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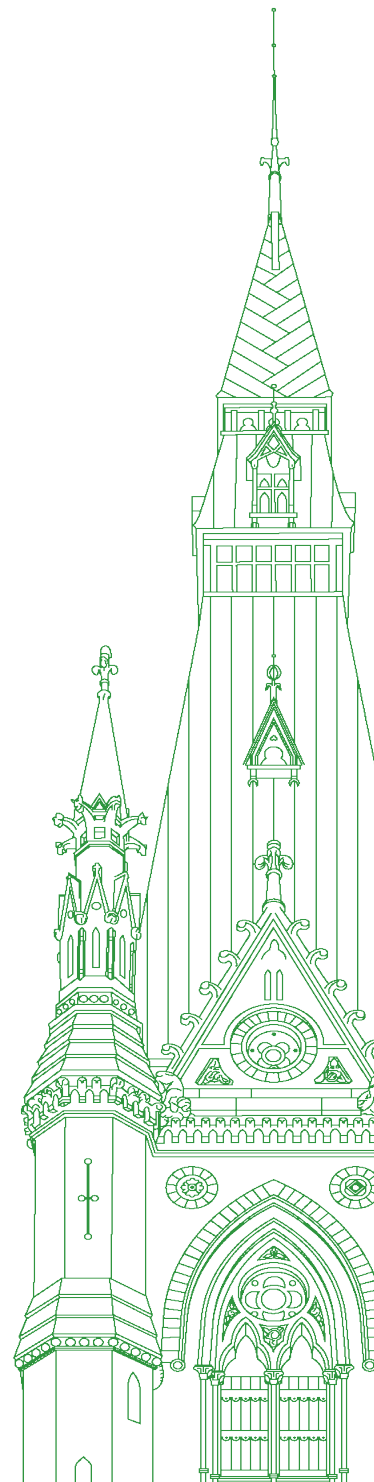
Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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Wednesday, April 15, 2026

Chair: Patrick Weiler



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1610)

[English]

The Chair (Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 31 of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

[English]

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, the committee is meeting to commence its study on the factors determining the opening and closing dates of marine harvesting seasons.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is being held in a hybrid format, in accordance with the rules of procedure. Members may participate in person or via Zoom.

[English]

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

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

I'll make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and the members.

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

[Translation]

Regarding interpretation, those participating in the meeting via Zoom can choose between floor, French or English at the bottom of their screen. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

[English]

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

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

Appearing by video conference, from the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, we have Ian MacPherson, executive director. In person, from the Sport Fishing Institute of BC, we have Owen Bird, executive director.

We're going to begin with opening statements from the witnesses, for five minutes or less, starting with Mr. MacPherson.

Ian MacPherson (Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): Thank you, Chair.

I would once again like to thank the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for inviting the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association to participate in today's session.

Although the topic of season start and end dates may appear to be mundane, the scheduling of this session is both timely and important.

As an organization that represents over 1,250 independent businesses, we are laser-focused on negotiating season dates that maximize the potential of our limited season fisheries.

Along with many other Canadians across Canada, we are experiencing changes in climate and seasons. These changes can have direct impacts on fishing incomes, so we need to have better mechanisms in place to assess and evaluate these changes, as well as to look at date shifts that make environmental and economic sense.

There is an ever-increasing discussion taking place around season start dates. The challenge is to incorporate the best options but also keep financial impacts in mind.

For example, a number of Nova Scotia lobster fishing areas have requested season start dates that are significantly earlier than historical season dates. The shifting of a season start by up to two weeks or more can have significant impacts on markets when these changes overlap existing seasons. We are not advocating for season start dates that cannot change; rather, we are advocating for a holistic approach to be used to assess how existing markets will be impacted if significant quantities of product are landed at a different time of the year.

History tells us that if supply outstrips demand, prices can be impacted, and lower-value products are produced in these situations. Date changes must be backed up by equal parts of current science, respect and inclusion of harvester knowledge and observations, documented votes and consideration of global markets.

Today, we would also like to address the lack of a consistent process for votes related to resource management. It is important that a fair and consistent process be created. The protocol the PEIFA applies ensures that all harvesters have the option to participate in a vote, using a ballot system that prevents duplicate votes and a counting protocol that involves a properly scrutinized count and results sharing. We feel that this is an area of increasing importance and that it is time for a consistent process to be put in place for all jurisdictions and fishing organizations.

Today, we have addressed our concerns around season dates and the voting process for such changes. We would also like to address our concerns around extended seasons or significantly increased activity in current seasons.

The PEIFA is concerned about the approximately 100 lobster licences that have been added in the Gaspé region to the spring fishery. This defies the parameters of a pilot project, and we declare that a holistic assessment approach is required to fully assess the impacts on the overall fishery in other seasons.

We suggest that all harvesters participate in the long-established and approved Department of Fisheries and Oceans fishing seasons.

With a collective focus on the next generation of fishers, it is our responsibility that healthy stocks be maintained and depleted stocks be allowed to be rebuilt. This will take an overarching approach and the commitment of all harvesters.

In summary, we know that the only constant we can count on is change. We also know we are in a period of unpredictable climate and economic uncertainty. The challenge is how we manage these changes so that one fishery does not benefit at the expense of others. We also need to come up with a better process to document votes on important decisions. Finally, all harvesters are stewards of the water for our next generations. We must ensure any season shifts are properly researched, discussed, voted on and honoured.

This concludes our committee presentation, and I welcome any questions the committee members may have.

Thank you, Chair.

● (1615)

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

With that, we're now going to hear from Mr. Bird for five minutes or less.

Owen Bird (Executive Director, Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee once again.

My name is Owen Bird. I'm here representing the Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia.

I've spent my entire personal and professional life in and around the recreational fishery on the B.C. coast: growing up and continuing as a participant with friends and family, as a fishing guide and as a manager of service provider operations. Now I'm the executive director of the SFI, an organization established in 1980 that's committed to the protection, enhancement and promotion of sustainable recreational fisheries, primarily along the B.C. coast.

With this background, I appreciate the committee's decision to examine the factors influencing the DFO's decisions on opening and closing harvest seasons, as well as the opportunity to note the consequences that delays or anticipated changes in those decisions have on participants' livelihoods and the broader economy.

This study is relevant to all fisheries, though the consequences of opening and closing dates vary significantly from one sector to another. In the commercial fisheries, success is measured by efficiency, the ability to harvest quota and the value generated. In the recreational fishery, the entire sector depends on one thing: a predictable, reliable opportunity over a 12-month season. It is this opportunity, not the volume of fish caught or harvested, that attracts and drives participation, supports business operations and planning, and underpins the cultural, social and economic fabric of coastal communities.

This distinction underlies why it is essential to consider the unique needs of each fishery. A quota or share-based management approach for the recreational fishery would be devastating. It would require time-sensitive catch accounting and introduce a level of instability and variability that would undermine the benefits the public fishery provides. Such an approach would create uncertainty around opening and closing dates, removing the stability that is essential for the recreational sector to function.

The recreational salmon fishery is the most valuable fishery in British Columbia and one of the most valuable in Canada. Its strength comes from the participation of roughly 650,000 licence-holders fishing in both fresh water and tidal waters, who generate an economic ecosystem built on long, predictable seasons and a reasonable expectation of opportunity.

The public fishery directly supports more than 9,100 jobs, contributes nearly \$1.3 billion annually to British Columbia's economy, sustains small businesses and attracts visitors from around the world. Beyond the economic importance, B.C.'s public fishery plays a cultural and social role, connecting people and the community to the ocean and fostering the stewardship of marine resources. Recreational fisheries and fishery tourism depend on healthy ecosystems and strongly support conservation measures that are effective, science-based and implemented in ways that are reliable and sustainable for all.

The socio-economic power of the public fishery and recreational fishing tourism comes from the ability to plan. A predictable opportunity, established with full seasons, allows small coastal communities to prepare for visitors and business, hire staff and maintain essential marine and boating infrastructure, such as marinas, marine sales, boatyards, fuel docks and tackle shops. These and other local businesses and services rely on advanced bookings, confidence that seasons will stay open as expected and assurances that any in-season closures will occur only for conservation reasons. When decisions are delayed or communication is inconsistent, the impacts ripple immediately throughout local economies.

Decades of recreational catch data give managers the ability to reliably estimate and adjust the harvest well in advance. With small, adaptable limits and selective fishing tools, the recreational sector consistently accounts for only a modest share of B.C.'s total salmon harvest. This predictability should continue to guide management decisions and inform how and when public fishing opportunities are communicated.

While conservation objectives are essential and widely supported, the uncertainty and inconsistent communication surrounding opening and closing decisions create significant concern and anxiety for those who depend on or wish to access marine resources. Delays in decision-making do not just inconvenience business; they jeopardize livelihoods. They undermine business and tourism planning and weaken the economic stability of coastal communities.

• (1620)

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. I look forward to your questions.

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

This concludes our opening statements. We're going to start the first round of questions, the six-minute round, with Mr. Arnold.

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

Thank you to both witnesses for your testimony today.

I want to start with Mr. Bird, please. In your experience as a fishing guide—you mentioned that you've done this for a number of years—how far ahead were clients booking vacation time from their workplace, and how far ahead were they typically planning trips?

