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# Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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Chair: Patrick Weiler





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Monday, February 9, 2026

• (1100)

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

[English]

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

I would also like to acknowledge the 2026 Super Bowl champions, the Seattle Seahawks.

**An hon. member:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** It was a great season played.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting to continue its study on 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 cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, particularly the interpreters. You'll also notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

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

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

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

[Translation]

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: either floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

[English]

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

[Translation]

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the raise hand function.

[English]

With that, I'd like to welcome our witnesses. We have Professor Anna Metaxas from Dalhousie University, participating by video conference. In person today, we have Kendra MacDonald, chief executive officer of Canada's Ocean Supercluster. Participating by video conference, we have Dwan Street, president of Fish, Food and Allied Workers-Unifor.

We will start with the witnesses' opening statements of five minutes or less.

Professor Metaxas, we will start with you.

**Anna Metaxas (Killam Professor, Dalhousie University, As an Individual):** Good morning or good afternoon, depending on where you are.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I wish to first thank you for this invitation to be a witness for your study on marine and coastal protections. I have been conducting research relating to the design of marine protected areas for more than 20 years.

Within the Canadian context and particularly in the Maritimes, my research group provided data that led to the closures of the eastern Jordan Basin and the Corsair and Georges canyons as sensitive benthic areas and now as OECMs. We have been providing scientific data, helping with monitoring and contributing to the ecological overviews for the Eastern Shore Islands AOI and the Fundian Channel-Browns Bank AOI.

I regularly provide science advice to DFO, including as a member of the advisory committees for the Endeavour hot vents marine protected area, the Eastern Shore Islands AOI, the Fundian Channel-Browns Bank AOI, as well as for the conservation network technical working group and the marine refuge coordination committee in the Maritimes specifically.

Internationally, I have participated in several meetings of the Convention on Biological Diversity, including three as a member of the Canadian delegation.

Lastly, I'm currently a coordinating lead author on the chapter on implementing targets two and three of the KMGBF for the spatial planning and connectivity assessment of IPBES, for which I was also nominated by Canada.

In all these activities, I act as an honest broker. I will be happy to share my experiences with these processes during the question period.

To answer your questions briefly, the Government of Canada has signed international agreements to halt biodiversity loss and has developed a national plan to conserve biodiversity across Canada's three oceans. The science is unequivocal. Protecting biodiversity can help maintain healthy oceans; support our coastlines against erosion; provide nurseries for ecologically and commercially important species, including birds; enhance carbon sequestration; and directly contribute to human health.

Biodiversity loss can result from many stressors, such as resource extraction, climate change, habitat loss through coastal development, pollution, eutrophication and fishing, among others. Importantly, the impacts of these stressors are not isolated but cumulative. For example, polluted ecosystems are more vulnerable to ocean warming, or when seagrass beds are lost, the carbon they store is released back into the atmosphere.

One tool to protect biodiversity is marine conservation areas, which play the same role as our national parks on land. Conservation objectives are typically specific to an MCA and are about the conservation of biodiversity, not about managing fisheries.

The process of implementing networks of Oceans Act MPAs in Canada started with the Endeavour hot vents back in 2003, followed by the Gully in 2004. At that time and into the early 2010s, the process took an average of a decade to complete, as with St. Anns Bank, for example. As of March 2025, approximately 15.5% of Canada's marine and coastal areas were designated in some form of conservation measure, which includes Oceans Act MPAs, national parks with marine components, bird sanctuaries, etc.

In terms of timing, of the 14 Oceans Act MPAs specifically, six were designated before 2015. For another five, the process toward designation was initiated before 2015. We still have quite a bit of work to do. Because this is very much an ongoing process, it is still too early to fully address your specific questions at this point.

I would like to reinforce the point of many previous witnesses. For the implementation of MCAs to be successful, broad and deep consultations with as many stakeholders and rights holders as possible are critical from the onset of the design process and for the duration of the lifetime of an MCA. I firmly believe that marine

conservation can—in fact, should—coexist with other ocean uses, including fisheries, aquaculture, shipping and tourism, in the same way as our national parks coexist with agriculture and other activities.

However, spatial planning used to allocate space to different activities on land and in the sea, including for marine conservation, requires trade-offs by all actors. Thus, a lack of adequate consultation often leads to misinformation and a failure to reach a compromise that everybody can live with.

● (1105)

Importantly, long-standing mistrust of government that extends back decades and across governments of all colours can derail and has derailed the process, an example being the Eastern Shore Islands AOI, about which I will be happy to provide more detail. So can province-specific priorities that may not align with federal ones.

To understand whether targets are met and objectives are achieved takes time, possibly decades for some MCAs, and requires monitoring—

**The Chair:** Professor, I'm afraid we're out of time. I'm going to ask you to please wrap up, and then we'll have to move on.

**Anna Metaxas:** I am.

It requires monitoring of environmental conditions, ecological states, socio-economic impacts, enforcement, and management effectiveness. The MCA system is still evolving in Canada, providing an opportunity to keep improving implementation. For example, the Banc-des-Américains MPA was just recognized as exemplary and was nominated for a global award as a blue park. This indicates that we can get it right. However, I believe that to get it right, we need to sustain the allocation of human and financial resources to the process to ensure extensive consultations, detailed socio-economic analysis and robust monitoring.

Thank you. I'll be happy to answer your specific questions.

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

Next we're going to Kendra MacDonald for five minutes or less, please.

● (1110)

[*Translation*]

**Kendra MacDonald (Chief Executive Officer, Canada's Ocean Supercluster):** Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today.

[English]

I'm here today as the CEO of Canada's Ocean Supercluster, a national innovation cluster that brings together almost 1,000 members across industry, indigenous partners, researchers and government in Canada to help translate complex ocean challenges into practical, deployable solutions. With over 150 projects in our portfolio, our role is not to set policy but to ensure that policy ambition is supported by real-world capability. From that perspective, I would like to focus on what is a Canadian but also global challenge.

As marine protected areas expand globally, including here in Canada, governments are encountering a common problem: Monitoring, enforcement and impact measurements have not kept pace with MPA designation. In many jurisdictions, MPAs are monitored through periodic surveys, infrequent patrols and datasets that sit in different institutions for different purposes. Even where intentions are strong, this makes it difficult to answer basic questions on an ongoing basis—for instance, what is happening in the water, how ecosystems are responding and how fisheries and other activities are interacting with protected areas over time.

This is a global challenge. In Canada, that challenge is shaped by a siloed reality. We do not have a national marine spatial plan—a dedicated plan on the use of our marine space—or a comprehensive blue economy strategy that provides a shared, integrated view of how conservation, fisheries, shipping, energy, coastal communities and other ocean uses are meant to coexist over time. As a result, decisions are often made by sector, by program or by region rather than within a unified spatial and economic context. This means that decisions on trade-offs are assessed case by case rather than being supported by a more cumulative view.

Canada does have significant data to support decision-making. We have fisheries science, compliance data, environmental monitoring, oceanographic information and indigenous and community-based observation, but this often exists in pockets, designed for specific purposes and not consistently integrated to show how decisions across marine activities interact. Without that integration, it becomes harder to demonstrate, for example, how protected areas support fisheries or climate resilience, or where adaptive changes are warranted as climate impacts change conditions over time.

This is where technology becomes essential. Technology allows monitoring to move from episodic observation to ongoing assessment. It allows enforcement to be informed by data rather than visibility alone. It also makes it possible to connect ecological, operational and economic information in ways that support evidence-based discussion.

Importantly, technology does not replace indigenous knowledge, local expertise or governance. It complements them by improving visibility, consistency and shared understanding. In many cases, it can reduce cost and increase collaboration.

The good news is that this capacity already exists in Canada. I get to see it every day in my role. For example, such Canadian-developed systems as AI-enabled fish-monitoring platforms are already being used to observe fish presence and movement continuously, using underwater sensors and analytics. These tools are directly applicable to sensitive habitats and protected areas, providing

non-intrusive, real-time insights into what is happening below the surface.

The same goes for Canadian autonomous and acoustic monitoring platforms that observe marine activity and ecosystem conditions over large areas, supporting situational awareness, more targeted compliance and the kind of longitudinal data needed to evaluate outcomes over time. Advancements in environmental genomics technologies are addressing environmental stewardship and enhancing pathogen detection and mitigation efforts, information that could directly support decision-making around MPAs.

These technologies show that the constraint is not whether we can observe the ocean; it is whether we choose to integrate that information into decision-making. Better information does not eliminate disagreement, but it does support evidence-based discussion. I believe Canada can build on its strengths—strong science, capable institutions, innovative technology and deep indigenous knowledge—so that ocean decisions, in any policy direction, are grounded in credible, ongoing measurement that shows those affected by these decisions whether the desired outcomes are being achieved.

A healthy ocean is a more productive ocean. Conservation and economic objectives can be aligned and supported by more integrated data. Using this data to inform a national and cohesive marine spatial plan, we can connect MPA monitoring from coast to coast while strengthening an already thriving ocean economy in Canada.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. MacDonald.

We will now conclude with opening remarks from Ms. Street.

You have five minutes or less.

• (1115)

**Dwan Street (President, Fish, Food and Allied Workers - Unifor):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the members of the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Dwan Street. I am the president of the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, FFAW-Unifor. We represent thousands of fish harvesters, processing workers and coastal residents in Newfoundland and Labrador, whose livelihoods and communities depend directly on continued access to marine resources and the long-term health of the ocean.

