well, the length of California is no short distance. Along the length of the California coast, there are 124 marine protected areas.

Mel Arnold: In previous evidence that I've seen, the net benefits of the coastal protections have been unmeasurable on the outlying areas.

Mark Carr: There again, we have to be cautious. When you say the "outlying areas", there's more than enough evidence now that those protected areas established in California lead to conservation value of the species within those protected areas.

Mel Arnold: That seems to be disputable depending on the witness.

Mark Carr: We have published papers that demonstrate that unequivocally, but no, the detail is what you.... In your question, you said “in outlying areas”, which is a different question.

The question of whether those protected areas are affecting regional responses of species has not yet been evaluated, and that's one of the critical questions: what are the overarching effects of the MPAs?

Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald or Mr. Sullivan, quickly, in your opinion, after years of being on the water and in the industry, would you say that proper integrated fisheries management plans could do as good a job or a better job than closed areas?

● (1755)

Fraser MacDonald: Yes, it's my opinion from my experience that IFMPs are the way. We already have them in place. We have the tools, the advisory boards. That's the tool that we should use, and if there are, like I said in my introduction, static areas that need protection for static ecosystem health, we should use an MPA for that, but we should manage the fish that move in and out of that MPA through our IFMPs.

Keith Sullivan: What he said, yes, that works for me. It makes sense. That pretty much summarizes it for me too.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Ernie Klassen: Thanks so much. I'm going to split my time with Mr. Morrissey. I think it's the last round here, and Mr. Connors just asked Mr. Carr if he could submit those reports in writing that he referenced in the last answer.

Mr. MacDonald, I love to hear the passion in your voice about ensuring that the younger generation continues in this industry and how we can rebuild this industry.

I really appreciated the comment that you made about a made-in-Canada approach, and I'm wondering if you could just expand a little bit on that from your experience and perspective.

Fraser MacDonald: What I was trying to get at with the made-in-Canada approach was that while we committed to international obligations and we want to make sure we meet them, I don't think we need to implement them in a way that is standardized internationally. I think we can look at what we're already doing. That's why I mentioned that we want to protect what's currently unprotected.

Our species and our stocks that we harvest are already protected and managed through our IFMPs. Each different fishery has super-robust management and oversight and monitoring. I think we should really take that into account as we go forward in that MPA process. We should make sure that the things that need MPAs to be protected, whether it's sponge or deep-sea corals, are protected, but if there are species that can be harvested without impacting the conservation objective for that site, let's make sure that within those closure areas, we should be allowed to have those fisheries, and that should be written out in our IFMPs.

In the early implementation of certain sites in the NSB, we have a lot of examples that are not doing that. There's a conservation objective in a specific area, and fisheries that don't interact with it are being shut out.

I can actually say that we did have one good example of how it can be done. The offshore MPA off the west coast of Vancouver Island is the largest MPA in B.C. Protecting the sensitive benthic area and deep sea vents was put into the development process. Originally, the albacore tuna fishery, which is a surface troll fishery, was not going to be allowed because they didn't want to have any commercial fishing. Once they realized that we fish in three feet of water and they're protecting benthic zones that are in 9,000 feet of water, the albacore tuna fishery was allowed in that MPA, as it should be.

If we can use that sensibility across the board through the NSB and the other processes in the south coast, I think we can find a happy medium.

Ernie Klassen: Mr. Morrissey, please go ahead.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

Mr. Carr, you listened intently to the answer Mr. MacDonald gave to Mr. Arnold's question. That's going back a bit. Could you give an opinion on that?

I believe Mr. MacDonald stated that there is methodology you could use to achieve some of the objectives without the rigid approach of MPAs.

Mark Carr: There is one thing I was going to mention, and I'm not sure if this is because I was largely agreeing with some of the comments he was making.

When people think of MPAs as fisheries management tools, which I'm not a fan of necessarily, they think of them as a way of determining the amount and location of species that are harvested. Generally people think of MPAs as fisheries tools, but MPAs also provide other opportunities. This actually goes back to the question I had earlier, which is that one of the biggest challenges in managing fisheries is to be able to distinguish whether the changes that you're seeing are due to fishing mortality in space and time or to environmental variation.

In terms of environmental variation, as you've heard from others, climate change is the biggest threat to fisheries anywhere on the west coast of North America, so how do you evaluate whether the changes that you're seeing are due to climate change or to fishing pressure?