Owen Bird: Thanks for the question, Mel.

Not only was I a fishing guide, but I was also involved in managing service provider resorts, including sales. I can tell you with a great deal of confidence, both from a professional perspective and from my personal perspective, that trips are often booked as many as two or three years in advance. Depending on the fishing outing, they are looking down the road and expect that this is something they will be able to do.

The variety of opportunities in British Columbia means that trips can sometimes be quite costly, so people book a long time in advance. They want to have confidence in their being able to enjoy the trip.

Mel Arnold: This covers the people who are purchasing these trips and so on. Moving to the people who are selling the trips or the gear that's required—a marina buying small boats to take clients out, making sure they have enough guides on staff or making sure that the tackle shops have the gear they need—how far in advance do they have to make those arrangements for staffing, equipment and sales items?

Owen Bird: In many ways, planning for the next typical tourism season, which extends from May to September, begins the moment the season they are in is completed. They are beginning to look at supply arrangements, staff, advertising, bookings and all of those things, so it happens well in advance.

Mel Arnold: What would be the impact if there wasn't some certainty that the seasons would run for times similar to those of the previous year or years?

Owen Bird: I've heard this a number of times in recent days. Imagine a family planning a trip to Disneyland, and when they went ahead and made their booking six months in advance, the advice was, "We're fairly sure we'll be open, but there's a quota on the number of visitors who come to California." This would not sit well with anybody, and this is a very similar situation.

• (1625)

Mel Arnold: What would clients do if there was another location with more certainty?

Owen Bird: That is precisely it. They would very likely look elsewhere for stability and reliability in where they could plan their trip and spend their money.

Mel Arnold: Can you give me any information about your experience with what happened last year on the west coast? We had a superabundant return of sockeye salmon that was far over early expectations.

Was there any additional opportunity issued, or were there delays in getting the opportunity available?

Owen Bird: This is a fine example of the impacts and challenges of unclear decisions being made about fishery openings. As you said, there was a tremendous abundance of sockeye salmon and a great interest for the recreational fishery to have an opportunity to catch it. However, because of a variety of issues that were not clear to the public, that opening was not communicated in any kind of timely fashion to allow people to readily take advantage of it or consider making a trip to come and take advantage of what is not a regular occurrence.

Mel Arnold: Has the Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia estimated the economic opportunity that may have been lost?

Owen Bird: It has not been done on the sockeye fishery specifically. It's possible that one of the speakers a bit later will have some more information on that, but we don't have information on it specifically.

As I mentioned in my remarks, it's a \$1.3-billion industry. This is spending that occurs to get to the opportunity. It's not based on the value of the fish but on the opportunity. Some of the \$1.3 billion was lost because there was not an opportunity to fish sockeye. Particularly because it's in the Lower Mainland, it's very accessible.

With this not being communicated well, money was not spent and it wasn't realized.

Mel Arnold: Has this been a trend of greater uncertainty over any length of time?

Owen Bird: Yes. It's challenging, because we're involved in seeing how these decisions come to pass, but from a public perspective....

For example, uncertainty about killer whale regulations—which have been talked about but not identified in full—has a very negative effect, because people hear tidbits of information. They think there will be regulations enforced because of killer whales. What does that mean? In effect, people will ask, “Am I going to be able to fish if I come in August, because I've heard this stuff about killer whales?”

The uncertainty that goes along with this is very damaging.

Mel Arnold: Thank you.

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

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

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

My question will be for Mr. MacPherson from the east coast. Welcome back to the committee.

In your opening statement, you referenced the scheduling of seasons and the changing climate as having an impact. I believe we're seeing that this spring, when the lobster season will be scheduled to open almost a week earlier. Is that correct?

Ian MacPherson: Compared to some traditional dates, yes.

Robert Morrissey: Is lobster the only species we're seeing that could be impacted by changing water temperatures and changing climate affecting the opening and closing dates in the area you represent?

Ian MacPherson: Certainly, we've just seen snow crab being delayed this year. We've had more of a typical ice coverage than in the past few years.

It's an excellent point. It can go both ways. It can delay the start or, depending on the conditions, potentially precipitate an earlier opening. Those are the big ones that we deal with as an association.

Robert Morrissey: Could you elaborate a bit more on your perspective—you've been in this industry a long time—from an advocacy role as the executive director of the PEIFA? What priorities and, more importantly, what negative impacts should be avoided when the department moves to change the season dates for opening and closing? Could you expand on this a bit?

• (1630)

Ian MacPherson: As I mentioned in my statement, one of our concerns would be.... One thing I neglected to mention is the importance, at least in Prince Edward Island, of pre-season dredging.

This is also predicated on ice and when the tenders are finalized and equipment is in place.

We have to be very careful about a season being delayed at the start, and then another season starting in another area significantly sooner, because this could create a situation in which a lot of product hits the market at one time. We know from past experiences that the plants make every effort to handle the capacity that comes through the door, but this can also create issues with some of our production plants.

Robert Morrissey: Through you, Chair, to Mr. MacPherson again, we often look at the impact of season dates as when the fisher gets on the water or leaves the water, but to focus more on the point you last raised about the necessity of fully understanding the impact on the marketplace of moving dates around for certain species, could you explain to the committee why this should be top of mind?

Ian MacPherson: It's supply and demand. Although a lot of supply agreements are negotiated prior to the season, delivery dates are spread out. I'm not a direct representative, of course, of the production in the processors' association, but we work very closely with them and part of this is trying to spread out workloads, keep costs in line and do those types of things.

Robert Morrissey: It is important for everybody to be aware that the efficiency of those processing plants directly impacts the price paid to fishers. Am I correct on that?

Ian MacPherson: Yes. In the past, this has not worked in our favour when too much product hit the market at the same time.

Robert Morrissey: There's another point in reference to your opening statement. You referenced a consistent process in determining the opening and closing dates. Could you elaborate a bit more on when this may not have worked well or what practices do work well?

Ian MacPherson: Well, two of our three regions border on other provinces, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and we have had scenarios in the past when there are votes conducted on what a date should be and there's not really a structured process. We have a very rigorous one at the PEIFA. We think this should be extended to other areas in that it's just like a vote for our politicians. There's a process. Everyone follows the same process. The results are documented, and the results are shared.

A concern is that sometimes you meet fishers from another area, and they didn't have the opportunity to vote, they weren't aware of the vote or it was just a series of phone calls. We feel these are very important issues. They impact a lot of people. There should be a rigorous process in place when a vote is required.

Robert Morrissey: This is my last question in my time left, Mr. MacPherson. Do you feel it is extremely important for the department to verify that every fisher who is impacted by a date change or the contemplation of one has the ability to express their own point of view?

Ian MacPherson: That's correct, yes. We think that votes are the best way, and they allow everyone to have a voice, but at the end of the day, it truly goes in the direction of the majority.

One other quick point I want to make, Mr. Morrissey, is that sometimes, if there's a lot of product in the marketplace, the processors will pivot to a product they can process more quickly, which tends to be a lower-value product in the marketplace. We don't want to see those types of scenarios either.

Thank you.

• (1635)

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

[Translation]

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

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

Good morning, everyone.

I thank the witnesses for joining us.

Mr. MacPherson, my first questions are for you. Can you hear me clearly?

[English]

Ian MacPherson: Yes, I can.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: You said that the established process for deciding when to open and close the zones lacked consistency, that it wasn't reliable.

What makes you say that?

[English]

Ian MacPherson: Well, it is relevant to the conditions of this particular area. Some fisheries try to have predetermined dates long before their season opens. I will speak to the spring lobster season on Prince Edward Island.

We have a lot of dialogue prior to the season to get input from people, whether they're ready, what the ice conditions are in their particular ports and that kind of thing, but many times—and we saw it this year—we have one region that wants to go quite a bit earlier. This year we had another region, 26A, that wanted to go with a more traditional date. DFO made the decision, which they should be making, but there is very little dialogue between the two areas even though they're fishing the same area.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: If I understand correctly, you're referring to two zones on Prince Edward Island.

Is that correct?

[English]

Ian MacPherson: We have three, actually, but two of the three zones border either on Nova Scotia or New Brunswick.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: When Fisheries and Oceans Canada makes a decision, like in this instance, do they explain to you the reasons behind that decision?

[English]

Ian MacPherson: In this particular case, there were votes on both sides that supported the differential in dates. DFO landed somewhere in the middle, perhaps a little closer to the traditional date, but a lot of times these decisions come quite late, as people are trying to prepare. In this particular case, I believe the DFO rationale was a concern that, if the season started too late, it would run into July, which we don't want to see, but the conditions didn't prevail for the season to start earlier.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: You say you think Fisheries and Oceans Canada based its decision on a certain reason, but do they explain their decisions to you?

When they announce them to you, do they provide the scientific advice or data on which they based their decision, for example regarding water temperature or the presence of ice?

[English]

Ian MacPherson: Sometimes, yes. I wouldn't say we generally get this type of information extensively. I can appreciate that it's not a precise process.

Part of my concern is that we seem to have submissions of a wider variation of dates. A lot of the time, we may be talking about a day or two one way or the other, which is very close, but in this particular case, we had at least five to seven days' difference in the start date, which is quite significant.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. MacPherson.