I appreciate the committee's focus on marine and coastal protections and the opportunity to speak to how these measures have affected fishing communities, how conservation success is being measured and whether the stated objectives are actually being achieved.

Let me be clear at the outset: FFAW members support conservation. No one has a greater stake in healthy oceans than fish harvesters. Our members work on the water every day, and they depend on sustainable ecosystems, not only for today's income but for the long-term survival of their communities. That said, our experience over the past decade shows that while the intent behind marine and coastal protections may be well-meaning, the way these measures have been implemented has had serious and lasting consequences for fishing-dependent communities, while raising legitimate questions about fairness, consistency and effectiveness.

Since 2015, the federal government has significantly expanded marine protected areas and marine refuges. For coastal communities, these decisions are not abstract. They directly determine whether people can continue to make a living from the sea. When a fishing area is closed, the impact is immediate. More importantly, it is often permanent. Lost access represents a direct economic loss that extends across generations.

Fishing enterprises are built around access to specific grounds. Once that access is removed, it is rarely restored. Over time, closures reduce the viability of owner-operator enterprises and limit opportunities for young people to enter the fishery. They weaken processing capacity and, moreover, contribute to population decline in coastal communities. These impacts are compounded by the cumulative effect of multiple closures layered on top of one another, often without a full accounting of long-term socio-economic consequences. While conservation benefits are frequently framed at a national or global level, the costs are borne locally by fishing-dependent communities with few alternative economic options.

The FFAW is also deeply concerned about clear imbalances in how different ocean users are treated within marine refuges established in the name of conservation. In several cases, fishing activity is categorically prohibited, even where it may pose little to no risk for conservation objectives. For example, in areas such as the Funk Island Deep, fishing methods like longline fishing, which have minimal contact with the seabed, are not permitted. At the same time, in other areas, including the northeast marine slope refuge, oil and gas exploration and development activities are allowed to proceed.

What is particularly troubling is the process applied to these decisions. Oil and gas proponents are given the opportunity to demonstrate, through various tests and monitoring, that their activities will not cause significant harm to conservation. Fisheries are not given the opportunity. Fishing activity is simply excluded outright, without an equivalent evidence-based assessment or a chance to demonstrate compatibility with conservation goals. From the perspective of fish harvesters, this represents a clear double standard. Industrial activities are permitted subject to conditions, while fishing—a renewable, highly regulated activity that sustains coastal communities—is shut out entirely.

This imbalance is compounded by the lack of transparency around how the government measures whether conservation objectives are being achieved once protected areas are established. Monitoring and evaluation are inconsistent, long-term outcomes are often unclear, and results are not always publicly reported. Fishing activity is heavily monitored, controlled and enforced. It is reasonable to expect the same level of rigour and accountability in demonstrating that marine refuges and protected areas are delivering the environmental benefits that justified their creation.

Designation alone does not guarantee conservation success. If the objectives are biodiversity, protection, habitat conservation or stock recovery, those outcomes must be clearly demonstrated. Where evidence shows that objectives are not being met, management measures must be reviewed and adapted. Fish harvester knowledge must be central to that process. Our members possess generations of experience and understanding of marine ecosystems. That knowledge should not end at the designation stage. It must be part of ongoing monitoring, evaluation and decision-making.

In closing, marine and coastal protections must be effective, evidence-based and fair. When fishing access is removed, economic loss to coastal communities is often permanent and can last for generations. Canadians deserve clear evidence that such sacrifices are producing real environmental benefits. The FFAW believes conservation and sustainable fisheries are inseparable goals. Achieving both requires transparency, accountability, adaptive management and equal treatment of all ocean users.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That concludes our opening remarks.

We're going straight into the first round of questioning, starting with Mr. Small for six minutes.

• (1120)

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

Welcome to our witnesses today.

My first question is for Ms. Street. Did the government need to sign on to the United Nations' 30 by 30 marine protected areas scheme to protect Canadian waters, when more than a dozen acts of Parliament are in place to protect fish stocks and our ocean ecosystems? Was agreeing to 30 by 30 necessary, do you feel?

**Dwan Street:** We don't feel that it was necessary. We feel it was a very extreme target. Unfortunately, it has been the fishing industry that's borne the brunt of what we've seen. Our goalposts are constantly moving. We heard it was 10; then we heard 15. Then it was 20, and then it was 30. Our question is, when does it stop?

We don't feel the fishing industry is being treated fairly in this. Had we all gotten to the table.... There are pristine areas, say, in the Arctic, in northern Labrador—everybody was willing to work together—that could help meet those targets and not affect their industry negatively, but unfortunately, what we're seeing is just complete disrespect for our industry.

Just a little while ago, we had the Virgin Rocks come across our desk as a potential closure. Our members are up in arms. It's one of the most lucrative historical fishing grounds when it comes to northern cod, which, of course, is on the rebound and is becoming much more important to our members as a species that they will harvest.

**Clifford Small:** I want to stop you right there, Ms. Street.

When did you find out about the Virgin Rocks marine protected area? Would you have been one of the first groups approached for your support in the developing of that, since you're user who depends on that area so much?

**Dwan Street:** We're not quite sure where we were in that hierarchy of folks who were informed, but I do remember our industry liaison, Katie Power, who deals with closed areas on the forefront, coming to me late fall last year and saying she thought this was going to be a major issue. We were absolutely floored when we saw that the Virgin Rocks were even in consideration.

**Clifford Small:** I heard you mention pristine areas that could be protected. When we look at land-based protected areas, historically, we'd be looking at areas where we had old-growth forests and areas that were never touched, that were pristine. Do we have areas in the ocean that are pristine and rarely fished that you think could be a priority to be protected, over areas that have been, as some of these areas have been, bottom-trawled such that the bottom was like a parking lot?

**Dwan Street:** We obviously speak to our indigenous counterparts on a regular basis as well, and I know there were some areas in northern Labrador that were under consideration, mostly areas that were never fished, whether by our members or indigenous groups. It just seems like those fell by the wayside. Unfortunately, it seems like the target is always on the back of the fishing industry.

**Clifford Small:** Thank you.

Ms. MacDonald, how do you feel about the need for our federal government to sign on to the United Nations' 30 by 30 marine protected areas protocol, when our oceans are protected by more than a dozen acts of Parliament?

**Kendra MacDonald:** Our role is not to comment on policy. Certainly, I've been part of a number of discussions, and there is a global focus on protection, but the conversation globally, and the challenge, is that we can't have designations outpacing our ability to monitor, enforce and understand impacts.

**Clifford Small:** Along the lines of what Ms. Street and I were just speaking about, when we look at land-based protected areas and national parks, historically, when we began with national parks, it was pristine areas, old-growth forests and areas never touched by any type of developing or resource harvesting that were first to be protected. Do you think that's the way that 30 by 30 could proceed in protecting pristine areas that are not touched already?

**Kendra MacDonald:** That would not be my area of expertise.

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

Ms. Street, oftentimes, Canadian ENGOS are pushing the narrative for establishing new protected areas. They're often funded by American foundations to help sway public opinion in favour of creating protected areas. How do you feel about that?

• (1125)

**Dwan Street:** We've been very public and very clear on our position when it comes to ENGOS. We're deeply troubled that the Canadian government has them at the table as stakeholders in fishery management decisions when clearly the only stake they hold is padding their own pockets and their own coffers for their donors.

I want to stress again that FFAW members believe in conservation. There are no greater stewards of the resource than fish harvesters. It's their livelihood. It's going to be their livelihood for generations.

It's very easy for somebody in an office who's probably never seen salt water to weigh in and try to shut down somebody else's livelihood when it really doesn't affect them. It's been troubling since the days of their advocacy against the seal hunt. We've seen the devastation that's caused. Now we see them trying to shut down fisheries and shut down areas with absolutely nothing that demonstrates it's going to achieve any of their goals.

We really do question their motives. As you said, Mr. Small, they're catering to American donors, millionaires, who have no stake in the fishing industry. It is troubling. We're seeing their involvement grow and it's something we are going to continue to push back on.

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

Next we're going to Mr. Klassen for six minutes.

**Ernie Klassen (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.):** Thank you very much, and thank you to all the witnesses for bringing all your information forward.

As we have said over and over again in this committee, and as Ms. Street said, conservation and a sustainable fishing industry are doable, and that's obviously the goal for all of us here. We must ensure that we protect the waters and that we protect the harvesters' industry and the communities.

Ms. Street, you were mentioning that the ENGOS were not engaging, or were not involved in being on the water. I'm wondering how we can ensure that the ENGOS and the harvesters all bring adequate and reliable information to the table.

**Dwan Street:** We don't feel that there is a role for ENGOS when it comes to the management of fisheries.

We've sat at the table, and their messaging is always to close it down, to stop fishing, to limit fishing. There doesn't seem to be a willingness to work together. When that messaging is always negative and is trying to put our members out of a livelihood, we don't feel that anything they're bringing to the table is reliable. We don't trust their motives.

Our interest is always in maintaining the health of the resource so that it's going to sustain our communities for a long, long time, because in Newfoundland and Labrador, without the fisheries, our communities are just going to die.

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

Professor Metaxas—I hope I said that right—196 countries around the world have signed on to 30 by 30. Could you tell us a bit about where Canada stands in relation to some of the other countries, or where the majority of the other countries are, in enforcing or achieving 30 by 30? Also, is Canada following the 30 by 30 process, or are we doing a Canadian version of 30 by 30?

**Anna Metaxas:** Thank you very much, and you almost pronounced my name correctly.

First of all, the 196 nations have not just signed on to 30 by 30. That's a very narrow view. What all those nations have signed on to, as we heard earlier in the week, is a global biodiversity framework.

The purpose of this is to prevent biodiversity loss. It has four goals and 23 targets, one of which is 30 by 30. Another target is sustainable fisheries. Another target is doing something about climate change and minimizing the impacts of climate change. Another target is spatial planning. That is what Canada has signed on to, and 30 by 30 is just one part.

In terms of how Canada is doing, I would say Canada, as you can expect, is doing better than some and worse than others. There are small island states—for example, Palau—that rely completely on their oceans, because that's what they're surrounded by. They have very high protection levels and they have far exceeded the 30% already. There are other countries that are doing much less. I would say that we're in the middle of the road, as Canada usually is.

In terms of whether we're approaching this with a Canadian reality, I think every country has to do that, including Canada. There is no recipe. Everybody is trying to adjust to their realities.

• (1130)

**Ernie Klassen:** You also mentioned consultation. We often hear that the industry doesn't feel it's being consulted adequately.

I'm wondering if you could talk about other organizations, as well as fishers and harvesters, and where we could improve consultation, from your perspective.

**Anna Metaxas:** My experience is from the Maritimes. I have sat in a lot of rooms in a lot of those consultations with a lot of different groups in the room—different fishing industries, ENGOS, academics who provide the science and all sorts of governments—and I would say those were heated debates. They always are.

We can always do better, and I think where we can do better is in spending time ahead of the process, with everybody informing each other and providing evidence to every other actor in the room about what things would mean. The scientists could say, "This is why you need 30 by 30." The fishery industry could say, "Okay, but if you put it there, this is what it will mean to the industry."

Consultations are critical. We need to have as many stakeholders and indigenous people in the room as we can, and I think we should educate one another as much as possible.

**Ernie Klassen:** Information is always power, so educating people is probably one of the best strategies we can use.

Ms. MacDonald, I think you talked about an insufficient strategy and about organizations and departments working in silos. We saw a bit of that when the provincial government in Newfoundland reversed its decision on at least one of the MPAs.

I'm curious to know if you can talk about some of the other provinces across the country. How are they engaging, and are they buying in? How can we get more buy-in from the provincial governments as well?

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I have to jump in here, because we are over time.

I think it's an important question. Ms. MacDonald, if you'd like to respond in writing, it would be much appreciated by the committee.

[*Translation*]

We will now continue with you, Mr. Deschênes. You have the floor for six minutes.

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

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Dwan Street, you talked about a double standard in terms of the bans that result from the establishment of marine protected areas. You say there are different standards for the fishing industry and the oil and gas industry.

Would you like to explain that to us?

[*English*]

**Dwan Street:** Sure. I'll use the example of the development of the northeast marine slope.

We were consulted fairly heavily and told there would be no fishing activity in that area. On the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have a fair amount of oil and gas activity, and our members were willing to make some sacrifices and compromises there with that area, because they recognized what a rich, vibrant area it is.

Then, of course, we found out that there is absolutely no restriction on seismic activity or on oil and gas exploration there. Our members aren't able to drop a single hook to catch a fish in that area, but a seismic vessel can go in and blast all day and all night long. If there is a finding of oil and gas there, then they can drill, drill, drill.

That's problematic. We've heard from our members for decades now on the difference they see in catchability once a seismic vessel goes through an area. I think about turbot in particular. Our members will tell you that the second a seismic vessel goes next to their vessel while they're fishing turbot, their catch rates drop off to pretty much nothing.

We fail to see how allowing that activity in the refuge is okay when our members can't even drop a hook, which is non-destructive and is not bottom-contact gear. It's completely prohibited.

• (1135)

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Ms. Street, I'm new to this. I thought that there was supposed to be no oil and gas exploration in marine protected areas. However, you're saying that it is being done in your area of Newfoundland and Labrador, which is the Newfoundland northeast slope.

How did you find out that the government wanted to ban fishing activities but allow oil and gas exploration?

[English]

**Dwan Street:** It really depends on the categorization of the area they're trying to close.

You have marine protected areas, marine refuges and national conservation marine areas, and each one has certain criteria. It really depends on the label they put on the area. The northeast marine slope is labelled as a refuge. That means no fishing, but it allows oil and gas. Generally, depending on the area, we have to go to government and say, "What are we looking at here?"

With the NMCA that our province just pulled out of—and we're very thankful that they did—we were barely consulted. We asked Parks Canada some questions, because, of course, we had not dealt with an NMCA. We asked what that would allow, what it would permit and what it would restrict. We were told that the effects on the fishing industry were going to be very minimal.

Then we realized that scallop-dragging is completely prohibited. That's a massive industry down there. It's small boat harvesters, but it's high-value. We were told, "Absolutely not." Obviously we can't support this.

It really depends on the categorization of the area they're closing.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** In this case, when did you discover that there could be oil and gas exploration in the area?

[English]

**Dwan Street:** As soon as we were consulted and we got to the table, we always asked what other industries were going to be affected. When it came to the east coast of our province, we always asked, "What's going to happen with oil and gas? Are they going to still be permitted to operate?", and the answer was, "Absolutely, yes."

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** What did the advisory committee say to you when you told it that banning all fishing but allowing exploration made no sense?

[English]

**Dwan Street:** They didn't really have answers for us, which was unfortunate.

I was around when that process was ongoing, and at that point I was actually in the industry liaison position at FFAW. We tried to push as hard as we could, but we were told, "No, the fishing industry is the one that's going to be shut out."

Again, it always seems like it's the fishing industry that has the target on its back and has to bear the brunt of the sacrifice when parts of our ocean are closed.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Which area is the Newfoundland northeast slope marine protected area in? Has it already been set up?

[English]

**Dwan Street:** Yes, that area has been closed now for quite some time. I'm guessing it was probably around 2016 or 2017, if I recall correctly.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Ms. Street, what you're telling us is quite worrisome.

You mentioned your fear of economic losses. Are there already examples, in Newfoundland and Labrador, where the advent of marine protected areas has resulted in economic losses for the fishing industry?

[English]

**Dwan Street:** Absolutely. If I just take the example of the Funk Island Deep, we're seeing it not only economically but ecologically. It's completely thrown off the ecosystem.

That area was closed to protect northern cod, but now there's a box where northern cod are absolutely taking over and diminishing the snow crab resource in that area. Harvesters are losing out in zone 3K, where they were absolutely devastated last year with a 50% cut that was proposed for snow crab. We were able to get that down to 25%, but it was still a very significant loss. Harvesters are saying that the area is a problem, because the predation of northern cod right now on snow crab in that area is absolutely off the charts. That's what we're always concerned about.

There are a couple of other ones. Think about Eastport. That was a harvester-driven initiative. They're always keeping an eye on it, because it's there to protect lobster. There's always a concern that when lobsters are allowed to grow, the predation of the big ones on the little ones gets a little out of hand.

We're always monitoring those ecological impacts, and when there is an impact like that, it does affect a harvester's bottom line. It's always the owner-operator who will feel those effects first and foremost.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you, Ms. Street.

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

• (1140)

[*English*]

That completes our first round of questioning.

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

**Mel Arnold (Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing today.

I want to take us back to the reason for this study and quote the lines from the motion for the study:

...the committee undertake a study on how the Government of Canada has established marine and coastal protections since 2015 with particular focus on

(A) how these government initiatives have affected Canadians and coastal communities that depend on fisheries and marine resources;

(B) the government's methods for measuring whether conservation objectives and reasons for establishing protected areas are achieved;

(C) whether the government's reasons and objectives for establishing marine and coastal protection are achieved....

I'll start off with Ms. Metaxas.

You mentioned spending time ahead of the process to make sure the consultation was done correctly. Could you explain, possibly, why this committee continually hears from harvesters and users of the resource that they have not been consulted, or, if they were consulted, that their input was either ignored or sometimes used against them? Why is that something we hear all the time at this committee?

**Anna Metaxas:** I have no experience with the consultation process anywhere other than in the Maritimes, obviously, and in my experience, those consultation processes did include the harvesters.

Speaking of NGOs, during the consultation process, it was my personal experience that a member of an NGO acted as a broker between the fishing industry and government to facilitate moving forward.

I guess the reason you hear it is that livelihoods are affected. I think there are also misperceptions about whether the industry is being listened to. Not doing what the industry asks for right off is not necessarily not listening to them, but what we absolutely must have—and I agree 100% with Ms. Street—is an assessment of how the industry's proposals will impact the conservation objective and how the conservation objective will impact the industry.

**Mel Arnold:** Now that you've mentioned that you agree with Ms. Street on something, I'll turn to Ms. Street.

Ms. Street, are all Canadians equally impacted by marine conservation protection?

**Dwan Street:** In our opinion, absolutely not. Again, it always seems like it is the fishing industry that has to give, give, give and receive nothing in return.

It's not only the FFAW that feels that way. I've spoken with some of my colleagues in the Maritimes, and I'm thinking about St. Anns Bank. They tried to work very hard to compromise and come up with an area that they felt could be closed and actually be beneficial to the ecosystem. They were told, "We will work with you and ensure the impacts are minimal." When the area was finally closed, they lost about 30% of their most lucrative halibut fishing area. It's easy to see why the fishing industry becomes frustrated when we see oil and gas exploration being able to continue in these areas.

Even with this NMCA process that we just went through and that our province pulled out of, all we heard about was tourism. I understand what tourism can bring to an area. I'm from an area that was saved by tourism after the moratorium, but you can't sacrifice one industry over another. What tourists are going to bring for two or three months of the year and what you're going to take away from the livelihood of the citizens of your town is not a fair trade-off, and it always seems that it is the fish harvester—

**Mel Arnold:** Thank you. Our time is so limited here, unfortunately.

Ms. MacDonald, I believe it was you who said that we can't have growth of marine conservation areas beyond the ability to monitor and that we have insufficient processes. This gets back to one of the key pieces of the study motion, which was the government's methods of measuring whether conservation objectives are achieved.

Has the government put in place the goals and objectives that are needed so we can monitor whether those goals and objectives have been achieved?

• (1145)

**The Chair:** I hate to do this again. We're right at time.

If you could give a brief answer, that would be great.

**Kendra MacDonald:** I think what we have seen globally is that monitoring is not keeping pace, so how do we actually leverage consistent monitoring?

I would say, based on what I've heard in the testimony, that if we're not trusting the outcomes and recommendations and we're not able to get on the same page, then we are not sufficiently collecting the data to prove the value of the marine protected areas at this time.

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

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

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

I'm going to be sharing my time with my colleague Mr. Morrissey.

Ms. Street, are MPAs the best available tool to halt or reverse the losses of marine biodiversity? If not, from an industry perspective, what would you recommend?

**Dwan Street:** We don't feel that the evidence is there to support that. All we want to see is that closing the area actually achieves what it is supposed to achieve.

With current methods of monitoring and what we've experienced, we don't feel that closing any of these areas has really achieved what they said it was going to achieve. Of the ones that have—and you used Eastport as an example—Eastport is a good one, because Eastport was harvester-driven. Harvesters went to government and saw the potential gains from protecting their lobster resource, and they monitor it. They have an Eastport lobster MPA monitoring committee, and I sat on it a few years ago. They are constantly looking at the area and asking if what they're doing there is actually achieving what they want to achieve. They keep an eye on it.

However, the government is coming at us top-down and saying that they're going to close an area. We ask what it's going to achieve, and they tell us. We ask how they know this, but they can't give us answers. Years down the road, we ask, “What has this achieved?”, and they still don't have answers. That's the problem.

We feel that when an MPA or a closure is grassroots-led and the folks on the water and those who earn their livelihood from it see a potential benefit and are able to work with government, that's not a problem, and if it doesn't work, then let's reopen it. When it becomes problematic is when it's top-down and government is coming to us and saying, “Here is what we're going to close, and that's it. We'll consult with you and tick a box, but you really have no input here.”

**Paul Connors:** In your experience, have you ever seen the boundaries of an MPA change after it was implemented, with further negative impacts on the industry?

**Dwan Street:** In my experience, I haven't. That's not to say it hasn't happened. Generally, when something is proposed, that's been what's implemented, and there hasn't been much adjustment there.

**Paul Connors:** On the consultation piece, how are fishers consulted currently? Do you think that process could be improved?

**Dwan Street:** It could, absolutely. I'll use the NMCA on the southwest coast as an example.

We found out about that. Then I kind of had to push our own way in there. The answers we were getting were very wishy-washy. We were trying to set up harvester committee meetings in the area. They would only offer us meetings, conveniently, when they knew harvesters were fishing. When we were finally able to get those meetings, they would hold meetings with other stakeholders on the same day, and the only messaging that would be communicated publicly would be the positive messaging out of the other meetings.

It was not a transparent process and not a trustworthy process, and something really didn't feel good.

**Paul Connors:** Thank you very much.

I'm going to share my time with Mr. Morrissey.

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

It's an interesting discussion.

At this moment, I would like to move the following motion. It was tabled last week. I believe all members should have it both of-  
ficial languages.

The motion reads:

That:

(a) the committee recognizes that,

(i) Atlantic mackerel is a key forage species and source of bait for many fisheries in Atlantic Canada and Quebec,

(ii) mackerel fishing has been affected because DFO science indicates that the species is in the critical zone in Canadian waters,

(iii) harvesters have witnessed large schools of mackerel while on the water, and videos on social media have shown evidence of large mackerel schools over the last year, raising questions about the health of the stock,

(iv) the United States is planning to increase its quota for Atlantic Mackerel which could put new strain on Canada's fishery, ecosystem health, and stock rebuilding plans;

(b) pursuant to Standing Order 108(2),

(i) the committee conduct a six-meeting study on Canada's mackerel fishery, the current rebuilding plan for Atlantic mackerel, the science and analysis of mackerel in Canadian waters, the recent U.S. science on mackerel, and the potential impacts that increased U.S. fishing could have on Canada's mackerel stocks,

(ii) the committee hears from harvesters, as well as scientific experts,

(iii) the committee reports its findings and recommendations to the House; and

(c) pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request the government to table a comprehensive response to its report.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1150)

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

The motion has been moved. All members should have it in their inbox and also in the room in hard copy.

With that, if anybody would like to speak to it, I'll open it up to debate.

Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

**Mel Arnold:** Could I ask for a very short recess?

**The Chair:** Yes. We'll briefly suspend.

• (1150)

(Pause)

• (1150)

**The Chair:** We're back.

The motion has been moved. At this point, we're opening it up.

Is there any debate on the motion?

Go ahead, Monsieur Deschênes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would propose an amendment so that the status of herring can also be studied, in addition to the status of Atlantic mackerel.

[English]

**Robert Morrissey:** Chair, we would agree with the addition of herring to the study.

**The Chair:** That addition has been put forward.

Is there any other debate on this amendment?

Are we all in agreement to amend the motion accordingly?

(Amendment agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**The Chair:** Now we are back to the motion as amended.

Is there any other debate on the motion?

Is everybody in favour of the motion?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** Looking at the time, we're going to move on.

[Translation]

We're going to move on to Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

After that, we're going to finish with Mr. Gunn.

[Translation]

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

**Alexis Deschênes:** Mr. Chair, I want to go back to the discussion about the closure of the Newfoundland northeast slope.

Ms. Street, my understanding of the situation is that a refuge has been created and that oil and gas exploration currently under way is allowed. However, you and the entire Newfoundland fishing industry have been told that it's absolutely impossible to conduct any fishing activity in that area. Is that correct?

[English]

**Dwan Street:** Yes, it is.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** What effect does the double standard have on your members?

[English]

**Dwan Street:** Well, it's a very lucrative area, especially for deep-water turbot fishing. We have a fleet of vessels that could go out there to gillnet turbot in those fathoms, but they're not able to fish there anymore.

While it's not a large part of our fleet, it was a very lucrative fishery at one point.

• (1155)

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Social licence is a problem that often comes up in connection with marine protected areas. The idea is to ensure that everyone can be consulted to get their support so that compromises can be made.

When you see what's going on, how does it affect your members' perception of marine protected areas and the benefits of this policy?

[English]

**Dwan Street:** Our members just want to see results and we want to see evidence, but we don't feel that we've been presented with anything to show that our fish stocks or our marine ecosystem is benefiting from any of these areas. We haven't been provided with anything.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** I understand that. However, how did people react to oil and gas exploration being allowed, despite the slope being closed, while all fishing activities are banned?

[English]

**Dwan Street:** It's not welcomed.

We always have concerns with oil and gas activity, and specifically seismic activity. DFO has done some work on snow crab in particular to see what the effects of seismic activity have been on the species and how it drives them into different areas and makes them migrate. It's really concerning, and there have always been concerns.

There were studies done in New Zealand and Australia on the effects on swim bladders of fish when it comes to seismic activity. We're always really concerned, because we know what seismic is. It's a massive blast, a noise, and there's no way it doesn't affect a fish.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** What we understand is that the government chose the oil industry to the detriment of the fishing industry.

[English]

**Dwan Street:** Yes, that's our perception.

[Translation]

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

[English]

We're going to finish with Mr. Gunn for four minutes.

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

Ms. Street, when it comes to conservation, do you believe these mass area closures that have been proposed as part of the government's plan to implement the UN's 30 by 30 are based primarily in science, or are they being pushed by an unscientific or not scientifically proven ideology?

**Dwan Street:** We feel that those targets are political. There doesn't seem to be any scientific evidence that the closure is going to protect anything.

We were told that the NMCA was largely socio-economic, that it was going to bring tourism. These towns are not large towns. They don't have a whole lot of money being injected into their economies. I can see why some of the town councils, when they're told by Parks Canada that there's going to be \$100 million injected into their communities, would jump on this, but when we asked them where that \$100 million was going to come from, they had no answers. They were promising all these jobs, and we were saying, "Where are these jobs going to come from?" Again, they had no answers.

We don't feel that it's evidence-based at all, either economically or scientifically. We feel it's largely political.

**Aaron Gunn:** Here in British Columbia, they've started the draft work to create giant marine protected areas as part of meeting the 30 by 30 target. Certain fisheries, like the prawn fishery, for example, face the very real possibility of losing up to 40% of their access to key fishing grounds.

If something like that happened to the fishermen you represent, what would it mean for them, their families and their ability to earn a living and put food on their tables, and to the coastal communities where they live?

**Dwan Street:** After speaking with some of my colleagues in B.C., I know how important prawn is out there, and I'd compare it to our snow crab fishery.

There are no other economic opportunities in a lot of these communities. When it comes to our coastal communities, it's the fishery that drives them. It's not uncommon for a harvester's spouse to be working in the processing plant.

We try to drive home to our politicians all the time that without these rural communities and without the fishing industry, urban centres like St. John's, Gander and Corner Brook are not going to flourish either, because that's where our folks are going to buy their vehicles and buy a lot of their groceries.

The fishery drives this province. If you remove any chunk of their income, then it's absolute devastation, because what's your alternative in a province where the fishery is the backbone?

**Aaron Gunn:** For clarity, in British Columbia the process is well under way to meet these arbitrary and, as you put it, political targets. Are they doing something similar on the Atlantic coast? Have they started drafting out and mapping out these mass area closures to meet this 30 by 30 metric?

**Dwan Street:** They have.

As I mentioned earlier, we were told the Virgin Rocks area is on the table. That's a huge concern for us, because fisheries in Newfoundland and Labrador go in cycles. Right now, we have a strong shellfish industry, but we also have a recovering groundfish industry. Northern cod right now has grown, and the TAC doubled this year, which has provided a massive economic opportunity to our members. Once the shellfish fishery starts to go down, which happens every seven to 10 years, we're going to rely more on northern cod.

The Virgin Rocks area was such a lucrative area for our members to fish with our larger vessels. If you take away that area and op-

portunity, that's going to be massive. We're definitely going to push back hard on this one. This just can't happen.

• (1200)

**Aaron Gunn:** Really quickly, as one final question for you, does it frustrate you when you see these large, primarily foreign-funded environmental groups pushing for and advocating these mass area closures when they really don't have any skin in the game, as it were, since they're not going to be the ones who lose their jobs? They're not based in the coastal communities where the massive economic effects will be felt if the government goes ahead with trying to meet the UN targets.

**Dwan Street:** It does, absolutely. We are frustrated to no end.

I know one of the most frustrating parts for us was walking into a hearing advisory and all of a sudden looking at Oceana and Oceans North sitting at the table, when the year previous they were observers sitting in the back. We asked DFO when these groups were promoted to stakeholder status and what stake they hold in our industry. We were just told, "They're at the table now, and that's it."

Knowing they have an equal voice with the folks who make their living on the water is deeply concerning.

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

That's going to complete our first panel today.

I want to thank all of the witnesses with us by video conference, and I thank the witnesses here in person as well. Your testimony is going to be very useful as we put together recommendations for government.

With that, we're going to briefly suspend while we welcome our next panel.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1200)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

I want to start by making a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses.

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

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: either floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

[English]

I'll give a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

With that, I would like to welcome our new witnesses.

We have Aaron Heidt, operations manager, Great Bear Sea marine protected area network. Also in person, we have Richard Paton, assistant executive director, marine and wildlife conservation, from the Qikiqtani Inuit Association. By video conference, we have Francis Skeard, councillor, Qalipu First Nation.

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

**Aaron Heidt (Operations Manager, Great Bear Sea Marine Protected Area Network, As an Individual):** Thank you for the opportunity to present.

I'm currently the operations manager for the Great Bear Sea MPA network. I've worked in the northern shelf bioregion in marine management and planning for first nations and federal and provincial governments for 20 years. Over those 20 years, there have been many government policies, directives and commitments to advance ecosystem-based management, marine spatial planning and marine protected areas in B.C. The MPA network process builds on this existing work.

As a planner, one of my roles is to listen to the concerns of coastal community members and work with the partners to consider and address them. In that role, I have spent years working in communities on B.C.'s coast. I am here today to provide information and clarification to the committee regarding MPAs in the region, including the 10-year planning process that resulted in the network action plan.

In my opening remarks, I want to clarify five points about MPA planning in the region.

First, the network action plan was made in Canada, made in B.C. and made on the coast. The plan was co-developed and endorsed by 17 first nations and the governments of Canada and B.C., whose economies and cultures are deeply tied to this marine area. Extensive local knowledge from businesses, economic development corporations, and first nations commercial fishermen and harvesters was incorporated into the plan. The network was built from the ground up, balancing economic, community and conservation goals. The balanced planning approach is reflected by the endorsement of 17 first nations, many of which are strong commercial fishing communities.

Second, stakeholder engagement in the network planning process was extensive. It included over 60 sessions with stakeholders and involved broad representation across 15 ocean sectors, including commercial and recreational fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, coastal forestry and municipalities.

To be clear, fishing associations expressed concerns about the network. In response to this, significant changes were made between network scenarios. For example, it led to the removal of entire sites from the network, adjustments of boundaries and modification of conservation objectives. However, the partners also heard

from many people, including owner-operators, who were extremely concerned about the health of our ocean and the state of the fisheries.

Over 70% of public respondents who live in the northern shelf bioregion support the proposed MPA network. The partners were repeatedly asked why they were moving so slowly to establish MPAs.

Third, there is still much work to do with stakeholders before MPAs are established. The network action plan is a blueprint that guides MPA establishment, similar to identifying areas of interest. All proposed MPA sites still need to go through a regulatory process to be established and still require management plans. These processes require stakeholder engagement and socio-economic assessments. All this work still needs to be done.

Fourth, a socio-economic overview was part of the network design process. It concluded that network implementation is expected to have many economic and social benefits for those living in the area and beyond. The socio-economic overview was published with the network action plan and is available on the network website.

The direct GDP value of marine sectors in the region was estimated at \$1.3 billion. This includes \$300 million from aquaculture, \$251 million from marine transportation, \$112 million from tourism and \$87 million from commercial fishing. The overview estimated that 8% of commercial fisheries' landed value in the northern shelf bioregion could be affected by the network.

Finally, the partners have committed to long-term monitoring of economic, ecological, social and cultural network outcomes. To this end, a monitoring framework that outlines the collaborative process for developing and doing network monitoring, including stakeholder involvement, was published on the network website in 2024.

In conclusion, MPA planning in the Great Bear Sea northern shelf bioregion represents a decade of work with 17 first nations, 15 ocean sectors, and the provincial and federal governments to design a network that will help create social, economic, and ecological resilience and abundance for coastal communities. The regulatory processes required to establish each MPA will further ensure that stakeholders' voices are heard and reflected in MPA establishment.

Thank you.

• (1210)

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

With that, we will go to Mr. Paton for five minutes or less.

**Richard Paton (Assistant Executive Director, Marine and Wildlife Conservation, Qikiqtani Inuit Association):** Good afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

On behalf of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, often referred to as QIA, I am pleased to respond to questions raised by this committee founded on the understanding of the Inuit-to-Crown relationship established by marine and coastal protection since 2015, and the impact felt by Inuit since.

The Qikiqtani region encompasses 10% of Canada's land mass. We are larger than the province of British Columbia. There are 20,000 people living in the Qikiqtani, of whom approximately 16,000 are Inuit. Traditional values, such as sharing, respect for elders and co-operation, remain central to our community life.

QIA, in working with the Government of Canada between late 2016 through to signing in 2019, sought to advance an Inuit-led approach to the management of Tallurutiup Imanga, or what we refer to as TI, the national marine conservation area surrounding the waters of Lancaster Sound. This included a shift in historical agreements, such as the one signed by Canada to open national parks in 1999, in that it added a layer for an all-Inuit committee to recommend changes across the NMCA and required Canada to work with Inuit on the development of an interim management plan.

Since 2022, QIA has been advancing a regional conservation approach embedded in opportunities for Inuit governance, stewardship and control over new protected and conserved areas through an indigenous protected and conserved areas lens. QIA, along with Canada and philanthropic donors, signed what we call the SINAA agreement in February 2025. While we are at the initial stages of developing the IPCA lens embedded within SINAA, the Government of Canada lacks support for the inclusion of an IPCA approach under federal legislation. Currently, it is the only viable pathway to facilitate impact and benefit agreements where indigenous—in our case, Inuit—partners are advancing Canada's commitments under the 30 by 30 target.

Qikiqtani Inuit have long sought to protect the rights of Inuit with respect to harvesting fisheries, both inshore, as advanced under the Nunavut agreement, and offshore, where waters adjacent to the Qikiqtani region are captured under article 15 of the Nunavut agreement and where government is meant to recognize the principles of adjacency and the economic dependence of communities on marine resources.

Of particular interest to this committee's questions raised with QIA is section 16.1.1 of the TI agreement—Lancaster Sound—which states as the primary objective, “To recognize that fishing and the harvest of wildlife is central to Inuit culture, and community well-being, and may contribute to a conservation economy.” That was the first iteration of conservation outcomes embedded in articles 8 and 9 of the Nunavut agreement that sought to understand and support collaboration between the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Inuit around the potential for a sustainable commercial fishery embedded within conservation outcomes.

As we look to discuss the methods for measuring whether conservation objectives and reasons for establishing protected areas are achieved, we should first look to understand how the conservation economy is affirming Inuit jurisdiction and authority while building a broader Inuit economy. Movement towards greater representation

of Inuit laws will consolidate and enhance the ability to be self-determining, creating concrete steps towards reconciliation between Inuit and Canada while broader policy thinking is still evolving around an economy that protects our environment. Qikiqtani Inuit represent less than 0.05% of the Canadian population, yet the Arctic, our homelands, represents more than 12% of the combined marine and terrestrial conservation targets that Canada has, which represents 40% of the 30 by 30 marine conservation target.

• (1215)

In closing, Inuit stewardship of lands and waters and a sustainable economy are vital to meeting conservation goals and maintaining ecosystem integrity throughout the Qikiqtani region. A successful conservation economy in our region can serve as a blueprint for conservation economies across the world.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

We're now going to conclude with opening remarks, for five minutes or less, by Francis Skeard.

**Francis Skeard (Councilor, Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation):** Hello. Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me here today.

My name is Francis Skeard, and I serve on the south coast fjords steering committee, representing the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation. I'm here to share our nation's perspective on marine and coastal protection and on the proposed south coast fjords national marine conservation area.

Our nation has over 25,000 members across 67 communities, many of them rural and coastal. For the Mi'kmaq, the ocean is central to who we are. It has fed our families, supported our communities and carried our knowledge from one generation to the next. Our responsibilities to these waters come from long-standing Mi'kmaq teaching and lived experiences.

The Qalipu First Nation supports marine conservation, in keeping with our long stewardship of Newfoundland. Healthy oceans, habitats and fisheries are essential to our communities. Protecting ecosystems is not a barrier to prosperity; it is the foundation for it. When habitats are sustained, economies are stronger, more resilient and better able to support sustainable fisheries, tourism and other ocean-based industries.

The south coast fjords study area is ecologically rich and culturally significant. Hunting, fishing and gathering remain vital to the Mi'kmaq identity and way of life. Over 100 archaeological sites demonstrate generations of continuous use and stewardship. Interviews with elders and community members document long-standing practices, from fishing in La Poile and White Bear Bay to harvesting along the coast and inner rivers to travelling seasonally between communities. This is continuous use tied to identity, responsibility and cultural survival.

The national marine conservation areas model provides a framework whereby conservation and a sustainable economy can coexist. It brings together Mi'kmaq governments, harvesters, local leaders and community organizations to guide zoning, management and long-term decision-making. When communities help shape the rules from the start, ecosystems are protected while stable and sustainable local economies can thrive.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's decision to terminate the south coast fjords national marine conservation area feasibility study MOU is a missed opportunity for true partnership. Industry concerns are important, but bypassing meaningful engagement prevented our perspectives from being heard and prevented solutions from being fully considered. Instead of collaboration and reconciliation, we are met with colonial approaches.

Conservation must reflect the reality that people live and work here. The goal is not conservation versus industry. It must be a shared framework, guided by clear rules, informed planning and indigenous leadership. Rights holders are not just stakeholders; we are long-time stewards of these waters. When indigenous leadership is present at the decision-making table, conservation is stronger, more credible and more durable.

Article 29 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms our right to the "conservation and protection" of our lands and waters and calls on governments to work with us to achieve it. Conservation must be done in partnership with indigenous peoples, not without us.

Within the Qalipu First Nation, our people expect both environmental protection and economic opportunity. A well-designed national marine conservation area can bring in investment, research and monitoring programs, stewardship roles, tourism growth and new employment opportunities, particularly for rural economies or communities that often struggle to secure them. When indigenous voices shape decisions from the outset, conservation and sustainable development can move forward together.

In closing, healthy oceans and healthy communities are inseparable. We support marine protection that respects our rights, reflects local realities and enables sustainable development. With true partnership and shared responsibility, governments can protect marine ecosystems while supporting the livelihoods and cultures of the people who depend on them.

We remain committed to working with all parties to find a path forward that respects indigenous rights and the needs of coastal communities.

Thank you very much.

• (1220)

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

That concludes our opening remarks. We'll go straight into the first six-minute round of questioning, starting with Mr. Arnold.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

A very important piece of this is how the government is establishing marine conservation areas and how it's monitoring those areas to see if they're actually achieving any results and if the reasons for establishing them are actually being achieved.

Mr. Heidt, from the title we've been provided in the notice of meeting, you're the operations manager of the Great Bear Sea marine protected area network. That would lead me to believe that the Great Bear Sea marine protected area network is established and in place. Is that correct?

**Aaron Heidt:** No. The network protected area is a plan. It's similar to developing an area of interest with an Oceans Act MPA.

It identifies areas that would have value for protection and what the conservation objectives for those areas would be. Each of those areas then needs to go through a regulatory process, just like an Oceans Act MPA would after an area of interest is identified or, similarly, a marine national wildlife area.

**Mel Arnold:** You're the operations manager for...

**Aaron Heidt:** It's for the overall network implementation, for the network. I'm a planner.

**Mel Arnold:** On behalf of whom?

**Aaron Heidt:** On behalf of the 17 partner nations, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Government of B.C.

**Mel Arnold:** Would this be attached to the Great Bear Sea initiative title?

**Aaron Heidt:** Yes.

**Mel Arnold:** How is the Great Bear Sea initiative funded? Where are the resources from?

**Aaron Heidt:** Well, as we move into implementation, the majority of funding is coming from the federal government. There's also a significant component coming from the provincial government, and then there are other philanthropic funders that have matched some of that funding.

**Mel Arnold:** Have the \$200 million received by the Great Bear Sea marine protected area network, which you work for, been deployed into the operations you manage?

**Aaron Heidt:** Yes. There's a small amount that goes towards network implementation and monitoring.

**Mel Arnold:** Do you mean a small amount out of the \$200 million?

**Aaron Heidt:** Yes. Well, it's not divided that way. The total amount that has been raised so far is \$335 million. There's \$200 million from the federal government. That all goes into a conservation fund, and a small amount from that conservation fund supports network implementation. The majority goes towards sustainable economic development within the 17 partner first nations communities.

**Mel Arnold:** Have some of the funds been invested so that the Great Bear Sea project can benefit from yields of that investment over time?

**Aaron Heidt:** The funds all sit in trust with Coast Funds. That's a question for them, but yes, my understanding is that they're invested and that the interest from the trust goes towards the implementation of the network, economic development and the monitoring of individual MPAs.

**Mel Arnold:** As to those dollars from the government, could your organization please send to the committee in writing where they were invested and the results?

**Aaron Heidt:** I can send you contacts within Coast Funds, which is the responsible manager for the investment of the funds.

**Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

Mr. Paton, in your observations, have objectives for the marine conservation areas been set out?

**Richard Paton:** I would say the objectives for all of the conservation areas across the Qikiqtani region are being worked on.

One national marine conservation area, which is Tallurutiup Imanga and was signed in 2019, has an interim management plan that identifies key objectives for Lancaster Sound, but a multitude of marine conservation areas that are yet to come online have objectives embedded within the SINAA agreement we signed last year.

• (1225)

**Mel Arnold:** Has the planning process involved how those objectives are going to be monitored or measured?

**Richard Paton:** Yes. There are key performance indicators that will go into the monitoring and evaluation plan we are developing over the next three years in partnership with Canada and Inuit in all 13 communities.

**Mel Arnold:** They will be able to measure any results of the conservation areas. Is that the plan?

**Richard Paton:** That is correct, yes.

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

I think that's all I have for now. Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

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

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

[*English*]

Mr. Heidt, my first question for you is just to make sure that I know what you're actually doing. You're a planner, you said, or

you're developing these areas for a group of organizations. Is that what I understand you're doing?

**Aaron Heidt:** Yes. The best way to think about it is that I coordinate all the government partners.

There are 17 first nations within the Great Bear Sea, the Province of B.C. and the Government of Canada, represented mostly by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, but the Ministry of Transport, Environment Canada and Parks Canada also engage in the process.

**Serge Cormier:** Since the beginning of the study, we've heard that sometimes it's about the anti-fishing of MPAs and sometimes it's about the anti-environment of MPAs. When we look at those two things, we see that it's mostly about how, where and who is going to bear the costs of proposed MPAs.

What would be the solution to make sure that everybody gets a win-win situation out of the MPAs we're trying to put in place now, in your opinion?

**Aaron Heidt:** Through the planning process, we engaged with 15 ocean sectors to really understand their interests and what their concerns around MPAs were, and that dialogue was critical in the final plan.

The final plan, again, is a working plan to inform the regulatory process for each MPA's establishment. As we move forward, it will be really important, through that process, to do strong engagement, to do good feasibility assessments, to do good risk assessments, etc. Those are required by the regulatory process.

**Serge Cormier:** I understand that, but in the mind of a fisherman, for example.... Let's say there's an MPA imposed in a certain area and that this MPA will ban fishing. In his head right now, he's thinking, "I'm not able to go fishing there. This is a loss of revenue." An environmental group will say that in 10 years, there will be more fish in this area. However, in the meantime, who do you think should bear the cost of this loss of financial activity for the fisherman?

**Aaron Heidt:** The goal of the process throughout was to minimize those impacts. As you can see in the socio-economic overview, we've reduced that to overall catch impacts of about 8%. The process was to minimize the impacts as much as possible.

The witness testimony from Grant Dovey and others talked about the scenario they developed and shared with us. We reduced the overall projected cost of fisheries through that process by 30% as a result of that engagement.

**Serge Cormier:** Are the fisheries organizations aware of what we're trying to achieve here?

**Aaron Heidt:** Yes. As I said at the beginning, there were over 60 engagement sessions with stakeholders. When they provided us with the scenario that they developed over a year with all of their commercial fishermen, we sat down with them over six workshops to work through it, to understand it and to provide responses on where we were adjusting the network—when I say "we", I mean the 17 first nations partners, the Government of Canada and the Province of B.C.—and where we couldn't, including the rationale for why that was not possible.

**Serge Cormier:** I'm not sure if you can answer this question.

We had a witness here the last time—I think it was a group—who gave the example for geoduck fishing, saying that they were not able to fish in a certain area.

Are you aware of that? Just going out with boots and a shovel to fish geoduck.... They were not entitled to do this type of fishing. Is this true?

• (1230)

**Aaron Heidt:** There are only a couple of sites within the network that have already been established. I'm not aware of any geoduck fishery that would exist within a site.

There are sites within the network that are proposed where a geoduck fishery has been identified as in conflict to the proposed conservation objective. In most cases, that is because the site is designed to protect overall biodiversity.

I should clarify that the geoduck fishery is a dive fishery that uses very high pressure, so it interrupts the benthic habitat. It's not shovels and people in boots; it's a scuba fishery with high pressure hoses that impacts the benthic habitat.

If you're trying to protect the benthic habitat, a geoduck fishery can have an impact on that.

**Serge Cormier:** Thank you.

Mr. Paton—quickly because I think I have only 30 seconds—you talked about an agreement that you just signed with the federal government in 2025. What is this agreement, again, please?

**Richard Paton:** It is called the SINAA agreement. It was signed in February 2025. It looks to conserve a network of marine conservation areas of just under one million square kilometres, or what is often referred to as about 100 million hectares, across the Qikiqtani region, embedded in about six different areas across the Qikiqtani region.

**Serge Cormier:** I think my time is up, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for the answer.

[*Translation*]

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

The next person to speak is Mr. Deschênes for six minutes.

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

Good morning to all the witnesses. I thank them for being here to enlighten us.

My first questions are going to be for Francis Skeard from the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation.

Mr. Skeard, you represent the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation on the island of Newfoundland. Is that correct?

[*English*]

**Francis Skeard:** That's correct.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Deschênes:** How did your first nation react to the announcement that the Newfoundland northeast slope would be closed and all fishing activity banned while oil and gas exploration was allowed?

[*English*]

**Francis Skeard:** I can't speak to that, except that we fundamentally believe in a balanced approach to economic development and conservation.

I can't speak to that question, sir.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Okay.

In your opinion, is it a balanced approach to ban all fishing activity in a refuge, but to allow oil and gas exploration?

[*English*]

**Francis Skeard:** If this was in the national marine conservation area on the south coast of Newfoundland that we've been working on, we would expect that oil and gas prospecting would also be eliminated from comparable areas. I can't speak to other areas, but I can speak to our traditional territory.

Is that helpful, sir?

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Yes, it is. Thank you.

Why do you think it would be important to ban all oil and gas exploration in a marine protected area?

[*English*]

**Francis Skeard:** In the south coast fjords national marine conservation area that we were working on until recently, oil and gas exploration and production were an exempted economic development.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Deschênes:** I'm not sure I understood your answer.

Why is it important to exclude oil and gas exploration from protected areas?

• (1235)

[*English*]

**Francis Skeard:** When we started the process with the national marine conservation area—the south coast fjords feasibility study—there were two or three economic development pathways that wouldn't be allowed to occur. One was oil and gas exploration. Another was minerals and another was the use of bottom-contact trawling. It was not all fishing, just bottom-contact trawling. Trawling was an exemption.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Deschênes:** My question to you is, why should oil and gas exploration be excluded?

[*English*]

**Francis Skeard:** If it became a feasible protected area, oil and gas were deemed to be non-conducive to a protected area of this manner.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Aaron Heidt, I understand that you're on the west coast and that you work on a large marine protected area.

What message do you think it sends to say that the Newfoundland northeast slope would be a refuge, but that oil and gas exploration would be allowed while all fishing activity would be banned?

[English]

**Aaron Heidt:** Within the northern shelf bioregion, where I work, there is a moratorium on oil and gas, so it doesn't become an issue. However, any federal tools that are used have to follow the federal protection standards, which ban oil and gas within federal protection tools. Those are the Oceans Act MPAs, national marine conservation area reserves and national marine wildlife areas.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Okay, but it happened. BP is conducting exploration in the northeast slope area of Newfoundland. What message does it send when the government tries to set up marine protected areas? Do you find that acceptable?

[English]

**Aaron Heidt:** It's hard to make the argument that offshore oil and gas are consistent with conservation objectives, but there are two cases within the framework where I understand that can happen. For marine refuges that don't follow the federal protection standards, it's case by case. The federal protection standards were established recently and they're not grandfathered, so if the MPA was created before the federal protection standards, that could be the rationale as to why.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** That's why it's happening now, but do you think we should tolerate this situation or instead recommend that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans put an end to that possibility?

There's really something at odds with common sense when all fishers are banned from an area, but oil and gas exploration is allowed there. Wouldn't you agree?

[English]

**Aaron Heidt:** You'd have to assess it against the conservation objectives; however, it does seem inconsistent. It seems hard to imagine there are conservation objectives that are consistent with offshore oil and gas.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Is it your opinion, then, that the government should be advised to change the rules to make that impossible in every case?

[English]

**Aaron Heidt:** You're putting me in a tricky spot. My role is to represent 17 first nations, the Government of Canada and the Government of B.C. in the northern shelf bioregion, so that's where my area is focused. Those are the people I reply to and take actions from, so I'd rather not say.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** In your area, that would not be possible. Is that correct?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt, but the time is up.

[English]

With that, we're going to start the second round of questioning with Mr. Small for five minutes.

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

I'd like to welcome the witnesses today, especially Mr. Skeard, who hails from the riding of Central Newfoundland.

I'll start with you Mr. Skeard.

With regard to the south coast fjords and the NMCA, you mentioned community engagement. Did you engage all the communities on the south coast that would have been affected by the implementation of the NMCA, or just one or two?

**Francis Skeard:** First, thank you for your welcoming, sir. It's nice to see you here.

The consultation process with municipalities, communities and organizations was quite extensive. To say that we as the steering committee moved forward and consulted with every community, I wouldn't necessarily be able to say that.

It was quite extensive, even to a point that as we progressed through the process, we were continually adding other groups and organizations to the consultation process.

• (1240)

**Clifford Small:** Do you think you would have had a better chance of success in keeping the NMCA process moving on the south coast if you had gone to the joint mayors of the south coast and possibly asked them to be signatories to the MOU in the same fashion as you went to Burgeo?

**Francis Skeard:** Your suggestion is well noted, sir.

As you well know, in the beginning, the process started with Parks Canada, Qalipu, Miawpukek and Burgeo as signatories to the MOU. As the process progressed very quickly, the diversity of consultation was some of the most extensive that I've ever seen.

I can only speak for myself on this. I offered to speak to a number of unique groups. There was a continual yes to all of those opportunities and the like.

Some of these consultations were virtual, some were face to face and some were hybrid. From a consultation point of view, it was, as I've said already, quite extensive.

Your point on the joint mayors is very warranted. I can't speak to whether the joint mayors group was contacted.

**Clifford Small:** In terms of the funding that groups receive to help them move messaging forward and affect public opinion, would any funding that you received over this process have come from American trust funds and foundations, such as Pew?

**Francis Skeard:** Qalipu First Nation received funding from Parks Canada to move this agenda forward. I can't speak to what other organizations received, sir, but Qalipu received funding. We had a contribution agreement with Parks Canada to cover our expenses for participation in the process of the feasibility study.

**Clifford Small:** Then, in hindsight, do you think that engaging the support of the ASF may have been counterproductive to your cause when you look back at it?

**Francis Skeard:** I would suggest that a number of things were counterproductive to the process. Engagement in a much more robust way with any and all industry groups is a piece. In saying so, we attempted to have early and robust consultation with some groups, and they were less available than I would have expected. To me, that's a missing piece where I wish we would have had much more engagement with the industry groups, sir.

**Clifford Small:** There's no doubt there will be more endeavours to create a national marine conservation area on the south coast. If that should come and should the process begin again, would you accept Ocean Winds' farms operating within a national marine conservation area, or would you want them exempted as you would oil and gas?

**The Chair:** We're over time, if you could just give a brief answer.

**Francis Skeard:** While it's important, sir, in this process, I represent Qalipu First Nation council. Qalipu First Nation council does not currently have a position on offshore wind farms, so I can't, with the greatest respect to your question and with greatest respect to the need....

I will say this. In previous councils, we had representation on offshore wind farms and had environmental assessment processes, regional assessments and things of this nature, so we are on the pathway to making decisions on these things. Sometimes we make the decisions, and sometimes we pause them—whatever suits the needs of our membership.

• (1245)

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

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

**Paul Connors:** Thank you.

Welcome to all the participants.

I want to ask a couple of questions of the Qalipu First Nation.

You said it was an extensive consultation. Was that government-led, partnership-led or industry-led?

**Francis Skeard:** The consultation was predominantly led by the steering committee. The steering committee had a couple of staff members provided by Parks Canada, so a lot of those individuals were the ones who led the consultation. A lot of those people were the ones who went into communities and things of this nature, but the entire steering committee was offered the opportunity to participate as much as we could. Most of the virtual ones I participated in,

and a lot of the physical ones, were at some challenging times of the year weather-wise.

Predominantly, the consultation was led by the steering committee.

**Paul Connors:** Do you know if the consultations included fishers, the commercial fishery—

**Francis Skeard:** Absolutely, yes, sir. It did.

**Paul Connors:** Is the Qalipu First Nation involved in the commercial fishery?

**Francis Skeard:** Without taking too much time, Qalipu First Nation has a development corporation. The development corporation has one shareholder, which is Qalipu. The development corporation itself is involved in commercial fisheries.

I guess the answer to that is yes.

**Paul Connors:** In your opening remarks, you mentioned that your first nation saw benefits from the NMCA. Was any socio-economic analysis done, or was that looked at?

**Francis Skeard:** We were in the process of doing those types of things. Socio-economic analysis, as you well know, is a fairly time-consuming process. Given the diversity of things, it was in the process of being looked at.

In saying so, there are certain datasets that we're able to use to show what economic drivers would be caused if, for example, Sandbanks Provincial Park were converted into a national park. If there were more tourism activities going on in the area, what would that result in? There appeared to be significant financial benefits to Qalipu First Nation members, their communities and the other communities in the area from a socio-economic point of view.

**Paul Connors:** From a socio-economic point of view, did you look at what negative impacts there would be on the fishing industry or the aquaculture industry?

**Francis Skeard:** It would be in the same context, sir.

There seems to be a bit of a misunderstanding of the negative impacts on fishing. While there would be some in the sense of some special interest areas and zones, the impacts aren't significant. In the context of the earliest mapping, the draft area was just shy.... Basically, we reduced it by about a quarter based upon the concerns raised by the aquaculture sector. We delineated any active aquaculture areas.

The one and only issue that was to be dealt with through zoning and more intense negotiations with fishers was bottom trawling, predominantly for a small scallop business.

**Paul Connors:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to take this time to introduce a notice of motion.

**The Chair:** Please go ahead.

**Paul Connors:** Small craft harbours are essential infrastructure for a robust and successful fishery. Safe, well-maintained small craft harbours assist in fishery operations and improving safety for harvesters, local community members and individuals who work around the water. There are concerns from communities and harvesters that funding processes and designs for small craft harbours need to be streamlined and improved. The new government was elected to cut red tape and remove barriers for industries so we can grow one strong Canadian economy.

I therefore ask that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2)(b), the committee undertake a six-meeting study on the small craft harbour program, its funding and implementation, the capacity of harbour authorities in managing and delivering small-scale upgrades, and improvements that can be made to remove red tape and streamline the program; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee ask that the government provide a comprehensive response to its report.

I can table that in both French and English.

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Connors. If you can circulate that to members through the clerk, that would be much appreciated.

Of course, this is just giving notice.

**Paul Connors:** Yes, this is just giving notice.

**The Chair:** You'll need to give 48 hours' notice before it can be moved, unless it's in committee business, of course.

**Paul Connors:** Okay.

**The Chair:** With that, we're moving on to Monsieur Deschênes.

[Translation]

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

**Alexis Deschênes:** Mr. Chair, I too would like to give notice of a motion, and I'm very pleased to do so, because it concerns a subject that comes up often in Gaspésie, especially in Chaleur Bay. It reads:

That,

(a) the committee undertake a study on the management of recreational and traditional clam fishing (*Mya arenaria*) in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Chaleur Bay within a maximum period of six months;

(b) the study specifically address:

(i) the opening of new shellfish harvesting areas in the Baie-des-Chaleurs region and elsewhere in the Gulf of St. Lawrence,

(ii) public support for the opening of new sites,

(iii) changes in federal resources allocated to recreational and traditional clam fishing since 1980,

(iv) the operation of the Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program (CSSP);

(c) the study aims to identify concrete solutions to increase the number of locations open to recreational and traditional harvesting, while ensuring public health and the sustainability of the resource, in particular, through reinvestment in testing programs and improved collaboration with local communities, Indigenous peoples, and municipalities; and

(d) the committee invites representatives from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, clam fishermen, representatives of the Micmac Nation, as well as biologists and other environmental experts working for research centres to appear before it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Deschênes. I know that your motion has been circulated to members. As I said to Mr. Connors, you need two days' notice to move a motion, unless it's in camera.

You have about a minute left to ask a question, if you want.

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

Richard Paton, as things stand, how would you describe the way the federal government consults you when setting up marine protected areas?

[English]

**Richard Paton:** Over the last three years, we've engaged all 13 of our communities and developed a Qikiqtani Inuit protected and conserved areas plan. As a part of that process, we worked with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to engage communities in the High Arctic. That was facilitated through conversations and engagement on the ground over the last two years, with a commitment through our new agreement called SINAA to engage all 13 communities with our federal partners.

I would say that goes hand in hand with conservation outcomes across the Qikiqtani.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but that's all the time we have.

We're going to move on to Mr. Gunn.

[English]

You have five minutes.

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

Mr. Heidt, you mentioned that 17 first nations have signed up to support the plan, and you're here to represent them. Have other first nations opposed it?

**Aaron Heidt:** To my understanding, there are a couple of nations on the coast that did not support it, and the partners respected that by not doing any planning within their traditional territories.

**Aaron Gunn:** Why did they oppose it?

**Aaron Heidt:** I don't engage with non-partner nations. That's the job of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, so I can't say.

• (1255)

**Aaron Gunn:** Were you not engaged in consultations throughout this entire area?

You're telling me that you don't know why. Is there speculation about why different first nations opposed it?

**Aaron Heidt:** Sure, I could speculate, if you'd like me to.

**Aaron Gunn:** Yes. I feel like they've said publicly why they opposed it.

**Aaron Heidt:** The Lax Kw'alaams nation is a commercial fishing nation and is concerned about the commercial fishing impacts. At the same time, the Haida Nation, the Metlakatla First Nation and the Heiltsuk nation are very strong commercial fishing nations, and they have all endorsed the plan.

**Aaron Gunn:** I want to clarify something that hasn't been clarified by anybody yet at this committee. The proposed area closures are intended—I'm trying to be as generous to your position as possible—to eliminate fishing activity that may be disruptive to certain ecological features that the plan and closures are purported to protect. Is that correct?

**Aaron Heidt:** That is correct.

**Aaron Gunn:** Do you know, in the proposed protected areas and closures, if FSC fishing is still permitted?

**Aaron Heidt:** What the plan states is that Canada has a legal obligation to first nations under section 35 and that Canada and an individual first nation will undergo an assessment of whether FSC occurs.

There are examples within the network where FSC is prohibited. There's Hoeya Sill, for example, as well as the sponge reefs in the Hecate Strait. There are examples where FSC does still occur within MPAs, like Gwaii Haanas.

**Aaron Gunn:** There are area closures that exist now. Obviously, as you pointed out earlier, the vast majority of these proposed closures in the northern shelf bioregion haven't come into effect yet.

**Aaron Heidt:** That is correct.

**Aaron Gunn:** We're mainly talking about ones that have already been put into place.

There are closures that have shut out commercial and recreational fishing but where FSC fishing is still allowed.

**Aaron Heidt:** Do you mean within the network itself, as a result of the network [*Inaudible—Editor*] processes?

**Aaron Gunn:** On the coast of B.C., I know from talking to everybody who's been involved in this process that the expectation is that, in the vast majority of cases, commercial fishing is going to be shut out and FSC fishing is still going to be allowed. My point is this: Does that not defeat the entire purpose and basically turn these into race-based closures?

**Aaron Heidt:** I would say two things. MPAs do not equal fisheries closures. They align with the conservation objective. In some cases, the proposal is that the fisheries close. In addition to that, Canada has the legal—

**Aaron Gunn:** The whole point of them is fisheries closures. That's the—

**Aaron Heidt:** No.

**Aaron Gunn:** Then they're just lines on the map.

**Aaron Heidt:** There are 15 in ocean sectors within B.C. All of those sectors have impacts on the ecosystems in the area. We assess those impacts against the conservation objectives.

This is way bigger than fisheries. As I said in my opening statement, commercial fisheries is one industry among many within the northern shelf bioregion.

**Aaron Gunn:** It's the main industry that's making a living on the water.

**Aaron Heidt:** Marine transportation, marine tourism and marine aquaculture are all, by GDP, much larger in B.C.

**Aaron Gunn:** Let's move on from that point.

You mentioned that you received \$200 million from the federal government, but that was only part of your funding. Where did the other funding come from?

**Aaron Heidt:** There was \$60 million from the Province of B.C., and then I believe there was something like an additional \$45 million from philanthropic organizations.

**Aaron Gunn:** Can you name the organizations?

**Aaron Heidt:** I can't. I can provide you with contacts within Coast Funds. They manage the trust. It is modelled after the Great Bear Rainforest trust, which has created hundreds of businesses and thousands of jobs within the Great Bear Sea and Great Bear Rainforest.

**Aaron Gunn:** You mentioned 17 first nations that signed up to support the plan. Were they given any capacity funding to be part of it?

**Aaron Heidt:** I believe they all had grants and contributions agreements with DFO. Beyond that, I can't say. That's not my role.

**Aaron Gunn:** Do you think it's problematic for groups to basically be paid by the federal government to support a plan being put forward by the federal government?

**Aaron Heidt:** That's not the way I saw it unfold over 10 years. In fact, I would make the argument that it was the 17 first nations that were pushing the Department of Fisheries and Oceans toward conservation because of their concern around ocean health in their territories.

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

That ends our time for this panel.

I want to thank our witnesses very much for their time—for being here in person and travelling a long distance or for participating by video conference. Your testimony is going to be very helpful as we formulate recommendations flowing from this study.

With that, we're going to briefly suspend in order to move to the last part of the meeting, which is in camera. Members of the public and witnesses will have to leave the room before we start that.

I'm going to briefly suspend.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]







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