These spatial areas that do and do not allow fishing are the most direct way that we can evaluate whether the changes that we're seeing are due to climatic effects or fishing effects. That typically is to the benefit of the fisheries, because in the classic examples in California, where we saw the demise of the red urchin fishery in northern California and the loss of the recreational abalone fishery in northern California, it was clear from comparing the responses of those species in and out of the MPAs that those losses were driven by climate and not by overfishing.

That's just one example of how the tool can be used.

● (1800)

Robert Morrissey: Mr. Carr, would you agree with his synopsis?

The Chair: There will be another opportunity to ask questions afterwards, so maybe just hold that thought and that question can be answered later.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you may go ahead. You have two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Chair, I'm going to let Mr. MacDonald answer Mr. Morrissey's question.

[*English*]

Fraser MacDonald: Yes, I think Mr. Carr has a lot more experience and background in the specifics of that.

What I would say is that we should manage fish with fishery policy and fishery management. If there are certain ecosystems that we want to protect, then static closures can be good for that, but managing fish harvesting with static closures is not the answer.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: I'm going to keep the discussion going with you, Mr. MacDonald.

Here is the question I have.

How do we make progress on the protection of marine areas in order to protect biodiversity?

Everyone agrees that there is a link with the sustainability of fisheries. How do we move the issue forward with the support of fishers and stakeholders? How do you see that happening? How do we move forward?

Much of the focus is on the need for a socio-economic analysis. Fishing prohibitions can be adjusted in an effort to reduce the economic impact. I understand that is something that can help guide the process, and it makes perfect sense, but economic consequences remain nonetheless.

In your view, how do we obtain the support of fishers or the aquaculture sector?

[*English*]

Fraser MacDonald: Yes, absolutely. It's something that we need to figure out as we go.

I would say, from my perspective, there's been a serious breach of trust in the implementation so far with DFO and Parks Canada and the way the process has gone.

Starting in 2018.... You had a witness last week who did an incredible job getting hundreds of fishermen in a room in B.C. That marine planning team, with Grant Dovey as one of the leaders, created a map layer for every single fishery. We went site by site, moved boundaries and made compromises. It is an incredible body of work with thousands of years' of fisherman knowledge going into it.

That was submitted between draft one and draft two. Don't quote me on the numbers, but I think it was a 75% reduction in economic impact. They actually exceeded all of the biodiversity targets for every single one of the 300 and some odd sites in draft one. That was submitted after an incredible amount of work.

In draft two, from our perspective, we saw that none of our recommendations had been taken into account. Actually, draft two was worse for the fisheries than draft one. What we then found out was that going forward, rather than implementing it as one plan that we could have feedback on from the beginning and know what our outcome would be 10 years from now, so that we could have a secure industry to invest in, it was going to go site by site.

In the first couple we've had so far of that site-by-site process, the feedback that we've given has not at all been taken into consideration. We need to make sure to rebuild that trust.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

● (1805)

[*English*]

We're going to have to abridge the last couple of rounds. It'll be four minutes and four minutes, and then that'll be the end of the panel here.

Mr. Gunn, you have the floor.

Aaron Gunn: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. MacDonald, from your vantage point and experience, do you believe the federal government's implementation of this crusade to close 30% of Canada's coast to various fishing activities by 2030 has been driven by science and an evidence-based desire to preserve certain ecological areas, or has it been driven by politics?

Fraser MacDonald: I believe the people within Parks Canada and DFO who are doing the actual work are doing it for the right reasons.

However, if you were to ask most people in the industry on the west coast, we would say that the process seems to have been so driven by time and with an outcome already predetermined that it is being done more for political reasons than truly for conservation—and that is what fishermen want. We want a system that's implemented with conservation in mind, not politics.

Aaron Gunn: From your vantage point, you mentioned that you were on the water for six months of the year. How devastating would these closures be to the fishing industry, should the realities that are laid out in the draft proposals put forward by DFO become a reality?

Fraser MacDonald: It would be crushing to our industry.

You get to a certain tipping point where there's not enough fish being landed up and down the coast to support off-load facilities and truck drivers and all the things that we need to make the industry work, all the infrastructure. If it goes through as set out in draft two, we'll be well past that point.

The prawn fishery in particular is a big part of my income in my year. We won't have a fishery anymore. With the number of licences we have, you can't take away 40% of the fishing effort for the coast and still have an economically or biologically sustainable fishery.

Aaron Gunn: You mentioned that this was the number one reason that people were leaving, exiting the industry, not wanting to take the financial risk to get into the industry, take out loans, buy boats and that kind of thing.

Can you lay it out for us? This has been going on for years, this process. We had DFO officials in here just months ago, still saying two different things about whether areas were going to be no-take or not no-take or what the economic impacts were going to be, with no socio-economic studies having been conducted at all.

Because the northern shelf bioregion is not in place at the moment, what is the impact of the uncertainty of not knowing what is coming tomorrow and the day after?

Fraser MacDonald: That's what I was trying to get at in my intro.

That uncertainty that has been created has really driven people out of the fishery, because, as I said, it's going to take you 15 years to pay off a $1.5-million prawn license. If what is in draft two—which is being said is what's going to happen—goes into place, in 15 years we won't have a viable prawn fishery.

It is the number one driver of fear of investment right now. Boats require a massive amount of upkeep. Every year we look at what we made for the year and we budget for our repairs and maintenance, R and M, for our boats. People are holding off on big long-term projects, because while we know what draft two says, we don't actually know what's going to happen once those MPAs are in place. What are our fishery managers going to do to make sure that we still have a viable fishery once these are in place? We don't know, and our fishery managers often don't know either.

Aaron Gunn: Really quickly, Mr. Carr, could there be some ecological concerns about pushing the same size of fishing fleet into a smaller and smaller area by creating a vast network of MPAs? If the quota remains the same, are you going to have the possibility of heavier or localized overfishing if it's not spread out along an entire coastline?

Mark Carr: In that case, what you would do, as you're suggesting, is that you would really change the landscape of fishing mortality. It would be increased where you concentrate that fishing mortality and alleviate it elsewhere, so the real question is, how do you make the balance so as to prevent that?

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

Our last questioner will be Mr. Morrissey, for four minutes.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses in this round and in the earlier round. They really addressed this issue from lifelong experiences. Thank you for your testimony here.

Mr. Carr, can Canada achieve its objective to protect sensitive parts of the oceans and protect the fishery at the same time? Are those two a contradiction?

● (1810)

Mark Carr: I think there are inherent trade-offs between the two, but you can balance the two objectives. It's been demonstrated at least throughout California. There haven't been any fisheries that have been lost with the implementation of 124 marine protected areas along the coast of California.

That being said, as I said in my introduction, we have not done a sufficient socio-economic analysis of the well-being of those, but they certainly can coexist.

Robert Morrissey: Mr. MacDonald, do you agree?

It's your livelihood.

Fraser MacDonald: I believe they can coexist. I believe we can have robust fisheries and a robust economy on the coast, and I believe we can also protect the things that are currently unprotected that need to be protected to maintain biodiversity.

Robert Morrissey: What does the department have to do in the next year or 10 months to do away with 10 years of consultation that has led—and I totally agree with you—to unacceptable anxiety within the fishing industry?

It's unacceptable, and there's no reason to take that long.

Fraser MacDonald: I would say that we need to change course on the way it's being implemented and we need to make sure that when consultation with industry is done—which is being done, and no one's saying it's not—our advice really needs to be taken into consideration.

When we're going to those meetings and saying, “If you do this, we won't have a fishery anymore”, they're saying, “Thanks for coming.” They listen and they appreciate it, but when things are released, our advice has not been taken into consideration.

If we can change course and have a collaborative approach, the fishing industry is there and willing to do it. We have an incredible amount of knowledge. There's an incredible amount of first nations' commercial fishermen knowledge up and down the coast. We want to collaborate. We want these things to be implemented in a way that protects what's unprotected and we have a vibrant economy. That can be done, but we need to have a change in direction so that we're working together.

Robert Morrissey: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I've heard all I need to hear.

The Chair: That's a good way of wrapping it up, then.

That will conclude our second panel.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today and for travelling a long distance to provide the testimony. As you've heard today, it's going to be incredibly important as we're putting together our reports and recommendations for the government on how to move forward.

I would like to mention that our next meeting will be on Monday, when we're going to continue the study on marine and coastal protections.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.