Mr. Bird, you speak a lot about uncertainty and inconsistent communication. Let's start with uncertainty. Normally, when these decisions are made, they are based in part on science and the state of the stocks. As a result, there is an element of uncertainty that will remain from year to year.

What improvements do you see as possible to reduce uncertainty as much as possible?

[English]

Owen Bird: There will be uncertainty, because a number of factors are involved in stock health. Climate change and all of those factors play into it.

The way seasons for a recreational fishery will end.... All fisheries on the coast of B.C. involve pre-season planning. This uses estimates and catch data from previous years. In the case of a recreational fishery, there are decades' worth of data that indicate anticipated catch, so it's a difficult question to answer specifically about so many different variables. MP Arnold asked about a sockeye fishery, and what I've just said is not fully applicable to this, because it's quite complex.

The overarching remark is that uncertainty is a part of fisheries planning. This is understood. In terms of setting a season start or finish for the recreational fishery, as I said, there is decades' worth of information about the recreational catch. It's quite reasonable to have an expectation of what the opportunity will be. It's what allows people to have confidence to book way in advance, because they know there will be an opening, in some regard.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Right now—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I must interrupt, as your time is up.

[English]

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

Aaron Gunn (North Island—Powell River, CPC): Mr. Bird, the first question is for you.

I know you've been talking about this already, but can you recap and summarize how uncertainty surrounding opening and closing dates for the recreational fishery.... Do you have an example of how this uncertainty has caused or is currently causing economic damage to the industry and individual recreational fishers?

Owen Bird: I touched on killer whale regulations. Obviously, there's been a great deal of focus and attention on the south coast of B.C. Regulations were put into place there that limited the opportunity to retain salmon. In some cases, there were closures of areas. The information communicated was general in tone. Once the information gets outside the fishing community, not very far at all, questions arise and people are uncertain about what this means. A notice about a particular area being closed, because of killer whales or for whatever reason, tends to have the effect of, "Oh, fishing is closed" or "Salmon fishing is closed in B.C." This has pretty immediate effects.

There is also, right now, a salmon allocation policy review. There are some concerns about proposals that are a part of the review, which suggest that maybe we should change recreational fisheries management to caps, quotas or a shares-based approach, much like a commercial fishery. This would have a devastating effect on certainty. It would alter openings and closings. Still, with the news going out into the world unaccompanied, people are now asking whether they will be able to fish this summer.

Aaron Gunn: In some ways, in the questions being asked in the public discourse, the uncertainty is already driving real-world economic costs to the industry and recreational fishermen.

Owen Bird: It is.

Aaron Gunn: You touched on a couple of different issues. Whether it's the killer whales off the southern coast of Vancouver Island, whether it's the conversation around the salmon allocation policy or whether it's the conversation surrounding the openings of the sockeye Fraser run, do you have confidence that these decisions by the DFO are being driven by science and by evidence, or do you feel they're being driven by politics and ideology?

Owen Bird: I would definitely not want to answer with the same response for each of those. There's a lot of complexity in it, for sure. There are, absolutely and without question, decisions that are being made because of social pressure, because of optics, and based not on science that is directly applicable to fisheries but on the situation at hand. I'm thinking of the killer whale issue. I'm not saying there shouldn't be regulations, but the things that are being implemented are not particularly science-based in some cases, and they are affecting the opportunity and certainty.

• (1645)

Aaron Gunn: Can you maybe walk me through how this would play out? I remember how last summer there was some concern up in the Port Hardy region that, with the weak stock management of the chinook, the opening or closing dates might change. We sent a letter to the minister, and the date didn't change. In communities such as Port Hardy, Campbell River and down in Nanaimo, Victoria and the Sunshine Coast, what are the economic ripple effects of this uncertainty and if the department were to move forward with changing the opening and closing dates of, for example, the chinook fishery?

Owen Bird: They are swift, and they are long-lasting. When there is the threat or risk that a fishery is going to be potentially closed or just won't open, as you said, this news travels. The ripple effect is well beyond guides, charter operators and service operators. It's to the communities themselves, the hoteliers, the grocery stores, the restaurants, you name it, basically. What you're talking about, really, is fishing tourism, and what brings people to those communities from either other parts of B.C. or other parts of the world is directly affected by what they understand their opportunity can be when they come.

Aaron Gunn: Is it safe to say that some of these coastal communities could be devastated by the wrong decision by Fisheries?

The Chair: Give a very brief answer, because we're out of time.

Owen Bird: The short answer is that it could be absolutely devastating, yes.

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

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

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

Welcome to the witnesses.

Mr. MacPherson, you mentioned overlapping seasons and extended seasons. Is there a difference? I know an extended season would be the DFO extending the season, but how could that not happen if a season gets delayed?

Ian MacPherson: Well, there are parameters around this, and I'm referring specifically to lobster, which is our largest fishery on P.E.I. The lobster are going into a moulting cycle in July, so we are up against a biological line. We're trying to prevent going into July at all as much as possible. Therefore, some scientific factors start to enter into extending a season. When things such as the moult happen, we think it's beneficial for all harvesters that no one is out fishing, even a small-scale fishery, during those critical periods.

Paul Connors: Therefore, there is a period at which you can determine when the lobster fishery should be cut off.

Ian MacPherson: This involves science and the conditions of the particular year. However, yes, that's the type of dialogue we probably need to have more of. We are seeing less ice in certain years and warmer water earlier in the year than we have, and it would make sense that there could, in fact, be a moulting cycle earlier than in past years. A lot of contributing factors go into these date decisions.

One thing I want to say is that if we go to the start of the seasons, safety comes first. Anything I'm talking about in the context of a season start is outside of a weather delay in which our members could be at risk.

Thank you.

Paul Connors: Is there anything that you think or the fishers think we could do to alleviate overlapping seasons?

Ian MacPherson: Well, as for the situation in Nova Scotia, in LFAs 27 to 32, I believe a few of them are going to move up this year. I don't have the exact schedule in front of me. There's discussion about wanting to move up permanently, and even more, earlier in the season, that would be taking place in other parts of the gulf. This starts to get into the catches, markets and things like that. However, I would suggest that the spacing of the lobster seasons in Atlantic Canada tends to work fairly well. Ideally, we'll smooth out peaks and valleys and help not only our live trade but also our processed product.

• (1650)

Paul Connors: You mentioned, I think, that this year there was a five- to seven-day delay to the opening. What does that mean to the bottom line for fishers? Do you have any idea? Have you done any calculations on this?

Ian MacPherson: I don't have the exact calculations.

I should qualify that. I meant that one group wanted to go—let's just land on the five days—earlier than normal, and we were looking at a more traditional date, so DFO landed in the middle. However, it was a surprise that our counterparts in Nova Scotia wanted to go quite a bit earlier than they have historically.

Different things are happening in different areas. Typically, in most lobster fisheries, the first two to three weeks are the most...the catches are usually at their highest, which means the most revenues generated and such things. If there tends to be less lobster for people to catch because of the pressure on the fishery, or more product

is coming in and we're not seeing the prices we need to be sustainable, then this creates significant economic impact.

Paul Connors: Mr. Bird, I have a question for you that I want to ask, but I'm running out of time. What variations have you seen in the opening and closing seasons? The length of time, has it been a long period, a short period?

Owen Bird: Well, because it is such a broad coast, there are lots of variations, absolutely. However, one thing that has been consistent, and we hope to see it maintained, is this notion that the idea of opportunity is made clear as far in advance as possible, and reliably too. It means that, sure, there are variations in which, in the south coast, there may be some periods of time when there's non-retention for salmon, or a marked selective fishing opportunity is given a certain window of time. This does change and has evolved, but really, what I mentioned in my introductory remarks is that opportunity is key, and it's been reliable for the fishery.

As a general comment, the B.C. coast is big. There are lots of variations and it's complex, but there is a general feeling of, "Let's maintain what we have, use anticipated catch to determine openings and closings, and carry on." It's worked quite effectively.

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

[Translation]

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

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bird, I'd like to continue our discussion.

You said that, to reduce uncertainty, Fisheries and Oceans Canada could rely more on pre-existing data collected over the past few decades to make estimates that would give everyone at least a rough idea, which would likely be refined later.

Based on the information you have, is the department currently using this historical data, or is that not the case at all?

[English]

Owen Bird: Yes, I believe they are being used. Absolutely, this is helping DFO to determine...as I said, for recreational fishing. Now, this is not suitable for or really applicable to commercial fisheries, so I am speaking specifically about recreational fisheries.

Part of the reason this is an important thing to note is that the catch of the recreational fishery, as I said earlier, is modest compared to that of commercial fisheries. The rate of the harvest is very different. It's very slow. We have daily limits of two per day for a person or a boat. Of course, there are many people participating, but compared to a commercial fishery, which is volume-based and very specific, it's quite a different approach.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: So the department is already using the data.

What I want to know is how we can reduce the uncertainty. Do you have any other suggestions on this?

• (1655)

[English]

Owen Bird: There are circumstances, such as those in the sock-eye fishery and the killer whale regulations, in which we are still waiting for fisheries management in order to know what those are going to be even for this year. Often, the reason given is that there's not enough data or estimate information available.

This will probably always be a problem, but there is no question that it could be improved. Also, there are times when they are clearly mired in political discussion before the management decisions are being made or communicated. It behooves all involved in DFO to try to work better at resolving those issues and recognizing that time is absolutely of the essence for recreational fisheries, more so than the commercial fisheries.

[Translation]

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

[English]

I'm just looking at the time. We're going to have to shorten the time for the last two speakers. We'll have three and a half minutes for Mr. Small and then three and a half minutes for Mr. Klassen.

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

I appreciate the witness testimony that we've heard so far today. It's wonderful. It's great work. Thanks for your contribution to what we're trying to do.

My first question is for Mr. Bird.

Mr. Bird, in the eighties, Canada had a fisheries and fishing industry with an output that was consistently in the top two of all the countries in the world. Now we're closer to number 30 in terms of our fisheries production. Norway is still way up there with a coastline that's one-eighth the length of ours.

Do you think the will exists in Ottawa to properly manage Canadian fisheries, to put us in our rightful place in the world in terms of the economic output from our fishing industry—and our sports fisheries? It's all fishery.

Owen Bird: I'd like to answer that.

As you said, from a recreational fishing perspective, you can absolutely talk about the eighties. Through the eighties and up to the nineties, the percentage of fish harvested by the recreational fishery

in B.C.—I'll talk about salmon—was 4%. All the rest of it was commercially harvested, yet the recreational fishery, at its 4%, if you check for inflation, was still providing these kinds of social, cultural and economic benefits.

Some could argue that maybe even more was being contributed to B.C.'s economy then.

I for one would love to see the care and attention given to the recreational fishery to have it optimized and to take best advantage of the fish that are sustainably harvested.

Clifford Small: The fishery you're speaking of has the same economic value as the snow crab fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador, which is the largest snow crab fishery in the world.

It's very important to us to try to get something done at this committee that can have a positive outcome for your people who depend on B.C. sports fisheries.

We can look at the decisions that are coming down. How would you compare the progress in the last 10 years versus the previous 10 years? We don't have a plan out yet for open net-pen transitioning. We're months behind in a lot of cases, so I'm told, with management plans. We're behind the optimum fishing seasons before the management plan comes down. If a government cared, would it be that slow?

Owen Bird: Yes, well, it's a question I can't answer. The decisions made are frustrating, as I said, for the recreational fishery. We have been able to maintain a degree of reliability and predictability, but as times change, it seems as though the decisions are mired in bureaucracy and not made as quickly as they should be or, it appears, could be made.

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

We're going to conclude this panel with Mr. Klassen for three and a half minutes.

• (1700)

Ernie Klassen (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Thanks so much. Thanks to the witnesses.

Further to the question that was put forward by Mr. Small, sometimes when people are waiting for a decision, they wonder when this decision is going to come. In hindsight, have the decisions made been the correct decisions, from your perspective?

Owen Bird: That's one of those questions where there is no one right answer. In some cases, certainly, and it's understood that some questions and some decisions require a considered and careful analysis.

I'll note that we're very pleased to see the announcement with regard to mass marking, which required a lot of analysis.

In regard to how decisions are being made on southern resident killer whales, we are not so pleased. The recreational community has been a very significant part of these discussions. Our view is that the decisions being made and regulations being imposed are not to the benefit to the southern resident killer whales, but are social in nature and are not fulfilling what they are intended to do.

Ernie Klassen: Okay, thank you.

Speaking of the mass marking, our government just announced the move to increase this.

How will this impact sport and recreational fishing and the tourism sector in B.C., from your perspective?

Owen Bird: We hope that it will do so positively and that mass marking will present more opportunity to consider new mark-selective fishing opportunities throughout the south coast, which will add to the opportunities elsewhere on the coast. Yes, that's a really good advancement.

There's an example. It's fantastic that this has come forward, but this has been on the table for somewhere in the neighbourhood of 17 years, and the details have not changed too much.

It's great that it's happened, but it's been too slow.

Ernie Klassen: From your perspective, are there factors that are not being looked at when decisions are made but that should be incorporated into some of the decision-making processes?

Owen Bird: I would say it's more the opposite. Sometimes things are considered that really shouldn't be in the mix of consideration much more than things are being missed, I would say.

Specific examples are challenging. There are some examples of a mark-selective fishery that could occur in Howe Sound and factors that are related but were added after. It seems as though there have been issues conflated at times.

This is very complex, and there are lots of different circumstances, but I don't think things are missed too often other than stakeholder input. This could be significantly improved, not so much for fisheries but for MPAs, for example, in which fisheries are taking place.

The amount of communication with stakeholders and the appreciation for their ability to give input is not clear at all. This could be improved to the betterment of these processes, and there are fisheries examples, too. It would help with people approving of and being confident in the decisions made if they were known to be involved.

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

This concludes our first panel. I want to thank our witnesses for being here in person and online. Your testimonies are going to be incredibly useful as we finalize our report and the recommendations flowing from that.

Thanks again for your contributions.

We are going to briefly suspend while we welcome our next panel.

• (1700)

(Pause)

• (1705)

The Chair: Colleagues, I call this meeting back to order.

I want to make a few comments for the benefit of our new witnesses before we get started.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

[*Translation*]

As for interpretation, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

[*English*]

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

We have from the B.C. Wildlife Federation, Jesse Zeman, the executive director; from the Public Fishery Alliance, we have Dave Brown; and from the Sport Fishing Advisory Board, we have Michael Kelly, tourism operator.

With that, we are going to start with the witnesses' opening statements for five minutes or less, starting with Mr. Zeman.

• (1710)

Jesse Zeman (Executive Director, B.C. Wildlife Federation): Good afternoon.

Today I want to speak about something that sounds technical but has very real consequences for people, communities and conservation—the timing of fisheries decisions, specifically when openings and closures are made, and the cost of getting those decisions wrong.

I'll use the 2025 Fraser River sockeye fishery as a case study. Let's start with the facts. Fraser sockeye returns are made up of four main runs. These are early Stuart, early, summer and late. In 2025 the pre-season forecast for all runs was approximately 2.9 million fish. What actually returned was nine million sockeye, a number more than three times higher than expected. This should have been great news. It was. It represented abundance we hadn't seen in years in real opportunity. However, that opportunity was not realized. Fisheries were strongly constrained by a low-abundance exploitation rate, commonly called the LAER, which was capped at 10% for late-run sockeye.

The escapement plan guiding those decisions was developed collaboratively by DFO and the Fraser Salmon Management Board and documented in the integrated fish management plan. The LAER was not applied across the full range of possible returns even when abundance exceeded the expected returns, as it did in 2025. Sockeye runs mix in time and space. When they do, management must protect the weakest stock. The principle is sound. However, in 2025, even with those constraints, there were clear low-risk fishing opportunities available in which summer fish could have been targeted and late fish could have been avoided.

On August 12, stakeholders, including the B.C. Wildlife Federation, put forward specific proposals that would target summer-run sockeye, minimize impacts on late-run stocks and generate tens of millions of dollars in economic activity. These were measured, evidence-based and aligned with conservation objectives. However, those opportunities were delayed. Despite written engagement, the in-river public fishery did not open until August 22. This is a critical window lost. Every day of delay can represent as much as \$1 million in economic expenditures for this fishery. Sockeye fisheries are highly time-sensitive. As the season progresses, stock composition shifts and opportunities disappear.

At the same time, there were serious concerns about how decisions were being made. A long-serving member of the Fraser River panel, Mike Griswold, resigned after 40 years. He described the approach as unnecessarily restrictive, inconsistent with abundance and not responsive to real-time conditions. He noted that in previous years there would have been flexibility. Concerns were also raised internationally through the Pacific Salmon Commission from the United States.

There were issues with policy interpretation. In our experience, DFO delayed an opening for the public fishery through a misinterpretation of the salmon allocation policy. We were told that commercial and recreational fisheries must open at the same time. Additionally, first nations food, social and ceremonial priority allocation was conflated with a perception of exclusive access in time and space. Those misinterpretations created delay and uncertainty and limited responsible and sustainable fishing opportunities.

What were the outcomes? Out of a return of over nine million fish, approximately 1.39 million fish were harvested. Of these fish, only about 70,000 were harvested by the public fishery, for roughly 5% of the entire harvest, although the public fishery delivers the highest economic value. It is the most selective fishery. It is the only fishery with dedicated funding for fish conservation. Even with a limited opening, the public fishery generated over \$1 million for fish conservation enhancement and restoration and close to \$10 million in economic expenditures. Imagine what could have been achieved with timely decisions.

This brings us back to the core issue that timing is not administrative; timing is economic policy. It is conservation policy, and it directly affects every single British Columbian who cares about salmon. When decisions are delayed, businesses cannot plan, communities lose economic activity, Canadians lose their connection to salmon and conservation loses funding. In 2025 we had abundance but managed as though we had scarcity.

What are the lessons? First, in-season management must be responsive. Second, policy must be applied correctly. Third, decision-making must be transparent and evidence-based. Finally, delays have real costs—real dollars, real jobs and real conservation outcomes.

If we want sustainable fisheries in the future, we need more than good science. We need timely decisions, clear accountability, adherence to policy and a system that can respond to abundance, not just restrict it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Mr. Brown for five minutes or less for opening statements.

• (1715)

Dave Brown (Public Fishery Alliance): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I moved to Whistler in the 1990s, spending 10 years owning and operating Whistler Fishing Guides, building hands-on experience in the British Columbia recreational salmon fisheries. I've served on the Sport Fishing Advisory Board for over 25 years and currently chair the Squamish-Lillooet Sport Fishing Advisory Committee. In 2017, I received a National Recreational Fisheries Award from Dominic LeBlanc. I also volunteer as an avid angler, supporting citizen science.

A central issue I want to raise today is the loss of predictability in fisheries management. A stable recreational salmon fishery relies on certainty of opportunity well in advance of each season. Historically, DFO provided an annual salmon abundance forecast with predicted fishery opportunities before the new year. This allowed Canadian residents, international visitors, guides and angling-related businesses to plan their season, and it contributed to British Columbia's reputation as a premier sport fishing destination.

Today, key stock assessment data is not available until late March or early April, and the integrated fisheries management plan for southern B.C. is often not finalized until June. This makes it extremely difficult to plan operations or run viable guiding businesses, or for families and visitors to plan fishing trips. The result is lost bookings and reduced angling tourism revenue; difficulty for anglers to secure time off work for planned trips; disruptions to supply chains, including marinas, tackle manufacturers, retailers and marine services; reduced licence sales, impacting funding for salmon restoration, enhancement and research; economic loss to individuals, small businesses and families; and risk to the \$1.25 billion in economic activity and the 9,100 jobs that depend on it.

These challenges are compounded by a lack of in-season flexibility. Even when returns exceed expectations, fisheries are not opened if they were not preauthorized. In 2023, more than 1 million chinook returned to the Fraser River, including approximately 625,000 of Thompson River origin. Despite this, no additional recreational opportunities were provided. This had a direct impact on in-river fisheries, affecting both community use and businesses that rely on the recreational fishing. This system is not adapting to real-time abundance.

Since 2019, Vancouver and the Sea to Sky region have faced some of the most restrictive chinook regulations on the B.C. coast. Fisheries have been effectively closed from April 1 to September 1 to protect Fraser River 5(2) chinook. This closure occurs during peak tourism, family vacation periods and key economic windows.

While anglers support conservation for stocks of concern, there is growing frustration that DFO has not opened targeted fisheries in which these stocks are not present in meaningful numbers. DFO's own science research shows that Howe Sound in April and May can support a sustainable fishery of chinook.

The 2024 reference fishery showed that, of 350 adult chinook that were sampled in Howe Sound, not a single fish was of stock of concern. The majority were hatchery fish intended for harvest. DFO's own assessment considers encountering a Fraser River chinook in Howe Sound during this time period to be rare. Despite this, Howe Sound remains closed, and anglers are being denied a sustainable fishery clearly supported by data.

Looking ahead to 2026, additional restrictions are being proposed to address Fraser River 5(2) chinook. These include extending the Vancouver area chinook closure from September 1 to September 11 and reducing the daily retention limit from two fish to one.

The Vancouver area is largely closed from April 1 to September 1 for chinook fishing. Extending this closure removes 11 days of prime fishing opportunity during a period that typically extends into early October. At the same time, retention limits are being reduced despite indications of stronger returns. This approach reflects increasingly fine-scale management decisions that reduce access without corresponding flexibility. These restrictions move beyond conservation and raise concerns about whether the recreational fishery remains viable for the public, guides and the broader tourism sector.

There is also serious concern about potential changes to the salmon allocation policy. If priority access for recreational fishers, particularly for coho and chinook, is reduced, the impacts will be significant. The recreational fishery supports 9,100 direct jobs and \$1.25 billion in economic activity. These impacts extend beyond coastal communities to inland communities along major river systems throughout the province. Further reductions will curtail already limited access; reduce certainty for guides and businesses; impact manufacturers, tourism operators and service providers; and reduce participation in a fishery that supports sustainable use.

There is growing concern that fisheries are being managed to the point that they are no longer viable. We are seeing delayed timelines, limited in-season responsiveness and restrictions applied

when localized data does not support them. At the same time, habitat capacity is being reduced, undermining long-term recovery efforts. Selective fishing technologies, particularly mass marking of hatchery salmon, have not been fully implemented despite being identified as a priority in DFO's 2001 policy for selective fishing in Canada's Pacific region. This limits opportunities to protect stocks of concern while allowing sustainable harvests.

• (1720)

We need a more balanced approach, one that protects vulnerable stocks while allowing access when data supports it. This includes early and more time-predictable planning, maintaining the existing salmon allocation policy, the ability to respond to in-season abundance, decisions grounded in localized data, maintaining fair access for the recreational sector, implementing mass marking of hatchery salmon and advancing selective fishing technologies. Without this balance, we risk losing not just fishing opportunities but the social and economic benefits tied to them across British Columbia.

Thank you very much.

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

Next we are going to Mr. Kelly for five minutes of opening remarks.

Michael Kelly (Member, Sport Fishing Advisory Board): First of all, I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me here today.

My name is Michael Kelly. I'm the current south coast lead for the Sport Fishing Advisory Board. I've travelled here today from a small community on northern Vancouver Island called Port Hardy. Our little town is located near the tip of Vancouver Island and looks directly out on to Queen Charlotte Strait.

I'll give you a bit of my background. I have an academic background in environmental science, specifically in renewable resource management, with a keen interest in fisheries and wildlife biology. I've been a lifelong recreational angler. I was introduced to recreational fishing by my dad when I was young, and I've worked as an offshore fisheries observer employed in the field of catch monitoring on such fisheries as groundfish trawl, longline, salmon troll and gillnet, as well as shrimp beam trawl. My grandfather was a commercial fisherman on Lake Erie, and I worked as a commercial fisherman for the better part of 10 years in both salmon troll and the hook-and-line fisheries targeting bottom fish, such as halibut, black cod, rockfish and other groundfish species.

I currently work in the tourism industry as the owner of a company called Codfather Charters and at Tides and Tales Sport Fishing in Port Hardy. We currently operate five boats in and around the area. The heart of our season is from May through September. We do have work through the other months, but that's the heart of it. We also offer accommodation as part of our charters, as well as utilizing local hotels and restaurants. Between our charter boat operation and our accommodations, we directly employ seven to nine individuals each season, with roughly three to four of them working on and off throughout the winter, maintaining vessels and accommodation facilities.

As a service provider to the public or recreational fishery, pre-planning is extremely important. We need to know when our season will start and finish so that we can commit to all the organizations and individuals who support our business, as well as those we offer our services to—our customers.

I've always viewed the tourism industry as it relates to the public fishery as a bicycle wheel. The supports provided by the many businesses in our community are all spokes in the wheel that help make it go round. What makes recreational fishery so strong from a socio-economic standpoint is that the many spokes include guides, lodges, value-added catch processing facilities, marine mechanics, tackle retailers, restaurants, airlines, shops and stores, to name a few. This is known as the multiplier effect, and the businesses that support and benefit from recreational fishing are vast and widespread; ultimately, they contribute to the substantial employment opportunities our community desperately needs and appreciates.

The need for stable, predictable access and opportunity is vital to the social and economic lifeline that is the public fishery in British Columbia. Visitors need to be confident that fishing opportunities will be available if they choose to plan and book a trip to a coastal community. Individuals need to book time off work, finalize travel plans, including airfares, lodging, etc., and not worry if the season will be open or has the potential to close prematurely, which could cause investment uncertainty.

On the topic of caps and quotas, they are simply not suited to or designed for recreational fisheries. They are designed for commercial fisheries. An example of this would be the experimental halibut licence program. While this program has seen very limited participation, it has highlighted the challenges associated with monitoring and has created a venue for unscrupulous participants to gain monetarily through undocumented catch.

Because of the vast coastline and many small, isolated communities in British Columbia, it is extremely challenging for the department, from a catch-monitoring and resource perspective, to account for catch in a timely fashion. This is highlighted in the regular recreational halibut fishery, for which the department's catch accounting is typically three months in arrears. This often causes the department to employ the precautionary principle, which results in early closures to the season. The sport fishing advisory board has always, from a historical perspective, worked with the department collaboratively to improve and enhance catch monitoring and is committed to continuing this work moving forward.

There has been discussion to say that caps and quotas would be suitable for other recreational fisheries such as salmon, but this demonstrates a lack of understanding of the intricacies of how these dynamic, mixed-stock fisheries work. Implementing caps and quotas for recreational salmon harvesting would require such a high degree of catch monitoring that the department would have to astronomically increase financial and human resources to avoid reliance on the precautionary principle, which, as we know, would often result in premature season closures and reduce confidence among visiting and resident anglers.

It is open and reliable access that the public fishery requires, implemented with daily and possession limits, which has been the historical method for managing recreational fisheries in British Columbia. The opening and closing of recreational harvesting seasons has utilized historical catch data, which provides an accurate estimate of anticipated catch.

● (1725)

With that said, I thank the committee again for inviting me to appear, and I look forward to answering your questions to the best of my ability.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelly.

This concludes our opening remarks. We are going to jump right into the first six-minute round of questions with Mr. Arnold.

Mel Arnold: I thank all three witnesses for being here. It's an important study.

I want to start out with Mr. Zeman, if I could.

You talked about the impact on the sockeye fishery last year. I believe you said that only 5% of the catch was.... Was that 5% of the total allowable catch or was that 5% of the return of the run?

A lot of people don't understand that there is an expected return and then there's an expected number that are allowed to be caught out of that, to allow the escape.

Jesse Zeman: There were approximately 1.39 million Fraser sockeye killed between all fisheries. They are test fisheries, Americans, commercial and FSC—all of those. There were 1.39 million fish. The public fishery accounted for 70,000, so that's 5% of the catch and less than 0.8% of the entire run.

Mel Arnold: This is less than 1% of the entire return that came back. Thanks for clarifying that. This was my first piece about what impact the public fishery has.

Have the recreational or public fisheries ever been the cause of a fish stock becoming at-risk, on the west coast or in Canada?

Jesse Zeman: They haven't, that I'm aware of. I don't have the full history, though. There are decades, so there's probably some place.

Generally speaking, we always flag conservation first, and we tend to limit ourselves on the conservation side.

The Fraser sockeye issue, though, was very different last year. There were fish identified in TAC, I believe, on August 8. We had solutions in places where we would have minimal to no impact on the lates, and there was no opening until the 22nd.

Mel Arnold: To your knowledge, no fish stocks have been put at risk through a public fishery.

Jesse Zeman: Not that I'm aware of, but I'm not the historical subject matter expert.

Mel Arnold: Okay, but you've been at it for a while.

Going back to the season openings last year, what organizations had input into the season openings, the potential expansion of the opportunity or the delays in the expansion?

Jesse Zeman: It was the SFAB, first nations and DFO. The Fraser River panel is the overarching, external-facing...as it relates to engaging through the Pacific Salmon Commission. Those are the governance pieces.

As I said, I think there are two pieces that really hitched the opening for the public fishery last year. The first one was that TAC was identified. We identified places where our fishery.... Our fishery can move. The mouth of the Fraser had a lot of mixed fish between late and summer runs. If we opened the fishery there, at the mouth of the Fraser—and this gets back to Mr. Kelly's point around caps and shares—we would have used up all of the layer for late-run sockeye. Instead, we said there were places in the Fraser River right then where we could open a fishery because we could move our fishery to where there would be very little to no impact on late-run fish. This was just on summer fish, so it's essentially free fish.

This is the missing piece in the flexibility. There are times and places at which we can have fisheries with little to no impact, other users can't have fisheries and we can generate tremendous benefit.

Mel Arnold: Mr. Brown, I believe it was you who said that there were concerns from the Pacific Salmon Commission last year regarding the sockeye fishery. Was it you who mentioned this?

Dave Brown: No.

• (1730)

Mel Arnold: Was that Mr. Zeman?

Can you elaborate on this? What were those concerns from the Pacific Salmon Commission?

Jesse Zeman: Certainly.

It would probably be in the committee's interest to bring in Mr. Griswold. He was a panel member for 40 years, but he resigned. It was on CBC. He issued a letter and said that this wasn't working for him. He would be a good person to bring to committee.

Mel Arnold: Mr. Brown, you talked about stock assessments, how important they are and the delays or the lateness of them.

Can you elaborate a little more on that? We've heard that some of these stock assessments are going to be eliminated through cuts.

Dave Brown: Yes, that's one thing we are seeing. I'll speak to the local level, on the Squamish River.

There are years when we see an abundance of pink and chum salmon. There could be opportunities to open for river anglers. Those opportunities are severely reduced. We've heard DFO say that basically the whole region 2, which would include the Squamish River system, where I live, is closed until open. We've been lobbying for a long time. We've seen abundant returns, particularly of pink salmon and in some years chum salmon, and fishing opportunities aren't occurring.

We were told by DFO that they simply couldn't do stock assessment. They made decisions about five or so years ago in which they closed the whole region to angling opportunities. There's no in-season adjustment. Our area is really impacted by this, because we're not part of the integrated fisheries management plan. There is rarely an opportunity to adjust when we see an abundant return.

To give you an idea, the Squamish has probably become the second-most-used watershed for the Vancouver area, after the Chilliwack/Vedder River, so you're talking about a significant opportunity for angling. Guides can't plan. Locals can't plan for opportunities to get out and fish. It's a very popular fishery, especially for the pink salmon. This is a great opportunity for young people to learn. They're easy fish to catch. They're enjoyed, but there are no opportunities happening.

Mel Arnold: It sounds as though the government is cutting off the cash flow that could be coming in from the public fisheries—the cash flow they need to do the stock assessments. They've cut the stock assessment, so you can't fish.

Dave Brown: Yes, the stock assessment is not adequate. It's being used as an excuse not to open a fishery. If we're not in the pre-season planning, the IFMP, the opportunity is pretty much not happening. We're losing the economic benefits, the social benefits and the mental health benefits for people to get out and enjoy it. For everyday Canadians to put food on the table, it's significant.

The Chair: We're well over time, so I'm going to have to jump in.

We're going to Mr. Klassen for six minutes.

Ernie Klassen: Thank you so much.

Thanks to the witnesses.

There is a lot of information coming our way from the three of you. It's been really educational to hear all of this.

Mr. Brown, I think you mentioned this, as did Mr. Bird: We're looking at a \$1.3-billion to \$1.4-billion industry. You also stated that the fish industry is becoming less viable and that we need a more balanced approach to making the decisions, ensuring that the industry survives. I think all of us would agree that we want to make sure the industry survives.

Can you talk about what kind of a more balanced approach you would like to see?

Dave Brown: Yes. It's a good question.

We're seeing the kind of management in which broad areas of the coast are being closed when there are opportunities to harvest sustainably. We have very good data from a number of years and even more recent data.

We're seeing chinook returns, for example, to the B.C. coast, and certain stocks are some of the best we've seen in years. Over the last 10 years, they've been improving every year. This is the most popular salmon for sport fishing. Despite this, we're seeing continued constraint and reductions in opportunities that aren't justified by the data. We have very good information, from over a long time, on the chinook salmon migration routes and timing: where they migrate, where they're present, where they're not present and where there could be angling opportunities.

I'll use Howe Sound as an example. We've been lobbying, talking to DFO and working through the Sport Fishing Advisory Board to try to get a mark-selective fishery. There's incredible data. DFO's own science says it's a very sustainable, supported fishery that would target hatchery fish, where the mark rate is high enough and where the salmon are present. Despite this, in 2026, having worked on this since 2019, we are without a fishery such as this.

We're hopeful, with the minister's most recent announcement on marking more fish, that it will also lead to opportunities for the Vancouver area, which desperately needs it. I've been told by DFO staff that this is the best candidate, even above those that are currently open, to be a mark-selective fishery for the Vancouver area.

Those are some of the examples I can give you.

• (1735)

Ernie Klassen: Mr. Zeman, you talked about the late opening of the salmon run. What do you think the consequences of the late opening would be to the stock, last year especially?

Jesse Zeman: You have to move quickly on those fisheries because the late run was the run that was constrained. On August 8, there were 1 million fish identified for the summer run and TAC. There were a lot of fish available for harvest, which was good news, but there were places in which they were mixed in with the late fish.

Mentally, you have to go, "Okay, where in time or place can we focus on harvesting summer-run fish?" At that point, most of those opportunities were in the Fraser River already. Moving quickly, we could have had a fishery that opened literally on August 8 or right after that, and this would have had very little to no impact on those late fish. This is where we got into a kind of chess game, in which people were interpreting the salmon allocation policy in an inconsistent way. It dragged on and on.

It was good news. No one thought we would have that many fish. We were definitely unprepared to be talking about a fishery, but on the same side, with the mixed stock fishery being one of the things that constrain us, we have to think, okay, if we have mixed stocks, where are the places and times we can avoid having a high exploitation rate on weak stocks? This is one of those examples.

Ernie Klassen: Thank you.

Mr. Kelly, you talked about how there have been some seasons closed prematurely. I'm wondering if you can talk a bit about how often that has happened. What are the consequences of it?

Michael Kelly: It is a very good question.

A prime example would be our recreational halibut fishery. We're managed to 15%. This would be a cap on a total allowable catch for the public fishery. When the department feels that we're getting close to the number, then they would shut it down to keep us from going over the TAC. This is problematic, because that would typically happen in September, say, or October. Instead of having a full season, we would be shut down short.

This does not bode well for late-season tourism in terms of people who want to plan to come on a fishing trip or take their family and their boat up to a small coastal community, because in the fall there's a possibility that the particular fishery could be closed down. I think that would be the best example I could give. It's really one of the main ones managed through the cap idea.

Ernie Klassen: Thank you.

To go back to Mr. Brown, how do we ensure public access to fisheries while still prioritizing conservation for declining stocks?

Dave Brown: There have been a lot of adjustments made in the last 10 years to avoid stocks of concern. This has been adjusted, and we have really good information about that. We are also making adjustments with selective fishing technologies and are fishing in ways whereby you can avoid these stocks.

We are seeing a lot more angler education, gaff releases and releasing the salmon in the water without taking them out of the water if they're stock you don't want to harvest. The increased mass marking will certainly help as long as we see the minister open mark-selective fisheries that currently aren't in place, especially towards our largest fishing base, the Vancouver area.

The other thing I would say is to make sure that when there are abundant opportunities, and we know there aren't stock concerns, to open these fisheries. Get them confirmed earlier.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Dave Brown: There is that information, for sure.

The Chair: I know that Mr. Brown will have a lot more to add, but we're at time. I appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Klassen.

Dave Brown: Thank you for giving me a little stop sign there, Patrick.

The Chair: There will be more time for questions.

[Translation]

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

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the witnesses. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Kelly, you may find these to be basic questions, but I am interested in the Sport Fishing Advisory Board.

Can you explain to us how this organization came to be?

• (1740)

[English]

Michael Kelly: That's a very good question.

The organization, I believe, has been around for close to 60 years now. I couldn't give you the exact date it was first formed, but it's one of the longest-standing advisory bodies to the federal government in existence. It's a grassroots, volunteer-driven organization. It starts with local communities and committees up and down the coast, both on the coast and inland along waterways. Those committees can put forth motions. It trickles.

We've recently gone through a revitalization and a bit of a change to the way the organization has worked, but traditionally there have been three levels to the organization: There's the grassroots, the local committees, which we still have; we had south coast and north coast committees. It would then trickle up to what we have called the main board. Now we've eliminated the regional committees, which were the north coast and south coast committees. We now go right from the local committees to what we call a conference board.

Unfortunately, with COVID we lost the in-person aspect of those meetings, which was very unfortunate. It would be really beneficial to the fishery and to the resource if we could get back to a point in time at which we could have in-person meetings for the Sport Fishing Advisory Board.

We work collaboratively with the department to try to assist with managing fisheries.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: I'd like to get back to the relationship with Fisheries and Oceans Canada. When the council was formed 60 years ago, was it an initiative of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, or was it more of a citizen-led initiative?

[English]

Michael Kelly: My understanding is that it was likely grassroots-driven, but it's a Government of Canada program, so it is the

government's. It's a government advisory process, so it is run by the government, and it's co-chaired by a government representative and a member of the board.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: When you say "the government", you really mean Fisheries and Oceans Canada, don't you?

[English]

Michael Kelly: That's correct, yes.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: In my riding, we have Ensemble pour un accès aux ressources marines, a group that advocates precisely for greater consultation with recreational fishermen in fisheries management. One of its demands is that a committee like yours—an advisory committee on sport fishing—be established.

In your experience, does Fisheries and Oceans Canada listen?

Are there occasional meetings with government representatives?

[English]

Michael Kelly: Certainly, we have regular meetings with the department. They vary, depending on the topic or the issue at hand.

I think they listen to us. We try to be collaborative with the department. We don't often see the results we would like. There are many factors and issues, and I think that's likely why.

I find that with some wings of the department, yes, we are more collaborative, and with others not so much, but we've always maintained an attitude that we want to work with the department, not against the department.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Are you also called upon to engage with commercial fishers?

[English]

Michael Kelly: Regularly, yes. Being in a small town, we have a commercial fishing industry. I've commercially fished for quite a long time myself, so certainly, yes.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Do you have any examples of cases where Fisheries and Oceans Canada acted on ideas you proposed?

[English]

Michael Kelly: One example would be, as I touched upon earlier, the recreational halibut fishery, in which we've developed something of a very collaborative working relationship whereby the Sport Fishing Advisory Board's halibut committee puts forth recommendations to the department with regard to management scenarios based on a total allowable catch that we would have.

Of course, the total allowable catch for halibut comes from the International Pacific Halibut Commission. Its number comes down from there to Canada, and Canada splits that 85:15. The commercial sector gets 85%, and the recreational sector gets 15%; we then try to collaborate with the department on a scenario that can give us the longest season possible and the most opportunity for recreational anglers without going over our total allowable catch.

It's a very challenging process, but this is an example of collaboration.

• (1745)

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: If citizens were to pursue their recommendations until they succeeded and Fisheries and Oceans Canada agreed to establish a committee like yours, but on the Quebec side, what would your recommendations be for setting up a structure that works well?

[English]

Michael Kelly: We've advocated for a licence fee increase. We see this as a way to generate money to put towards management. Things we've talked about are a lack of stock assessment and improvements needed in catch monitoring for certain areas. These are all things we, as anglers, feel we could help with through something as simple as a licence fee increase.

Does that answer your question?

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I must cut you off.

[English]

That completes our first round of questions.

We'll now go into the second round of questions, starting with Mr. Gunn for five minutes.

Aaron Gunn: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Zeman, last summer, before the brief Fraser River sockeye opening, my phone was blowing up from fishermen on DFO test fishing boats. Clearly, they knew well in advance this was going to be an above expectation return, and in fact a near-record return. How do you explain DFO's decision when it comes to the Fraser River sockeye opening, why it was so late and why the catch opportunity was so limited?

Jesse Zeman: There were a few pieces put in place ahead of time. The 10% layer on late fish was part of the limitation. This got set in stone through the process and into the IFMP, for which they estimated, I think, 460,000 fish and said we were not going to exceed harvesting more than 10% of those. When you have 900,000 fish show up, from our perspective, you should be adjusting that layer. This gives you more flexibility, and in the past, that would have happened.

As I said, there was the resignation of the board member and certainly the conflict with the United States. However, why it took so long is a really good question. We put a very good case forward for a sustainable fishing opportunity, but we heard such stuff as, "We

like to let the commercial and the recreational sectors go at the same time." There's nothing in policy that supports this. We heard other things such as "we need time on the river" and "what about two days a week?" There's nothing in the policy.

If your question is why, I would say it's because the salmon allocation policy was not being followed.

Aaron Gunn: You said it was over 9 million—

Jesse Zeman: Yes, 9 million fish.

Aaron Gunn: —and you guys were only allowed to harvest 70,000. Is that correct? Is that number, to you, in any way based on conservation concerns or science or evidence? I'm looking at those numbers, and I'm sure Canadians are too, and they don't seem to add up.

Jesse Zeman: It's a timing issue. You have to be very reactive with sockeye. Especially if you get a surprise, a good surprise or a bad surprise, you have to move quickly, and that was one of the things we didn't see last year. I think everybody, including our reps on the Fraser panel, was surprised at 9 million fish and they were not in the headspace to move quickly or to adjust. Is it low? Yes. The salmon allocation policy as it relates to sockeye says that the commercial sector gets 95% across the coast and we get 5%, but in the Fraser River example the limitation doesn't necessarily exist.

Aaron Gunn: Can you provide some context for people on how long the opening was compared to—if DFO was more reactive—how long it could have been and how much more of a greater opportunity you could have had?

Jesse Zeman: It opened on the 22nd, I believe, and for the summer-run fish, TAC was identified on August 8. Obviously, with test fisheries ramping up the way they were, people knew this was coming. It could have happened very quickly after August 8 for sure.

Aaron Gunn: Okay.

Mr. Brown, we're talking again about DFO's reaction time. One thing that confuses me is this: With the advances in technology and capability, you'd think it would be easier now than it was before to model, predict and monitor salmon returns, yet it seems as though decision-making at DFO is slower and more inconsistent. Does that match your experience, and do you have any explanation for it?

Dave Brown: I think some of the catch monitoring or prediction models, especially for chinook, for which they use the Albion test fishery.... We hear a lot that the test fishery isn't always accurate. We know from historical levels that there are stocks that will be abundant going into the season. However, the approach seems to micromanage when opportunities would be created, whether it be a mark-selective fishery or even abundant non-marked fish that could be harvested, and it's not getting into the IFMP. The data is there. At our local level, in our river, an issue is stock assessment, and stock assessment is very frustrating.

• (1750)

Aaron Gunn: This is a question for all three of you, for whoever wants to jump in.

When you see these decisions being taken that are very hard to explain away, and all of you disagree with them, do you think DFO is reaching these inexplicable decisions through a lack of capacity or incompetence? Is it a certain ideological predisposition or policy that is leading to these decisions, if that makes sense?

Dave Brown: To some degree, there's micromanaging of the fishery, and it seems that there is some political influence there that's occurring, in my opinion. I'll let the other two gentlemen answer.

Michael Kelly: It's the resources too. You can't solve problems with money you don't have.

It's important that the department be funded to do the important work that it needs to do. Catch monitoring costs money. Stock assessment costs money. All of those things are important, but they have to have those resources to do it.

Aaron Gunn: Do you want to add anything?

Jesse Zeman: In the Fraser River context, we had TAC identified. We have an international agreement. There were fish available. There was no decision to execute a fishery. This is not a policy issue. This is a policy interpretation issue in which people are definitely colouring outside the lines or not following policy as it's written. That's the issue for Fraser sockeye.

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

We're going to Mr. Connors for five minutes.

Paul Connors: Thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming out.

I'm from Newfoundland, born and raised, and the salmon fishery on the west coast is certainly very interesting to me. Unfortunately, I never had the chance to go out and do it, but it's on my to-do list.

Was the commercial fishery advocating for a similar opening and closing as well?

Jesse Zeman: I think that's why the panel member resigned. It's because they were very upset about the way Canada approached what went on last summer, keeping in mind that the commercial fishery lived through different constraints because they can't move up the river where the majority of the summer-run fish are.

Were they upset? Yes, extremely upset. Did they get a very limited harvest? Yes. Should there have been more flexibility? Yes, for

sure. I think that ultimately led to the resignation of the panel member, who had spent 40 years on that panel.

Paul Connors: I'm going to get clarification. When you say what "Canada" did last year, can you elaborate on that?

Jesse Zeman: The Fraser River panel is part of the Pacific Salmon Commission in agreement with the United States, because these fish are shared. The Fraser River pink and the Fraser River sockeye are a shared resource, so we have the Pacific Salmon Commission, which is the overarching body, and Canada and the United States sit there too.

Essentially, to open a fishery you need two of the three parties to agree on a fishery. We got to the point later on in the season at which the United States put forward a proposal saying that they wanted a pink fishery and Canada said, "No, we're not supporting you." They probably didn't offer compelling evidence in the opposite direction, and the Pacific Salmon Commission sided with the United States, so there was a limited pink fishery, which would have hit some of these late-run sockeye. We have an international agreement, and that's how this process, in terms of identifying the available harvest and all the factors that go into it, is very transparent and very clear—the opening side, not so much.

Paul Connors: I'll stick with you for a second, because in the beginning you spoke about the loss of predictability of the season and how decisions need to be transparent and evidence-based in a timely fashion. Can you elaborate on this a bit and on more around the science-based piece, if the science shows...?

Jesse Zeman: Yes. The timeline is basically that on August 8 the Pacific Salmon Commission came out with their weekly report and said there were 1 million summer-run fish available for international TAC, fish that were available for people to harvest. There could have been a fishery right after that, but there wasn't anything that happened until August 22 for our fishery.

Again, our fishery is so small and it generates the highest return per fish per pound for conservation. There are so many social and economic benefits for people who don't get access to fish in the Lower Mainland. All of a sudden, we have thousands of Canadians and new Canadians who get to go fishing in their backyard, and they've never experienced this.

It took two weeks to make the decision. We had the science. The numbers were in. It was a matter of, okay, where can we go and fish sustainably? We identified those opportunities, but those opportunities were not addressed until 14 days later. By that point, we had the late fish starting to show up in the river more and more. Every day that you wait, your risk goes up and your impact on those late fish goes up. You have to be able to move quickly and be agile for sockeye fisheries.

• (1755)

Paul Connors: Mr. Kelly, you mentioned environmental science. You have a varied background in the fishery and everything like that.

I'm talking about new technologies now. Do you see any new technologies that could be used to make sure that these decisions that are made would be acceptable to the DFO and to the industry, both commercial and recreational, and are the right decisions?

Michael Kelly: From a technological perspective, we certainly have counting cameras, fences and acoustical devices that are used. In some places, we could certainly use more of them.

From a catch-monitoring perspective, we have seen some improvements over the last few years. The Sport Fishing Institute of BC now has an app. You can record your catch on the app, and it will upload. There will continue to be improvements on things like that.

Somehow the department needs to get the resources to take what it's seeing in the water and move that forward in a timely fashion. From a technological perspective, I don't know exactly how it would do this.

Paul Connors: Is this something like a—

The Chair: I'm going to have to jump in. We're out of time, but there's going to be one more opportunity for questions from the Liberal side.

[Translation]

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

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Chair, I will yield my speaking time to my colleague, Mel Arnold.

[English]

Mel Arnold: Thank you for sharing your time.

I have one question for each of the three of you.

What would you recommend to the DFO when it comes to season openings? The crux of this report is making recommendations to the government to improve the process of getting seasons opened or being adaptable.

We'll go to whoever would like to start and then go down the line.

Michael Kelly: Thank you, sir.

I would say utilizing historical catch data, which is what they typically do, for the majority of fisheries. Obviously, some fisheries, like sockeye, which Mr. Zeman talked about, require more in-season decision-making. However, for a lot of species, they can say ahead of time the opening date and closing date and how it's going to be. Managing to a zone, not to a fixed number, would really be the best-case scenario. This gives confidence, and then people have confidence that if they decide they're going to this place at this particular time, it's going to be open.

Dave Brown: I would echo the same sentiments: historical catch data and using mark-selective fisheries, particularly for the Vancouver area when we're talking about the months of April and May for chinook salmon. Also, predictability, having these seasons deter-

mined well in advance, is going to benefit families planning vacations around salmon fishing, guides and industry, tackle manufacturers, hotels and everything. It's very important to the Canadian and British Columbian economies.

Jesse Zeman: Broadly, I would say to work with us. We have things like catch-and-release, hatchery only, slot limits, and times and places, so if we're identifying opportunities or identifying places in which we need to constrain opportunities, I would say to work with these folks. They're willing to put their hand up. First, work with the public fishery. Second, around the Fraser sockeye fishery, follow the policy. That's it.

Mel Arnold: The policy is there. It's just how it's being interpreted under different.... Is that by—

Jesse Zeman: Yes, there were things.... We were told, "Well, we like to open the commercial fishery and the recreational fishery at the same time." As I said, we have all these late fish stacking up at the mouth of the Fraser. It's really hard to do this if we're going to manage at a 10% exploitation rate for those lates. If we let it rip at the mouth of the Fraser, we'll go over 10% in no time. There's nothing in the policy that says we can't open the public fishery first or in places and times whereby we're not hitting late-run fish.

We were also asked, "What if we give you two days a week to minimize conflict on the river?" There's nothing in the policy or in legislation that says opportunities are exclusive as they relate to fishing. The allocation is conservation, section 35 FSC, and recreational and commercial after that. I think it was just a lot of foot-dragging that went on last summer.

• (1800)

Mel Arnold: Thank you. I think that was....

The Chair: You have another four minutes.

Mel Arnold: I took Mr. Deschênes' time.

The Chair: I put them together, so another four minutes are left.

Mel Arnold: Okay. I'll pass the remaining four minutes on to Mr. Small.

Clifford Small: I have a question.

Mr. Zeman, are you surprised that the current Liberal government, which claims to be a new government, has all of its ministers, including the Minister of Fisheries, running off Justin Trudeau's 2021 mandate letters?

Jesse Zeman: I can't get into partisan politics at all, so you can reframe your question and ask me about fish, or you can ask one of these guys.

Clifford Small: It ties into a question I have for you.

Mr. Zeman, DFO had a budget increase of 100% since 2015 and a 50% increase in staffing in the same period. Now, these staff do what they're told at the rate they're told to do it. Clearly, it's not a resource issue within DFO. Is it a matter of priorities? If it was a priority with DFO to get these management plans out on time, do you think they'd get it done if they were told to do it?

Jesse Zeman: There's definitely an accountability challenge. We've talked about steelhead to the committee. We've talked about the subversion of science. I think that's more of a systemic cultural issue within the organization itself. I'm not going to wade into partisan politics. DFO has always been an extremely challenging agency.

Getting back to your questions around how we prioritize stocks of concern, you invest in them. That's the one piece we missed. If you have stocks of concern and mixed stock fisheries and these stocks are limiting people's ability to go out, you have to invest in those fish. Things like the Pacific salmon strategy initiative are where we should be focusing our dollars.

The other thing on funding with which we're concerned is the salmon restoration and innovation fund. We're concerned that those dollars are not going to be targeting salmon.

Clifford Small: I have a quick question for Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Kelly, you've had an extensive career in fisheries that are government managed. What have you seen over the years in terms of patterns in management plans and decisions for openings and closures and the timeliness of these things? What have you noticed in the last.... I don't know. I'm not going back to 2015 or 2006 here. In your entire career, how has it drifted?

Michael Kelly: It's certainly timeliness. When you take a look, as an example, at the salmon integrated fisheries management plan, we often don't see that until June. With the final regulations for a particular area, we might not see them until late June.

Clifford Small: When you were a 20-year-old fisherman, when did these management plans and decisions come down?

Michael Kelly: It's always at the last minute before the season is going to start.

Clifford Small: It's before it starts.

Michael Kelly: It's before it starts.

Clifford Small: It's not after.

Michael Kelly: I'm trying to think. Have there been times when we have gotten the IFMP after the season has started? I don't think so, but it's always right at the line.

Clifford Small: It gives the stakeholders absolutely no time to plan budgets, to travel or to do any other associated activities with the sector.

Michael Kelly: It's certainly not enough time.

Clifford Small: Is that it?

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Clifford Small: Thank you very much. You guys were great.

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

We're going to conclude our questioning with Mr. Connors for five minutes.

Paul Connors: I'm going to finish off with what we were discussing about new technologies. I was going towards how we get the information out. It leads from what Mr. Small was talking about.

I was going to ask about peer-reviewed science and stuff like that. Does industry have a say in it? For the salmon allocation plan, where is that in your industry? Do you understand what I'm saying?

• (1805)

Michael Kelly: Not quite.

Paul Connors: Neither do I. I lost my train of thought there.

We were talking about the introduction of new technologies, and I know there's a salmon allocation review ongoing. I don't know if you're involved. Are you involved with this?

Michael Kelly: Yes, I have been.

Paul Connors: You have participated. