



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 025

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Chair: Patrick Weiler



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

• (1615)

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

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting to continue its study of marine and coastal protections.

[Translation]

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

[English]

Before we continue, I would like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. Measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants but particularly interpreters.

Pursuant to our motions, I can advise the committee that all witnesses appearing virtually have completed the required technical testing.

I have a few comments for the benefits of members and 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.

[Translation]

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

[English]

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 would like to welcome our witnesses today.

From the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we have Kathy Graham, director general, marine planning and conservation; Amy Amos, regional director general, Arctic region, participating by video conference; Anna Classen, regional director general, Pacific region, participating by video conference; Doug Wentzell, regional director general, Maritimes region, participating by video conference; and Brett Gilchrist, director, national programs, fisheries and harbour management.

From the Department of the Environment, we have Marie-Eve Neron, director general, protected areas directorate.

From the Parks Canada Agency, we have David Millar, vice-president, protected areas establishment and conservation; and Lori Macadam, director, national marine conservation area establishment.

Welcome to everybody.

We'll start with witnesses' opening statements for five minutes or less, starting with Ms. Graham.

Kathy Graham (Director General, Marine Planning and Conservation, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to speak to this committee once again.

I want to acknowledge that I am joining you from the traditional territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people.

Since my last appearance, my colleagues and I have listened carefully to the compelling testimonies from the witnesses called before this committee. I have since met with several partners and stakeholders from across the country. We hear the fishing industry loud and clear. We need to strengthen trust in our process and more closely work together to better understand and address potential economic impacts. We've heard fish harvesters express these concerns, while also reaffirming their commitment to protecting fish stocks so that future generations can continue this way of life.

Fishing is a vital part of Canada's history, identity and economy, and it will remain central to our future. We look forward to continuing to work with all partners and stakeholders to find the best path forward, one that supports conservation goals alongside sustainable, prosperous fisheries. I look forward to guidance from this committee on how best to advance this goal, and I thank you, Mr. Chair, for bringing all of our voices to the table.

Today, I want to touch on the importance of relationships with partners and stakeholders, assessing and considering economic impacts, and the role conservation plays in maintaining healthy ecosystems while supporting sustainable fisheries.

First, as noted by the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, strong relationships drive successful outcomes. The support of all partners and stakeholders, such as the fishing industry, was instrumental in conserving over 15% of Canada's oceans. We know advancing meaningful marine conservation requires time and ongoing dialogue, including working through scenarios together. While we offer many opportunities for input throughout the establishment process, we recognize the need to do better to ensure that fishers are heard, respected and included. Their practical knowledge is invaluable, as is the research and monitoring work we do together. Continuing to strengthen all of these relationships remains a priority for Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Second, we recognize that our decisions directly affect the lives and livelihoods of coastal communities. We are taking community and industry concerns about the potential economic impacts very seriously. Decisions will continue to be based on science, indigenous and local knowledge, robust socio-economic analysis and extensive consultation. We continue to carefully consider potential economic impacts from the outset, working closely with industry to develop new baseline data to better inform boundary adjustments and zoning to minimize impacts while achieving site-specific conservation goals. To date, 10 of Canada's 14 Oceans Act marine protected areas have resulted in minimal impact on existing fisheries, and most allow some form of sustainable fishing.

Third, I wish to emphasize that according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, healthy marine ecosystems are vital for ocean nations, like Canada, aiming to maintain and grow a prosperous and sustainable ocean economy. Investments in marine protected areas help achieve these objectives by supporting, for instance, sustainable fish stocks. There is global scientific evidence that supports marine protected areas as an effective conservation tool. Marine protected areas safeguard ecosystems from a wide variety of human pressures, including risks that fisheries management alone cannot address.

The choice we make is not protection or prosperity; rather, protection is how we secure long-term prosperity. As stated by several witnesses, marine protected areas generate both direct and indirect economic benefits. By providing safe havens where species can grow and reproduce, they can support long-term stock recovery and stability. We have seen this in the Eastport marine protected area here in Canada. Further, marine protected areas also support tourism, research and innovation, cultural activities and indigenous reconciliation. Public support remains consistently strong. Canadians expect their government to maintain healthy oceans.

Let me conclude with one final note. Marine conservation and fishing can absolutely coexist. Through renewed dialogue, we can achieve necessary protections and ensure a sustainable fishing industry that supports strong coastal communities.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Marie-Eve Neron for five minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Eve Neron (Director General, Protected Areas Directorate, Department of the Environment): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Let me begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation, who have a relationship with this land stretching back at least 10,000 years.

[*English*]

The mission of the Canadian wildlife service is to achieve nature conservation outcomes for wildlife, habitats and the ecosystems of which they are a part, with a particular focus on migratory birds and species at risk. This includes establishing and managing protected areas in marine and coastal areas across Canada's three oceans. Coastal areas and offshore islands provide important nesting habitats, while ocean waters provide crucial foraging habitat for marine birds.

The Canadian wildlife service manages just over 150,000 square kilometres of land, coastline and water with high biodiversity value. Our marine network includes one wholly marine national wildlife area, 10 national wildlife areas and 44 migratory bird sanctuaries that have both coastal and marine components. Currently, Environment and Climate Change Canada contributes 0.54% towards Canada's marine conservation targets.

The national wildlife areas are managed through the wildlife area regulations under the Canada Wildlife Act. The migratory bird sanctuaries are managed through the migratory bird sanctuary regulations under the Migratory Birds Convention Act.

Canada's first marine national wildlife area, Scott Islands marine national wildlife area, was established in 2018 and consists of over 11,000 square kilometres of exclusively marine waters off the northwest coast of Vancouver Island. It supports the highest concentration of breeding seabirds on Canada's Pacific coast. Site-specific regulations are in place year-round to prohibit activities that may threaten the conservation objectives of the site.

The process to establish protected areas can be lengthy and complex. The Scott Islands marine national wildlife area took over 20 years to establish from conception. A terrestrial example is the Edézhíe national wildlife area and Dehcho protected area in the Northwest Territories, which took over 25 years to establish.

Consultation and engagement are at the core of Environment and Climate Change Canada's establishment process. Our department considers both ecological and socio-economic factors as well as obligations under treaties or land claim agreements when establishing protected areas. We work in collaboration with indigenous partners, stakeholders and other federal departments and levels of governments, as well as communities and non-government organizations.

Currently, Environment and Climate Change Canada is working in partnership with the Council of the Haida Nation to establish a proposed marine national wildlife area on Haida Gwaii in British Columbia. This is an ecologically rich and culturally significant place with important habitats for marine birds, fish, marine mammals, species at risk and other wildlife.

Nearshore Haida Gwaii was identified as an area for protection through the northern shelf bioregion marine protected area network action plan. The plan describes the approach to establishing new marine protected areas in the northern shelf bioregion, which is also called the Great Bear Sea. The plan was collaboratively developed and endorsed by 17 first nations, the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia.

ECCC is currently in the feasibility assessment phase for the proposed nearshore Haida Gwaii marine NWA. Building on the initial information included in the action plan, research and planning are under way to better study the area's environment, wildlife and human activities.

There are opportunities for broad input through the advisory committee, co-chaired by the department and the Council of the Haida Nation. Membership consists of stakeholders from across a variety of sectors, including government, industry, commercial fishing, recreational fishing, tourism and local ENGOS.

The advisory committee is currently reviewing the ecosystem overview report and a non-renewable resource assessment, which will contribute to the development of a socio-economic overview this fall. In future meetings, the committee will provide input on proposed boundaries, conservation objectives and proposed protection measures.

After the development of and consultation on a draft regulatory strategy, a site-specific regulation will be drafted and consulted on broadly via publication in Canada Gazette, part I. A regulatory impact analysis statement that includes a cost-benefit analysis will be published at the same time. Environment and Climate Change Canada is currently targeting prepublication in the Canada Gazette, part I, in 2028.

In Atlantic Canada, there are two key biodiversity areas where CWS, other government departments, rights holders and partners have invested in working towards marine national wildlife area—

- (1625)

The Chair: Ms. Neron, I'm afraid we're over time. Wrap it up very quickly if you could.

Marie-Eve Neron: I just want to thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Of course, there will be time, once we get into the rounds of questions, to get into that further.

We are now going to conclude with opening remarks from David Millar for five minutes or less.

David Millar (Vice-President, Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation, Parks Canada Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to discuss the contribution of Parks Canada's national marine conservation areas program to marine and coastal protections in Canada.

National marine conservation areas, or NMCAs, are one of several of Parks Canada's protected area programs focused on the conservation, management and visitor use of nationally significant examples of lands, waters and ice. We're a coastal nation, and Canadians take great pride in these natural environments.

[Translation]

NMCAs specifically play a vital role in conserving biodiversity and culturally significant places. In addition to supporting sustainable fisheries and industry, they create opportunities for tourism and recreation and bring economic diversity through new investment and economic activity to coastal communities. They allow Canadians to connect with oceans and places that are cornerstones of this country.

Parks Canada's sites help diversify and invest in the economy of rural, northern and urban communities by creating approximately 40,000 jobs across Canada. The 24 million visitors to these places spend approximately \$4.5 billion annually in surrounding communities—as an example, visitors to Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park brought approximately \$125 million to the Province of Quebec in 2023.

[English]

NMCAs are designed and managed based on input from partners and stakeholders to ensure these ecological and economic benefits materialize. As my colleague from DFO mentioned, we recognize the need to learn from past experiences and input from stakeholders in order to ensure that our consultation processes are robust and that those who make their livelihoods from the oceans are involved early and often throughout the process. We will be continuing to work to improve our processes.

While oil, gas, mineral and aggregate exploration is prohibited throughout the totality of an NMCA, an NMCA is not a no-take zone or closed area. Many activities, such as commercial and recreational fisheries, marine transportation, tourism and recreation, can continue in NMCAs.

Parks Canada has listened attentively to the witnesses who have presented to this committee, as well as through all of the stakeholder engagements undertaken to date. We aim to continuously improve upon our processes by listening to and acting upon the input we have heard. We've heard that marine conservation remains an important objective for all and that we all must work better together to achieve it.

[Translation]

As Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area and Haida Heritage Site and Tallurutiup Imanga clearly demonstrate, by bringing various perspectives together early and consistently, we can and have designed NMCAs that balance conservation with socio-economic interests. Working in this way takes time, but it is the right and only way to proceed.

[English]

NMCAs are about ensuring a future in which healthy oceans create the conditions for both thriving ecosystems and vibrant indigenous and coastal communities. That future is only possible when all partners sit at the table, shape the vision and help turn it into reality, and that is our intention moving forward.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

• (1630)

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

That concludes our opening remarks.

We're going right into the first round of questioning, the six-minute round, starting with Mr. Small.

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

I'd like to welcome our witnesses back. It's been a while, but it's great to see you back.

In November, we heard some interesting testimony from our panel here. Since then, we've heard a lot of testimony throughout this study from advocates of the Liberal-supported United Nations 30 by 30 initiative to stop or restrict economic access to resource industries like the fishing industry, aquaculture, and oil and gas, and to shut down 30% of that access by 2030. The vast majority of that testimony gave reasons other than climate change for enacting these closures, yet when Ms. Graham and others were all here on November 26, climate change was mentioned 14 times and was singled out as the main reason to close down these areas.

Numerous scientific, peer-reviewed studies don't agree with that theory. How do you quantify the reduction in atmospheric carbon that 30 by 30 will bring when so many experts say there's no means to do so?

Kathy Graham: With respect to the relationship between marine protected areas and climate change, marine protected areas actually buffer against climate change in a way that reduces vulnerability. Well-designed protected and conserved areas can provide refuge for species and habitat by reducing cumulative stresses, making them better able to adapt to changing climate conditions.

Clifford Small: In Atlantic Canada, marine-based industries are governed by 27 federal and provincial acts to protect those waters.

Do you have a lack of faith in Canada's regulatory system, Ms. Graham?

Kathy Graham: The Oceans Act offers the opportunity for the government to address other human activities that are posing risks to the ocean as a whole. It's meant to complement the Fisheries Act, as an example, because the Fisheries Act on its own is unable to address certain risks that exist for the ocean.

Clifford Small: Mr. Millar, 48,000 square kilometres of maritime waters alone are scheduled to be protected under the Liberal-blessed United Nations 30 by 30 initiative. That's eight times the size of Prince Edward Island. With these waters being protected by 27 acts of provincial governments or federal governments, why are you guys trying to take away the provinces' jurisdiction over the regulation of their industries and coastal waters?

David Millar: As my colleague mentioned, marine protected areas are intended to complement sector-specific regulations to ensure the conservation of biodiversity and other outcomes, including the conservation of culture. We work in close partnership with provinces and territories when we engage in these processes to come up with solutions that everyone supports in moving forward.

Clifford Small: Once upon a time, Canada had a fisheries ambassador to represent the Canadian fishing industry at the United Nations and other high-level bilateral and multilateral meetings. In 2015, when this government was elected, the position of the fisheries ambassador was eliminated. Since then, this government has been sending members of ENGOs, such as Oceans North, to represent Canada's fishing interests.

Ms. Graham, why is your government sending foreign-funded activists who want to simply reduce fishing instead of an advocate who will support our fishing industry to the world?

• (1635)

Kathy Graham: My participation at the last UNOC, the United Nations conference for oceans, included representation from several ENGOs but also the fishing industry and indigenous communities.

Clifford Small: Who would represent us from the fishing industry?

Kathy Graham: I recall Mr. Jim McIsaac being at UNOC in Portugal. That's one name I recall.

Clifford Small: Would you agree that producing seafood in Canada is an important aspect of maintaining Canada's national food security?

Kathy Graham: Yes.

Clifford Small: There's a risk in setting up these protected areas. Outcomes can't be proven. Peer-reviewed studies say that the positive impact to surrounding areas by closing areas to fishing simply can't be proven. These are people in very high-level positions—academics and whatnot—who you'd never think would think that way. If there's a risk that the path we're on may not work out, is that an acceptable risk to take against Canada's food security?

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm afraid I have to jump in. We're well over time.

If the witness would like to provide that answer in writing, it would be much appreciated.

With that, we will move on to our next questioner.

Mr. Cormier, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

The committee has heard from many stakeholders and fishers as part of its study. As we know, the primary industry in my riding is fishing. Fishers are afraid, and rightly so, because it's difficult for them to understand this process. Sometimes when they arrive at a meeting, they are presented with a fait accompli. For example, they are shown maps of the marine conservation areas where they will no longer be able to fish for what they want. There's also a great deal of unpredictability, and they wonder what will happen if they can no longer fish in that area.

Earlier, I believe Ms. Graham said that some areas already in place had a minor impact on these people's incomes. I would like to ask the witnesses what constitutes a minor impact on the income and licence of a fisher who makes their living in this industry?

Kathy Graham: For our part, in terms of the stages of the socio-economic study, documents are available online that deal with socio-economic impact assessment and a summary of the regulatory impact analysis statement. They contain detailed information on the potential or anticipated impact of conservation areas. For most of them, the impact is defined as negligible; the amount is so small that it's not quantified. For a few, the amounts have been defined.

My colleague Mr. Gilchrist could give you more details on this.

Serge Cormier: Let's take the example of snow crab fishing in zone 12 in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence. If I'm not mistaken, marine conservation areas are planned for this zone if discussions progress well and everyone can agree. Have you done a socio-economic impact assessment related to snow crab fishing in zone 12?

[*English*]

Brett Gilchrist (Director, National Programs, Fisheries and Harbour Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Yes, engaging the fishing industry is the top priority, certainly for fisheries management in working with our Government of Canada colleagues, to understand the impact of any potential new protected areas, but also in trying to get a sense from industry about the potential opportunities, where that is possible, to continue fishing. That could involve finding boundaries that are more acceptable to the industry and areas that they consider prime fishing grounds, but it could also be about new fishing gear technology—for example, whalesafe gear for snow crab and fish harvesters in areas that are important to them.

The first step of the economic analysis is to engage fish harvesters and to get their opinions and positions about areas that are critically important to them.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Serge Cormier: Let's say there's a marine conservation area in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and, unfortunately, no one can fish there anymore for some reason, such as the presence of corals. If there is an economic impact on fishers, that is to say a loss of income, has your department planned any compensation, programs or funding to help these individuals?

We do this for other industries, such as the automotive and steel industries. Does your department plan to do the same thing if there is a loss of income in this sector?

[*English*]

Brett Gilchrist: I'm not aware of compensation, but again, in most cases—for example, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence—

Serge Cormier: I'm not asking whether you're aware. If there's no fishing in a particular zone, did you think about making sure there's money in place to help those fishers?

Brett Gilchrist: When we look at a protected area possibility, fisheries management, in the role we play, determines whether a new protected area is going to have an impact economically on fish harvesters. We determine whether an appropriate area is in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, in the southern gulf or in an area that is more appealing to harvesters.

We do consider potential implications and costs to the industry, and we consider options.

[*Translation*]

Serge Cormier: I think fishers are aware that marine conservation areas can be beneficial. On the other hand, they can also be detrimental to them since they can't fish there. They still have concerns. Most of them told us about the consultation process. As I said earlier, when they come to the meetings, they are shown maps on which an area has already been designated.

Why don't you do the opposite? Instead of meeting with them at public advisory committee meetings, why don't you meet with them beforehand to tell them what you're proposing? I think you're creating a lot more uncertainty in the industry the way you're doing things now than if you did things a little differently.

For future meetings or consultations, are you able to tell us whether you're going to implement this process, so that there can be better coordination with the various sectors?

Kathy Graham: If I may, I will answer the question.

I would say that, based on the feedback we're getting, the process is clearly problematic for fishers. We definitely want to take a step back and ask ourselves how we can do things differently.

Certainly, when we present a map with ideas, the goal is to have the highest level of transparency. We've been criticized in the past for doing things behind closed doors. Our goal is really to put forward ideas to start the conversation, get feedback and understand their perspective on what works and what doesn't work.

What we've managed to do over the years with the conservation areas we currently have is that most of the boundaries end up changing based on the feedback and information we gather from fishers' expertise and knowledge. We show the maps to start the conversation and achieve the highest level of transparency.

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

Mr. Simard, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm a little surprised by Mr. Cormier's questions about compensation for fishers and the connection he made with the automotive sector. It's still a government decision. I hope that, if standards were ever put in place, the government would agree to provide compensation for fishers. It's quite surprising to see someone from the government questioning public servants as if he thought they had the power to implement compensation measures.

I say this without malice, Mr. Cormier.

• (1645)

Serge Cormier: We don't always agree.

Mario Simard: As you say, we won't always agree.

Witnesses, I'm going to take you in a different direction.

You may be aware that the government has an extensive trade corridor strategy. Trade corridors often involve the use of waterways. I'm speaking for my region, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, where there have been investments in infrastructure at the Port of Saguenay. In fact, we thanked the government for its investments.

Is your department consulted on the potential impacts and mitigation of increased shipping?

Kathy Graham: We work very closely with our partners at Transport Canada, who have a mandate to manage marine transportation. When it comes to defining or considering marine protected areas, they are definitely part of the conversations, and we have an opportunity to work together to understand the dynamics or the relationship between the different objectives.

Mario Simard: I'm not saying this naively. We had discussions about this not too long ago. I know that in 2024, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans put in place a marine drone program to determine right whale populations. Mitigation measures could be put in place as a result, since boats could slow down their speed or make sure no collisions occurred.

I know that this is creating concerns among the people of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean about the protection of the ecosystem in the Saguenay estuary, particularly in terms of the well-known issue of beluga whales.

We found it useful to implement the same type of project. I don't remember the name of the company you were dealing with. I believe it was Whale Seeker. We wondered whether it was possible to

develop the same type of project to protect marine wildlife not only in the Saguenay estuary, but also in the St. Lawrence, since we know that belugas are currently migrating because of global warming.

Is that something you're thinking about?

Kathy Graham: Some protected areas have been established, and one of the objectives is to help protect whales.

My colleague Mr. Gilchrist has more knowledge than I do on the specific issue of whales.

[*English*]

Brett Gilchrist: Thank you for the question. It's a really important one, because it's an example of where sometimes technology and the monitoring of species like whales and their distribution can allow us to make more informed decisions and engage fish harvesters to minimize the impact of protection measures on fish harvesters. That's certainly something that your region...and belugas and other species, including endangered species like North Atlantic right whales, are deeply connected. It's about management measures that allow harvesters to continue fishing while also implementing conservation steps. That kind of research, piloting and monitoring can lead to those solutions, for sure.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard: I understand that mitigation measures must be found to preserve fishing activities, and I fully agree with that.

Given that the use of trade corridors also has an impact on marine wildlife, and that there may be an increase in marine traffic if we develop new markets with Europe, I wonder if that was something you were thinking about. My region in particular comes to mind, but I'm sure that's the case elsewhere. It's the same thing for the Port of Québec, which is trying to change its mandate to handle more containers.

We wonder how mitigation measures can be put in place to further develop the social licence of the trade corridor project. Are you involved in discussions with the government? Do you have any measures different from those I mentioned to you, the ones concerning marine drones? Are there measures to further develop the social licence for this type of project?

Kathy Graham: I know that my colleague from Parks Canada would like to talk about the project in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. In addition, if one of the issues of interest is noise, our colleagues could provide you with more detailed information on the noise abatement strategy.

Mr. Millar, do you want to add anything?

• (1650)

David Millar: I would just like to say something about what you mentioned, Mr. Simard. As you know, we have the Saguenay—Saint-Laurent marine park, whose purpose is to protect beluga whales and other marine mammals.

We're working with the shipping industry, not to stop shipping, because it's really important for the economy and for Canadians, but to set up mitigation measures, as you said. For example, reducing speeds in areas that are major habitats for beluga whales also significantly reduces the risk of collision. That's one example of what we're doing with industry.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simard.

That completes the first round of questions.

[English]

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

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

Ms. Graham, during our previous discussion at committee on these marine planning areas or underwater parks, you stated that DFO undertakes socio-economic analysis only after areas are established or chosen, leading to the potential of mass closures of fishing grounds without even studying how many jobs are going to be lost, how much tax revenue will be lost to the government and the impacts on Canada's food security.

Why doesn't the department conduct the socio-economic analysis before engaging in closing fishing grounds that could collapse an entire industry?

Kathy Graham: As a point of clarification, the socio-economic analysis is undertaken at the moment we have a better understanding of conservation objectives and what specific measures would be needed to actually achieve those conservation objectives. It happens before a site is established.

Aaron Gunn: Ms. Graham, you told me, “once we understand what conservation measures will be put in place, we will do that socio-economic analysis”. You also told me that no socio-economic analysis has been done, yet this process has been going on for seven or eight years now.

Are you now saying that the department will be doing a socio-economic analysis before announcing which areas will be closed? Were you mistaken before, or has the department's approach changed?

Kathy Graham: No. To clarify again, with respect to the northern shelf bioregion, what has been tabled is a plan. In that plan, there aren't fully defined conservation objectives and/or measures that have been agreed to—

Aaron Gunn: Are you talking about draft scenario two? That does have management measures, which were put out from that industry. It was able to estimate a huge loss of access to a variety of fisheries, including geoduck, prawn and rockfish. Are we no longer going off that at all? The minister in 2023 practically endorsed it. All the fishermen see it. They're now wondering if this is happening or not.

I would welcome the opportunity for you to dismiss this outright and say that, no, there is no.... Can you say that after seven years? Can you guarantee that fishermen will not be losing double-digit percentage access to these fisheries, for example, up the British Columbia central coast? Can you guarantee that, or is it still a possibility?

Kathy Graham: The northern shelf bioregion plan, the plan you've made reference to, is a concept that was put forward. In terms of the establishment process, once that process begins.... It has not as of yet, given that the government was negotiating the project financing for permanence with the same 17 first nations that endorsed the northern shelf bioregion plan, and as a result of that—

Aaron Gunn: Then we should just dismiss the draft proposal altogether, scenario two, because that's what industry.... Can you imagine being a fisherman? DFO puts out a plan. You look at the plan. You're going to lose 46% access to prawn, 36% access to geoduck and 34% access to rockfish on B.C.'s central coast.

You have yet to tell members of Parliament, and you have yet to tell fishermen. Is that plan now out the window and we're starting from scratch, or is that still the basis for what fishermen can expect?

Kathy Graham: That still remains the basis that fishermen can expect. In terms of clarifying—

Aaron Gunn: Okay, so that is significantly closing.

Kathy Graham: In terms of clarifying, advancing marine protected areas does not mean that all fishing areas will be closed.

Aaron Gunn: No, it does not mean all, but it means a lot of fishermen—

Kathy Graham: The objective is—

Aaron Gunn: Excuse me, Ms. Graham, but it's my time.

This plan has been put out with management measures. The fishermen have looked at it and studied it, and they've put forward what it is going to mean for them. You're sitting there telling me that DFO might not follow the plan exactly. Well, that's not good enough. If you're not going to follow the plan, then you need to tell fishermen what the plan is. That was four years ago, and they're sitting with all of this uncertainty. You're destroying their business; no one wants to go into it. You need to provide some certainty for these people.

Mr. Millar, the last time we spoke, you said that marine planning areas, or MPAs, are “not closed areas for fishing”, yet DFO has created and closed many areas over the years, including areas of the Gwaii Haanas marine conservation area around Haida Gwaii. For the northern shelf bioregion, as I said, the department produced the draft report, scenario two—everyone can see it—which included mass closures up and down B.C.'s coast. As an example, there will be up to a 46% loss of access to prawn on the central coast.

Will the northern shelf bioregion marine planning area or underwater park strategy, whatever you want to call it, look like scenario two, or will it match up with your previous statement that these areas will not be closed for fishing? It has to be one or the other.

• (1655)

David Millar: I would stand by the statement I made last time that NMCAs are not intended to be closed areas for fishing. That's not to say there are no measures within them pertaining to fisheries. Gwaii Haanas is a great example. The majority of the area is still open for a variety of fisheries. There are areas within it, within the management plan, where fishing has been limited in close consultation with the industry. The industry was involved in the planning process for the zoning and management plan from day one and, in fact, came out publicly in support of that management planning process.

The Chair: Thank you much, Mr. Gunn.

Next we are going Mr. Cormier for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to follow up on what my colleague Mr. Simard was talking about.

I think he clearly lacks knowledge about how the federal government operates. Even my colleague Mr. Gunn just asked the officials if they had thought about all the plans and all the socio-economic impacts.

As a government, it's our responsibility to anticipate socio-economic impacts, but it's also theirs. It is also their responsibility to make recommendations to the government. At the end of the day, that's how a government works. We make decisions. His colleague who is replacing him is not shy about asking the federal government for more funding. Each time, his colleague votes against it, as I'm sure does Mr. Simard.

I would now like to come back to how the marine protected areas work. My colleague Mr. Gunn just talked about the fear that fishers have. I want us to pay close attention to that. Their fear is that they will no longer be able to fish inside marine protected areas. Some of you are saying that they will be able to, while others are saying that they won't.

How are you going to allay the fears of the fisheries sector, for example? What more can you do right now to tell them that consultations are currently under way and that areas are being proposed for various reasons, such as protecting this coral or that ecosystem? There are advantages and disadvantages, but what more can you do right now? What can you tell our committee to allay their fears? If they lose revenue at some point, how can we assure them that you, as public servants, are thinking about these things during socio-economic impact studies, but that the government is also thinking about them? How can you allay their fear? All the members, fishers and associations that have come here have expressed the same concerns.

Kathy Graham: We have already started asking fisheries sector representatives for comments to get advice on how we can organize ourselves differently to ensure a good working relationship. We al-

so need to adopt an approach that will reassure them that the advice and information they provide to us are crucial. That will help us designate and put in place protected areas that make sense, in a way that achieves conservation objectives while minimizing the impact.

The role of the representatives is really essential to ensure that the ultimate goal is achieved, which is to put in place protected areas that reflect conservation objectives while having the least possible impact. That can't be done if they're not there to work with us. On our end, we thought we had done a good job, but after listening to the testimony and hearing the comments—

Serge Cormier: Did you listen to their testimony? It should be clear to you that this is not something that the committee made up. Fishers are really worried. As you just said, you have a huge job ahead of you to try to regain their trust.

I'm going to move on to you, Mr. Gilchrist.

• (1700)

[*English*]

You spoke about the new gear in, for example, zone 12. I think we can still talk about it. I think it's within the scope of what we're doing right now—the new whalesafe fishing gear strategy you just unveiled a couple of weeks ago.

There's even some concern from fishers that what we're trying to do here is have crab fisheries without any traditional traps, even when the whales are not present. Is that the case?

Brett Gilchrist: No.

This is a perfect example of how I believe we should engage—and we have engaged—fish harvesters from the start before making decisions. I don't think it's about putting a map on the table and saying what area we want to protect. It's about identifying the species, ecosystem features and objectives and asking how we work around them. You put these ecosystem features or species—whether it's right whales, a coral bed or a glass sponge reef—in front of the fishing industry and fish harvesters, both indigenous and non-indigenous harvesters, and ask, “Is there a way we can protect these critical elements and work around them that minimizes the impact on your fishery?”

Before making a decision on what a final product would look like, you have repeated rounds of engagement. For example, for the whalesafe fishing gear strategy, I recall going to communities. I remember sitting over at the fire hall and talking to harvesters about what they thought about that strategy. Some of them said it wouldn't work for their fishery. That's important because we can turn around and say, “Okay, this tool is not going to work for that fishery. Is there an alternative tool that will allow them to fish and protect that species?”

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

[Translation]

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

Mario Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to clarify my thinking for the benefit of Mr. Cormier. I don't want to be at odds with him. I'm a well-meaning person. I simply want to tell him that it would not occur to me to criticize an official from Natural Resources Canada because the government is not offering compensation to forestry industry workers for a situation that poses a problem today. Similarly, I don't think it's up to an official from the Department of Industry to comment on the compensation given to auto sector workers. That is the role of government. In all modesty, I wanted to qualify my remarks.

Let's get back on topic. I really enjoy a political debate, but I'm now going to come back to things that are relevant to the witnesses.

Not long ago, my colleague Alexis Deschênes and I met with fishers from the Îles de la Madeleine. They told us that it was hard to align your scientific data with the data they collect on the ground. I want us to listen to science, but there was often a considerable gap between your interpretation of the scientific data and the findings reported by the people on the ground.

Is there a mechanism in place to align the knowledge of fishers, meaning the findings made on the ground about fish stocks or the policies that affect the fishery, and the scientific knowledge that enables you to make decisions? Is there any kind of alignment or arbitration on that?

Kathy Graham: I'll ask my colleague Mr. Gilchrist and my colleague from Parks Canada to answer the question about the Îles de la Madeleine.

[English]

Brett Gilchrist: It's definitely about listening to harvesters and the feedback they have and working with them and DFO's ecosystems and oceans science colleagues to better understand how the science data, the feedback and the experience of harvesters connect, and if they don't connect, trying to find a way forward to try to identify a solution on that.

The experience of harvesters doesn't always align with the modelling exercises. That's a really important point, because sometimes modelling does get it wrong, so you return to the table, talk to harvesters and update the model. That's certainly happened in the development of some of the protected areas in the past, such as marine refuges, for example.

[Translation]

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

[English]

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

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

I want to thank the witnesses from all three departments for being here.

I'll start with Ms. Graham.

On November 25 of last year, you told this committee, "Fishing activities occur in all of our marine protected areas." Those were your words in testimony. Do you recall that?

• (1705)

Kathy Graham: Yes.

Mel Arnold: On January 28 of this year, I shared that statement with a B.C. harvester involved in the DFO marine protection processes, and he stated that there are, in fact, MPA initiatives that are no-take zones.

Ms. Graham, when you stated that fishing activities occur in all MPAs, did you mean that all MPAs include at least one zone where fishing occurs, or what did you mean?

Kathy Graham: Thank you for the question and the opportunity to clarify.

With respect to the 14 marine protected areas, we have four where, in fact, fishing is prohibited. There is the Laurentian Channel; Eastport, which we talked about; the Bowie seamount; and Tuvaijuittuq.

For Tuvaijuittuq, no fishing activity happens there. My understanding for Laurentian Channel is that—

Mel Arnold: Then your statement that fishing activities occur in all of our marine protected areas was incorrect.

Kathy Graham: Yes.

Mel Arnold: Thank you.

By fishing activities that are allowed, did you mean both indigenous and non-indigenous fishing activities?

Kathy Graham: Yes.

Mel Arnold: Are there any MPAs or other marine protection initiatives adding to the government's targets where indigenous harvest activities are limited or prohibited?

Kathy Graham: Do you mean in terms of existing sites?

Mel Arnold: Are there any MPAs or other marine protection initiatives adding to the government's targets where indigenous harvest activities are limited or prohibited?

Kathy Graham: Yes, there are.

Mel Arnold: Then can you explain why conservation objectives would be less stringent for sectors where catch often goes unreported or unmeasured by DFO?

Kathy Graham: In terms of the risk assessment that is applied with respect to fisheries for indigenous people, meaning the FSC, the risk assessment is also applied to the type of fishing. If it poses a great conservation risk, that is also limited. If it does not pose a significant conservation risk, then it is allowed.

Mel Arnold: Could you provide this committee in writing which of the government's marine protection initiatives limit or prohibit fishing activities by indigenous harvesters?

Kathy Graham: Yes, I'd be happy to.

Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Ms. Graham, I assume the federal marine protection initiatives are undertaken primarily for conservation. Is that correct?

Kathy Graham: Yes.

Mel Arnold: Federal statutes and policies and the Supreme Court of Canada have repeatedly affirmed that conservation is a primary objective for fisheries management that is entrusted to the Minister of Fisheries. If fishing activities in a protection zone are prohibited for a conservation reason, can a conservation region change, depending on whether the fishing activity is undertaken by an indigenous or non-indigenous harvester?

Kathy Graham: The risk assessment is still applied to the fishing activity that is occurring. Based on that risk assessment, a decision is taken on whether it can be allowed or not.

Mel Arnold: Do the conservation objectives change?

Kathy Graham: No, they do not.

Mel Arnold: Federal statutes and Supreme Court rulings have repeatedly upheld that conservation is the number one priority. The minister is closing zones to fishing for conservation reasons, but then exemptions to closures are made, and these exemptions betray the primacy of conservation and whether the minister had serious conservation concerns in the first place. If she did, one would assume that the reasons would warrant being upheld.

Ms. Graham, will you provide this committee in writing the detailed conservation objectives and how those objectives are actually measured for each marine conservation and protection area that is established or planned for on the west coast?

Kathy Graham: Yes, I will.

Mel Arnold: Could you provide that in a reasonable time, before we finish this study?

Kathy Graham: Yes, I'm happy to contribute.

Mel Arnold: Thank you.

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

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

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): Hello. Can you hear me?

• (1710)

The Chair: We can hear you.

Paul Connors: Thank you to all the witnesses who came out today.

I was very pleased to hear in Ms. Graham's opening remarks that they listened to the industry and the testimony as we started this. I believe you stated that you're already looking at some changes. Is that correct?

Kathy Graham: Yes.

Paul Connors: Fishers believe in conservation and sustainability. We heard that loud and clear. It is their work life and it is their source of income.

You made a comment that I want to get clarification on. You said that when fishers work with "us"... Should the fishers be working with you, or should you be working with the fishers? There is a difference.

Kathy Graham: Absolutely, we need to be working with the fishing industry.

Paul Connors: MP Cormier mentioned this too, but we heard loud and clear from fishers that they have lost trust in DFO and its ability to make decisions on behalf of fishers, and that marine protected areas are taking priority over their livelihoods.

In a no-take zone or in a zone that allows fishing.... In a no-take zone, a fishery wouldn't be able to survive, but in a marine protected area, can a sustainable, profitable fishing sector survive?

Brett Gilchrist: It's a good question. It depends on what the ecosystem objective is. If there are, for example, coral and sponge, a gorgonian coral, which is long-lived and hard, takes a lot of time to recover if damaged and can be rare. There are particular fishing gear types and fisheries that can't occur in that area without damaging the critical component to the habitat for those species. However, there may be other types of fisheries that can occur in that area, and you can design management zones and polygons around those ecosystem features that allow fisheries to continue.

It's a bit of a difficult question because each area is so distinct. There may be fishing opportunities and technologies that allow fishing to continue, but in some cases, specific gear types can't be used in those areas because of the ecosystem objective. It's a discussion with the fish harvesters themselves and scientists.

Paul Connors: What's identified first, the conservation objectives or the conserved or protected area?

Kathy Graham: It's the conservation objectives.

Paul Connors: Once those are identified and the consultations begin with fish harvesters, would they change? Would those conservation objectives change through the consultation process?

Kathy Graham: The conservation objectives would likely not change. What would change is likely the boundaries that would be defined, having received input, information and knowledge from the fishing industry.

Paul Connors: How would that be measured? How would what's being protected be measured in terms of how successful a marine protected area is?

Kathy Graham: Some of the marine protected areas have already been established for many years. We have, for example, Eastport, which I made reference to, where we identified improvements in the lobster catch as a result of the marine protected area. We also have the Musquash Estuary, an area where some of the monitoring we're doing is allowing us to demonstrate that there is improved migration among migratory species through the estuary.

We have monitoring that happens. The objective is to understand what ecological improvements are happening over time. That information informs our adaptive management practices. We determine whether or not any adjustments or changes are required based on the information we're collecting over time.

Paul Connors: Would monitoring be done in all marine protected areas?

• (1715)

Kathy Graham: Yes.

Paul Connors: I have a question on the socio-economic side.

A study would be done. Reading through, there would be either three or four points in the framework where you can identify when socio-economic analysis would be done.

Once a marine protected area is established and has been ongoing for a number of years, is any updated socio-economic analysis done?

Kathy Graham: We regularly do updates to the data to understand the performance of an MPA and assess the economic impacts of that area.

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

That finishes our second round of questioning. We're going to start the third round of questioning with Mr. Small for five minutes.

Clifford Small: I thought he'd get his two and a half minutes.

The Chair: Did I miss that? No, he already had it.

We're starting the third round. We're at the top of the round with Mr. Small.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Gilchrist.

Mr. Gilchrist, do you recall when the Funk Island Deep protected area was created? How long has it been?

Brett Gilchrist: It has been several years. I think I was here, actually, in front of some of you folks.

Clifford Small: Would you say that chances are there have been a couple of generations of the snow crab life cycle?

Brett Gilchrist: Yes.

Clifford Small: For the Hawke Channel, there have been a couple of generations—maybe even three—of the snow crab life-cycle.

Brett Gilchrist: Possibly.

Clifford Small: Why did fishermen buy into the creation of these protected areas at the time?

Brett Gilchrist: It depends on which protected area. Of course, some of them were developed based on feedback from the harvesters themselves and based on existing restrictions for fisheries they wanted to benefit from, instead of starting anew with a new area.

We were looking at ecosystem features that we felt, in working with industry and indigenous harvesters, needed to be protected, but we were also recognizing that there are some critical fisheries that ideally should continue.

Clifford Small: There was buy-in from the inshore fishermen to stop bottom trawling because it was felt that bottom trawling was decimating the snow crab stocks. Is that correct?

Brett Gilchrist: That's correct.

Clifford Small: What's the news about crab stock assessments today for 2J and 3K—those closed areas?

Brett Gilchrist: I would have to confirm the status of those stocks. Of course, they are part of the regular cycle of stock assessments.

Clifford Small: This is terrible news in areas that expected that closing bottom trawling would give positive results for snow crabs. There is a 78% recommended cut in the snow crab quota in area 3K, where the Funk Island Deep is, and a 60% cut in 2J. I had a message come in from a gentleman on Fogo Island just a few minutes ago.

We've had a lot of testimony here that said outcomes can't be measured. What do you think of this outcome for the snow crab, which was meant to be protected?

Brett Gilchrist: Obviously, there are multiple objectives when restricting a particular type of fishing activity. There are objectives for the recovery of species and the protection of ecosystem features. We have to determine what the correlation is between the status of the stock and the protected area.

Clifford Small: These are not closed experiments like in a laboratory. There are quite a few variables.

Why not open up those two closed areas for cod fishing? Maybe the cod has had a bigger influence on the snow crab population than anything else, with predation. These areas are closed to the time-tested, proven, most ecologically friendly form of fishing that exists, which is longlining.

Will you advocate for opening these areas to cod fishing for longliners?

Brett Gilchrist: I think the key is to advocate for types of gear and solutions that allow fishing to continue where possible without having an impact on the ecosystem features and species you're trying to protect.

Clifford Small: Mr. Gilchrist, a few minutes ago I heard you speaking of adjusting models. Is this a type of model you're willing to adjust?

With the demise of snow crab in 2J and 3K and an explosion in the cod stock, will you lobby the minister to adjust these closed areas for a more sensible approach to harvesting groundfish, to at least give some gear types access to areas where they don't have it now?

• (1720)

Brett Gilchrist: I think the department's focus is to try to make sure that if there are available options to support fisheries—where they can occur and will not have an impact on the targeted ecosystem features and species of a protected area—the department should be considering them. That's the approach.

Clifford Small: The 30 by 30 agenda was developed by the United Nations mostly to protect the waters surrounding third world countries, where they've been pillaged by multinational fishing fleets, but Canada's waters are protected. They're the most protected waters in the world. Including provincial regulations, they're protected by nearly 30 acts by provincial and federal governments.

Why did you not say to the United Nations when they tried to rope us into this, “Our waters are protected. Sorry, if you want to protect your waters, do what Canada has done”? Why can't you protect livelihoods and our ecosystem at the same time? Why is it such an attack on the livelihoods of fish harvesters?

The Chair: I'm afraid I have to jump in again, because we're over time. If any of the witnesses would like to provide an answer in writing, that would be much appreciated.

With that, we are going to Mr. Klassen for five minutes.

Ernie Klassen (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Thank you to the witnesses.

It feels to me like there's been a lot of fearmongering and misinformation out there, whether it comes from fishers or politicians—or who knows where this information comes from.

Ms. Graham, I think you mentioned that in the Northwest Territories, it was a 25-year process from the start of identifying an area to completion. Was that correct?

Kathy Graham: I was referring to the northern shelf bioregion, which is a process that started approximately 20 years ago.

Ernie Klassen: What would be the average time from the time that an area has been identified as a possible protected area until the final completion of that process? Can you just quickly explain the process we go through?

Kathy Graham: Establishing a marine protected area goes through five steps. Those five steps can take approximately five to seven years before it is a fully designated a marine protected area.

In the circumstance of the northern shelf bioregion, the length of time was associated with the fact that partners were coming together to talk about a network.

Ernie Klassen: Can you identify or tell us approximately how many regions are being worked on for the west coast of British Columbia for Canada?

Kathy Graham: My colleague Anna Classen, who's from British Columbia, can speak to that.

Anna Classen (Regional Director General, Pacific Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We are currently contemplating a handful of potential site profiles, including offshore Haida Gwaii, the north coast fjords with the Gitxaala and Haisla first nations, and Kitkatla Inlet. Those are the site profiles we're currently contemplating.

We have—

Ernie Klassen: Are they all at the same place in the process?

Anna Classen: No, they are not. We're actively considering what the ecological priorities are and what fisheries are existing in the area.

Ernie Klassen: As the minister has stated on a number of occasions, we want to ensure that fish harvesting and the private, smaller individual families can carry on. In the west coast especially, we want to ensure that we bring back and retain as much of the fishing industry as possible.

I was happy to hear from you, Mr. Millar, that there is a place where the socio-economics of the marine protected areas and the fish harvesters can coexist. Can you talk a bit about that?

• (1725)

David Millar: Sure. I think the reference I made earlier was to the Gwaii Haanas national marine conservation area off the B.C. coast. Over a period of several years, we worked with fish harvesters and indigenous groups to design a management plan for the area. An advisory committee that was set up to steer that process included representation from the fishing industry, indigenous groups and other interested parties and experts. There was extensive consultation with industry and stakeholders to design a management plan that would take into account the reality of fishing as well as the conservation objectives, and then set out zones and measures that would not unduly impact the industry but would achieve the conservation objectives.

It took time. It took engagement from day one. At the end of the day, as I said, industry representatives wrote letters of support saying, “We think this is a good plan and it's one we can get behind. It won't undermine our economic sustainability, and it will achieve the outcomes we want to achieve.”

Ernie Klassen: A lot of witnesses have come here saying that there isn't an opportunity for input, but you're telling us that there will still be opportunity for more input from fishers and fish harvesters and that boundaries can be changed if the impact is too great on the industry. I just want to reconfirm that I understood what you were saying.

Ms. Graham, perhaps you can respond to that.

The Chair: Can you say it very quickly? We are out of time.

Kathy Graham: Yes, absolutely.

Ernie Klassen: Thank you.

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

[Translation]

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

Mario Simard: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Graham, what I have previously seen in other areas is that in a consultation process, there's usually some form of specifications. Those specifications cover the various criteria, the targeted groups, the length of the consultation and the methodology for interpreting the data.

Do you have any kind of specifications for the consultations that you conduct? Do you have a model that you use all the time?

Kathy Graham: Most of the consultations are carried out by each of our regions, with the representatives who are closest to community members, among others. There's definitely some variation in terms of approach, for example. However, I would say that the regulatory process very clearly outlines the steps that have to be taken.

Mario Simard: Do you have some kind of format? Don't you have a format that you refer to for the various entities you have, a format that says you have to respect certain dimensions and that you have to hold consultations on certain types of issues? Is that not the case?

Kathy Graham: It's very specific for each of the sites.

Mario Simard: Okay.

However, you must have something. There's no pro forma that resembles what you're doing as consultation. Is that correct?

Kathy Graham: The regulatory process is very clearly defined, as well as the steps that have to be taken to carry out the consultation.

I could submit some information on that to the committee.

Mario Simard: If you have any documents along those lines that would help the fishers who will be consulted understand how your methodology works, I think it would be appropriate to table those with the committee. My understanding is that fishers regularly feel that their opinions aren't being taken into account.

I assume you break down the information you collect in one way or another. There has to be some overlap. Some people probably say the same thing about a number of issues that raise the same type of concern. When these people eventually read the report and see that their point of view isn't represented, I understand that there's a disconnect. If the goal is for fishers to agree to establishing marine protected areas, they have to feel that their point of view has been taken into consideration.

Is there a way for them to see that you have taken their specific demands or concerns into account?

• (1730)

Kathy Graham: Thank you for the question—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but the speaking time is already up. I know that two and a half minutes is very short, but if you could send a written response to the committee, we would appreciate it.

[*English*]

With that, we are going to Mr. Arnold for five minutes.

Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start off by asking the clerk or the parliamentary secretary whether we've heard back on the third request we sent to the minister to appear at this committee. Has there been any response?

The Chair: I'll just turn to the clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Maxime Ricard): I have not received a response to our latest request.

Mel Arnold: I'm sorry. My mic was on, so I didn't hear that. What was that?

The Chair: The answer was no.

Mel Arnold: There's been no response to our third request.

It's frustrating for this committee to hear officials paying lip service to the profound harm that Liberal policies have inflicted on Canadians. In 2018, this committee studied the process the Liberals

were using to crush Canadians' livelihoods to achieve a political ideology. In 2018, this committee provided the Liberal government with 24 recommendations. Many of them were laser-focused on increasing co-operation with Canadians.

Now, eight years later, here we are once again examining the process, objectives and measurables for establishing marine protected areas and conservation areas. Why? I would say it's because the Liberal government chooses not to listen to Canadians whose lives, jobs, businesses, communities and futures have been damaged by Liberal ideological policies. Perhaps this is why the fisheries minister refuses to appear or even respond to this committee's request to appear on this study.

The Carney government is just as bad as the Trudeau days. Three times we've asked for the minister to appear on this important issue, and she won't show up. I want the officials to know that members reflect the frustration of Canadians who have come to this committee to testify and our own frustration that our efforts to work for Canadians are being stonewalled by the minister.

I hear you today saying that you're going to change. Your words, I believe, were that you heard "compelling testimonies" during this study. Why weren't you listening prior to that? It has been eight years since the last time we studied this.

Ms. Graham, can you tell us why you're listening now when you haven't been previously?

Kathy Graham: We're diligently working to engage with the fishing industry and to hear feedback and collect information from it on site design, because that moment is the most critical for genuinely understanding the proposed conservation measures and how they may create or generate an economic impact. That dialogue is the opportunity for us—

Mel Arnold: I'll stop you there, because that leads to my next question, which is for Mr. Gilchrist.

You said that you identify objectives and present those objectives to see if they're workable. When we heard from representatives who were involved in the northern shelf bioregion consultations, we heard that after the initial objectives were provided, the industry came back with proposals that would have reduced the financial and socio-economic impacts and still met the conservation objectives, and the second version came back even worse.

How are Canadians and harvesters whose livelihoods are so dependent on this supposed to believe you or this government?

Brett Gilchrist: There are multiple examples of protected areas where boundaries were actually modified—

Mel Arnold: I'm talking about the northern shelf bioregion process.

Brett Gilchrist: I would ask a colleague to speak to that.

Kathy Graham: Anna Classen is online and can speak to that.

Anna Classen: I note that independent assessments were undertaken using a draft network plan that was subsequently revised and incorrectly assumed a full closure of 30% of the northern shelf bioregion. A final network design is significantly different from a draft design, and full implementation of the network will not result in a full closure of sites to fishing.

Where risk from fishing is not present or has been addressed through fisheries management measures, fisheries will continue, and the concerns about extensive losses would not be realized—

• (1735)

Mel Arnold: Why hasn't this been clearly communicated to the harvesters who have been here and testified at this committee?

Anna Classen: We are actively engaging with harvesters. Since March 2024, we've undertaken workshop planning with a small group of industry representatives. We've done some in-depth analysis and workshops on data needs that estimate baseline input and on identifying later steps. That includes, between May and June, meetings on groundfish, shellfish by trap and trawl, shellfish by dive, salmon, herring and tuna. We—

Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move that we again send a request to the minister to appear on this study. What we're hearing in testimony from harvesters and department officials is very contradictory. The minister is the one who should be here to answer why we're being stonewalled and why harvesters are being stonewalled.

I'd like to move that we resend another request for the minister to appear at this committee for this study.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, just so I understand you correctly, are you hoping to move a motion?

Is there agreement in the room? Does somebody want to weigh in on this?

Mr. Cormier.

Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, the minister has come to this committee probably four times, or maybe more. She will come again. That's my understanding.

I don't mind resending what Mr. Arnold wants to send back to invite the minister, but the minister was here many times, and she will come back. If Mr. Arnold wants the committee to send back the invitation, I think we can agree with that for sure.

The Chair: I see Mr. Connors on the same motion.

Would you like to say something?

Paul Connors: When was our last request sent? Wasn't that sent at our last meeting? Did they have time to reply to it?

The Chair: The last request was sent on Monday.

Paul Connors: They never had a chance to reply to it, and we're sending another request two days later.

Mel Arnold: I'd like to interject to say that you said the minister would not respond or would not appear.

The Chair: I'll turn to Mr. Klassen next.

Ernie Klassen: Mr. Arnold, I don't believe Mr. Weiler said that she was not going to be coming. She has not given us a definitive answer yet as to when she would be able to come. She has said that

she will come back to this committee—perhaps not in the next week or two—but we haven't received a firm commitment for when she'll be here.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mel Arnold: Would the parliamentary secretary please clarify whether the minister indicated that she would simply come back to the committee at some point in the future or she would come back to appear on this study?

Ernie Klassen: The minister has not committed to coming back for this study, but she has also not said that she would not come back for this study.

The Chair: On the same motion, I have Mr. Small.

Clifford Small: I think it's very important for the minister to appear at this committee on this study, because we're looking at areas in Newfoundland and Labrador where there are going to be brand new marine protected areas. There are many proposals, including shutting down the area around the Virgin Rocks.

A CBC article yesterday talked about snow crab stocks reaching “historic lows” by 2028. There are efforts in play to shut down the Virgin Rocks, historically the most productive cod-fishing area in the world. In a few years' time, the fishermen from 3L, whom she represents, are going to want to fish cod on the Virgin Rocks. She needs to come here and answer to the committee and to stakeholders. She's had long enough to confirm whether or not she's going to come, Mr. Chair.

• (1740)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

Go ahead, Mr. Morrissey.

Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): I don't have a problem with resending, but let's call out the Conservative opposition for the antics they're playing here. I've been on this committee for years. Ministers have been here on a regular basis. Compare that to the record of the former Conservative government, when a fisheries minister rarely appeared before this committee. In fact, my understanding is that it was maybe two to three times over 10 years.

The theatrics of what's going on here today with resending this to the minister.... All ministers have been very co-operative with this committee and have appeared here numerous times on a host of issues. If it's the wish of the opposition to send a new note after two days, then so be it. The committee can choose that, and we can move on to the study we're well into.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

It sounds like there's agreement on that.

Mr. Arnold, I saw you had your hand up, before we put this, hopefully, to bed.

Mel Arnold: I'd like to quickly add that the first invitation was back on November 12, 2025—months ago.

Robert Morrissey: The minister has been here since then. The minister has been here since we've been back in the new year.

Mel Arnold: The minister was here on Bill C-15, and she could not speak a word to it when she was here because she said the contract was under negotiation. She came for an hour and wasted our time saying that she couldn't speak to it because it was confidential. It was a full hour of those kinds of responses from her and the department.

The Chair: I have Mr. Morrissey and Mr. Connors. It sounds like we're in agreement on the way forward, so I would like to continue with the witnesses we have here today.

Given that Mr. Connors has his hand up, I want to quickly address that. We can send an email invitation, and then we can continue with the matter at hand.

Paul Connors: I have no problem with sending the letter again, but I don't think this study was started in November. On what date was this study started?

The Chair: I think it was the second meeting we had in January, so it was the last week of January. I don't have the date in front of me.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Okay, we will send an invitation to the minister.

With that, we'll move on to our next questioner.

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

Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

The thing that frustrates me with the current study is the misinformation that continually gets bandied around about marine protected areas. What I find disturbing is the rhetoric that comes from those in the official opposition, who are climate change deniers and parrot the talking points coming from the U.S., which wants to undermine the whole environmental agenda of the government to the detriment of oceans and fisheries, not only there but in Canada as well.

Not on one occasion did I hear a question related to what environmental changes we are seeing in our oceans that are negatively impacting fishers. This is the reality.

I would like Ms. Graham to speak to that briefly, because we've heard some comments here about stock quota reductions on crab in one area. I've read extensively on that, and one factor that's affecting the biomass there is the warming oceans. They're affecting the crab biomass on the Atlantic coast and in certain Atlantic fisheries with warming water. It's something we have to address, or there will be no species for any fishers to participate in.

Could somebody comment on that to this committee? What aspects of protecting parts of the oceans are for the future benefit of today's fishers and future generations?

This can go to Ms. Macadam, and you can give it to whoever you want.

• (1745)

Lori Macadam (Director, National Marine Conservation Areas Establishment, Parks Canada Agency): At Parks Canada, we have a dual mandate to protect conservation areas for conservation and for cultural heritage. At the sites that have been operating for a number of years, like the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park, the measures we've put in place have directly impacted and have had positive impacts on beluga populations, with mothers having safer spots to go to breed and care for those calves. We've also seen some eelgrass come back in the Gwaii Haanas national marine conservation area.

The work we've been doing at Parks Canada is building off the sites we already have, but we're also trying to work on additional sites to try to preserve and really protect those areas for future generations. Part of our mandate is to protect them for the education and enjoyment of Canadians, both now and for future generations.

Robert Morrissey: Recently, an NMCA was being discussed on the southern coast of Newfoundland, which was cancelled. I received lots of inquiries from a lot of angry community people there who put a lot of work into advocating for that particular protected area. A lot of misinformation was being used to undermine the process going into that area.

What was the intent in that area? It was my understanding that fisheries would not be impacted.

Lori Macadam: That's a great question.

Approximately 20 years ago, the town of Burgeo approached Parks Canada to look at the possibility of creating a national marine conservation area outside the town.

Robert Morrissey: Well, it came from the community, not from the Government of Canada.

Lori Macadam: It came from the town of Burgeo. It was their request, and at the request of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we made sure they continued to be part of the process throughout.

The cultural heritage in that area, as you know, has a long history of wonderful Newfoundland and Labrador culture. The idea was to have conservation, but also to minimize the impact on the fishermen. Unprecedented, we went out early and told the fishermen exactly where we were thinking they wouldn't be able to fish. It was at only 5% of the area. We were willing to continue having conversations with the FFAW to look at whether that 5% would work or not. We reached out over 30 times to have meetings with the FFAW to discuss that over an 18-month period, and unfortunately, only half of the emails were responded to. They only chose to meet with us three times, so we couldn't get feedback.

The idea behind it was to look at preserving the corals and sponges—which is one thing we've heard needs to be conserved here—but also to minimize the impacts on the fishery.

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

That completes our third round. We may have enough time to get through a fourth round.

We're going to start it with Mr. Small for five minutes.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The FFAW testified for this study not long ago, expressing grave concerns about the Virgin Rocks area of interest and establishing a marine protected area there. Historically, the Virgin Rocks have been the most productive cod fishing grounds in the world—bar none.

Now we're hearing from DFO that by 2028, snow crab stocks will be at historic lows. It seems that in Newfoundland and Labrador waters, and maybe throughout the rest of Atlantic Canada, we're returning to a proliferation of groundfish being the dominant species, versus crab.

How much consultation have you had on the Virgin Rocks protected area with the FFAW and other groups representing the fishing industry?

I think that question might best be answered by Ms. Neron.

• (1750)

Marie-Eve Neron: We're not involved.

Clifford Small: Which one of your departments is pushing for that protected area?

Kathy Graham: The Newfoundland and Labrador region has been engaging with the fishing industry, my understanding is, with respect to the Virgin Rocks.

Clifford Small: How far along is that process?

Kathy Graham: I think it was just exploratory in terms of engaging with the fishing industry to try to understand if there was an opportunity to establish some protection.

Clifford Small: In the history of establishing protected areas, do you know how many areas that started out as an area of interest stopped right there and didn't become a protected area? What's the track record?

Kathy Graham: I wouldn't be able to say.

Clifford Small: I have only heard of two and they were with Parks Canada: one in Notre Dame Bay and one in the south coast fjords. Other than that, everything I've ever seen as an area of interest went all the way through. The fishing industry is obviously concerned for that reason given what's going to be happening around the Virgin Rocks.

How much more meaningful consultation with the fishing industry of Newfoundland and Labrador will you have on the Virgin Rocks AOI?

Kathy Graham: My understanding from colleagues who work in the region is that they are continuing to engage with the fishing industry to determine whether there is a path forward. I wouldn't be able to speak to the most recent conversations they would have had.

I'd be able to refer back to them and get some information for the committee.

Clifford Small: Thank you.

I'm going to turn the remainder of my time over to Mr. Gunn.

Aaron Gunn: Ms. Graham, how is the success or failure of the MPA network being measured by the government? Are there specific objectives, or is it simply about closing a certain number of areas?

Kathy Graham: In terms of advancing conservation targets in the northern shelf bioregion, the objective is not to close fishing at all. It's about trying to understand what the conservation objectives are and what activities are posing the greatest risk.

Aaron Gunn: I don't think anybody would argue that it's the objective. I think the point is that it's a necessary consequence of preserving spatial closures.

Do you think it's reasonable that it should take longer to inform fishermen and coastal communities of what areas are being closed and what gear types are being prohibited than it took Canada to win the Second World War? Do you think that's a reasonable time frame?

Kathy Graham: I think the northern shelf bioregion, with the complexity, the partnerships and all the work that's happened to establish the network action plan, demonstrates the willingness of people to come together to chart a path forward.

Aaron Gunn: Then the length is evidence that a good job is being done—how long it's taken. Is that fair?

Kathy Graham: That would be my assessment in terms of wanting to make sure that voices are heard and that engagement is taking place.

Aaron Gunn: The logic is that the longer it takes going into the future and the longer it takes to get any certainty, the better the job the department is doing.

Kathy Graham: No, I think it's about meaningful consultation—to hear back from the fishing industry and sort out where boundaries make sense and how we can still achieve the conservation objectives.

Aaron Gunn: Do you appreciate, though, the uncertainty that a lack of answers can create in the industry and how detrimental uncertainty can be to investment and the people trying to plan out their lives?

Kathy Graham: That is information and feedback that I have heard from the fishing industry, yes.

Aaron Gunn: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

[*Translation*]

Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to use my time to table a notice of motion. I just sent it to the clerk for distribution to committee members.

The notice of motion reads as follows:

That,

(a) the committee recognize that:

(i) Atlantic salmon populations are experiencing a critical and ongoing decline in several rivers in New Brunswick, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador,

(ii) Atlantic salmon is an iconic species essential to the balance of aquatic ecosystems and to the economic, cultural, and social vitality of many coastal and Indigenous communities,

(iii) despite conservation efforts undertaken in recent years, salmon returns remain at historically low levels,

(iv) the rapid and unprecedented growth of the striped bass population in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, particularly in the Miramichi River, has resulted in increased predation pressure on smolts and juvenile salmon, raising serious concerns about the survival of Atlantic salmon in adjacent rivers,

(v) predation by seal populations in eastern Canada is also a concerning factor affecting the survival of Atlantic salmon, both in estuarine environments and at sea,

(vi) without timely and appropriate management measures regarding predator populations, this could compromise efforts to restore Atlantic salmon stocks;

(b) pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake an urgent study of no more than four meetings on the decline of Atlantic salmon, with particular consideration given to the impact of the current striped bass population in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and predation by seals, the available scientific data, existing management measures, and concrete options that could be implemented rapidly to restore Atlantic salmon populations;

(c) as part of this study, the committee invite to appear representatives from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, salmon conservation organizations, outfitting operators, recreational fishing guides, affected Indigenous communities, and independent scientists specializing in population dynamics;

(d) the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and

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

Again, this is a notice of motion. We can discuss it in our next meetings.

• (1755)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

All committee members will receive the motion by email. Only the notice of motion has been given. Members will have to wait two days before moving the motion and discussing it.

Mr. Cormier, you still have the floor.

[English]

Serge Cormier: Okay. How much time do I have?

[Translation]

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Serge Cormier: That's fine.

I will conclude by thanking the witnesses for listening today. I'm glad to know that they listened to the testimony of the various groups that appeared before the committee and were concerned about the news regarding these proposed marine protected areas. I think the message is to listen more attentively. That's what we want on our end, and that's what my colleagues have said.

As has just been said, there needs to be a consultation process that's a bit more open and transparent. It's important to make sure that fishers, especially, and people who are involved in the industry and depend on fisheries understand how the government wants to use these marine protected areas. They have to understand that it doesn't want to take away their jobs and harm their quality of life. Fisheries are in the DNA of our communities. In my riding, regardless of whether you're a fisher, everyone is connected to fishing in one way or another. We all have a cousin, an uncle, a father, an aunt or another family member who makes a living from fishing and has worked in fishing practically their entire lives. My father was a fisherman all his life. I understand that we want to protect certain fish stocks, which is fine, but at the same time, we also have to protect these people's livelihoods. I hope that we will be very attentive to their concerns in the upcoming meetings with them. We must also ensure that they fully participate in the designation and process of these marine protected areas.

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

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

Mario Simard: That's too generous, thank you.

I have a question for the witnesses.

I don't know if you're aware of the situation that occurred here with a witness, Mr. Lushington, who was pressured by the parliamentary affairs unit of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. He was supposed to come testify here, and he was basically told that he'd better watch what he says and show loyalty because his testimony could jeopardize his livelihood and his way of paying his bills.

I assume these aren't practices that you encourage; at least I hope not.

For your part, are you under any forms of pressure or being given any instructions on how to frame your testimony and answers? Is this a customary practice of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans?

• (1800)

Kathy Graham: No, not at all.

Mario Simard: Are you aware of this situation?

Kathy Graham: I'm aware of what has been reported in the media.

Mario Simard: Okay.

Earlier, I talked to you about your consultation process and said that you probably had a framework. If you have any information on how fishers can be included in the pool of people you'd like to consult to obtain the information you're seeking, we would appreciate it if you could table that with the committee. It could advance the committee's study. Above all, it could be valuable for members directly connected to fishers to help them better understand the consultation process.

Kathy Graham: We'd be happy to do that.

Mario Simard: That's it from me, Mr. Chair.

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

[English]

Next we have Mr. Arnold for five minutes or less.

Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to bring the committee, and especially our witnesses, back to the three points that were in the motion to do this study, particularly the second and third parts of the motion. The second part was about studying “the government’s methods for measuring whether conservation objectives and reasons for establishing protected areas are achieved”, and part (C) was, “whether the government’s reasons and objectives for establishing marine and coastal protection are achieved”. I don’t think we’ve heard that yet. I was hoping we would today.

Could I ask you to submit to this committee how the government plans to measure “whether conservation objectives and reasons for establishing protected areas are achieved”? How are you going to measure that for each of the areas you’re proposing? Have any of the objectives already set out for MPAs or conservation areas been achieved?

Kathy Graham: Yes, I’m happy to provide that information.

Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I’d like to see that before we finish this study. I think it’s very important. Those were key components when I crafted this study’s motion. I believe they are very important as we and the government move forward with our recommendations.

I want to move on to a slightly different topic now: southern resident killer whale management zones on the west coast.

There have been proposals floated out there by DFO to severely restrict access to chinook fisheries, especially off the southwest coast of Vancouver Island, to the point where it would eliminate the livelihoods of entire communities because of the recreational fishing opportunities that happen around those areas. Instead of static closures that would close off areas for extended periods of time and space, has the department looked at more dynamic closures, like the ones being used in some of the whale protection areas on the east coast?

Kathy Graham: I will turn to my colleague Anna Classen.

Anna Classen: We are actively engaging on potential measures to support SRKW, including as it relates to chinook fisheries.

On whether we’ve considered static closures, when I think about dynamic closures, I’m thinking primarily in terms of vessel traffic. In terms of fishery management measures, we do consider those based on time and location.

Mel Arnold: That’s a good point: You consider time and location.

In the case of the Pender bluffs closure, it’s closed year-round to both fishing and boating. From studies we’ve seen, the whales are only there for a few days out of the year, or at most a couple of weeks, yet the area is completely closed. Can you explain why a dynamic closure for an area like that would not be usable? Why haven’t you used that?

• (1805)

Anna Classen: I’m not familiar with the Pender bluffs closure in particular. I might ask my colleague Brett if he can speak to that. If not, we can certainly follow up with that information.

Brett Gilchrist: We can follow up with that information.

We look at the management measures for southern resident killer whales, just as we do for North Atlantic right whales, on an annual basis and determine if there are options to adjust those management measures accordingly. My assumption is that the closure is in place because of the detected presence of SRKW and other species at the time, but perhaps we can follow up with confirmation of that.

Mel Arnold: From what we’ve seen and heard, they are there for only a few days of the year, yet it’s a year-long closure.

These closures and proposed closures off the west coast have entire communities concerned for their future. Are they going to be listened to and accommodated somehow, to make sure that their livelihoods are maintained? We have guide outfitters and have lodges that need to book clients now, today. There are people who need to book their holidays today, yet they’re being threatened with a closure that could happen at any time through the summer season. They may only get part of a season and be totally shut down.

A lodge or guide outfitter cannot viably exist under those conditions. Will they be listened to?

Kathy Graham: In terms of the path forward, I know my colleague Anna Classen has been working really hard with the fishing industry on the west coast, so I’d turn to her to give you a little more information on what’s happening right now.

The Chair: Ms. Classen, can you give a very quick answer, because we are at time? If there’s more, you can provide it in writing.

Anna Classen: I will simply say that we absolutely are interested in understanding and responding to the impacts we’re hearing. We’re actively consulting on these measures and on ways we can reduce impacts.

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

We’re going to finish the round of questioning with Mr. Klassen for five minutes or less.

Ernie Klassen: Thank you very much.

Mr. Millar, my home riding of South Surrey—White Rock and the surrounding region depend on healthy marine ecosystems, including shellfish harvesting and tourism in the Salish Sea. How does Parks Canada balance conservation objectives with the economic sustainability of small-scale fish harvesters and coastal tourism operators in British Columbia?

David Millar: One of the great aspects of national marine conservation areas is that they bring both socio-economic and conservation benefits. As I've mentioned already, it's actually a requirement within a national marine conservation area that we have multiple-use zones where there can be ongoing fisheries and other economic activities. Certainly part of our process is to look at the conservation objectives relative to the activities that are occurring and try to maximize the opportunity for activities that wouldn't compromise the conservation objectives.

A national marine conservation area can also create new economic opportunities for things like tourism, guiding outfitters and all of those things, because they are designed in part to bring people out and to give people the opportunity to visit, learn about and appreciate nature and our oceans.

Ernie Klassen: Earlier you were talking about different ways of... If the industry is either closed down or at least limited, are you also looking at other ways that fish harvesters and families can look at diversifying how they can work within the industry or alter what they're doing, rather than just giving them financial compensation?

David Millar: Again, our intent with these areas is not to close down industries. It's to try to minimize the impacts as much as possible, to avoid areas that are particularly important for industry or to develop management measures that allow the activities to continue so that there is as limited an impact as possible.

In addition to that, they can create new opportunities for folks who want to pursue those opportunities. It could be that, in addition to fishing, you have an opportunity to use your vessel for tourism purposes, if that's appropriate, or to use your knowledge of the area as a guide. I'm not suggesting everyone wants to do that. What I'm saying is that we want to make sure we can continue to have fisheries activities as much as possible and can create new opportunities, whether for folks who currently participate in the fishing industry or for anyone else who wants to benefit from a national marine conservation area.

• (1810)

Ernie Klassen: I have one last question for Ms. Graham.

We were talking about the lack of information, perhaps, or harvesters not getting all the information about where the process is at in identifying these areas. I'm curious. Is there a website that's updated regularly? How do you inform harvesters who may or may not be impacted by what they're hearing, which may or may not be accurate?

Kathy Graham: We've been engaging with the fishing industry and getting advice from them on how we can help them reach more fishers at the wharf so the information can flow more regularly. We understand that a lot of the associations are very taxed. They're engaged on many fronts in the work they do, so we have been engaging with them proactively to seek advice on how we can organize

our information and make it more accessible so that it is easier to reach more fishers.

Ernie Klassen: Thank you.

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

I see that we have a bit of time, so I'm just going to ask a question myself.

One thing that has come up quite a bit in this study is questions about the process of the northern shelf bioregion, and in particular the feedback that has been provided by commercial harvesters. The frustration is that they don't feel their input has been taken into account for the steps forward.

A question I have for folks on the panel here is this: Could DFO give a formal response, maybe with some kind of matrix, on the input they've received from commercial harvesters, and on why that advice is or isn't going to be followed in the final boundaries that are going to be concluded for any potential marine protected areas?

Kathy Graham: Before I turn to my colleague Anna Classen, I'll note that as we move into advancing site establishment—which is the moment when we get clarity around what the actual conservation objective is and what the activities that pose a risk will be—that's the moment that we're able to really take in and understand the potential economic impacts that may exist.

I'll turn it to my colleague Anna Classen to speak with more specificity.

Anna Classen: We are actively working with industry to improve that communication, and I appreciate your suggestion. I think we can absolutely follow up to have some clear dialogue about the specific proposals and where the challenge areas are.

I will note, further to my colleague Kathy Graham's comment, that a big part of the next step will be getting into the very specific elements of the site measures and what the implications might be. At that point, we'll also have a more informed discussion.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes our panel today.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here in person and by video conference. Your testimonies are going to be very helpful for us as we finalize our report and the recommendations that will flow to government and to you.

Before we wrap up, I see that Mr. Gunn has his hand up.

Aaron Gunn: Mr. Chair, I'm obviously new to committee life, being a first-year parliamentarian, but I want to make sure, if it is appropriate to do so, that we congratulate you on passing your private member's bill through second reading.

The Chair: I would say that's appropriate.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you very much for the well wishes. Unfortunately, it won't be coming to this committee, but it will be some important work for the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to look at.

Before we wrap up, I want to mention that for future studies, we will need parties to submit their witness lists by next Wednesday. We will be back on Monday, March 9.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>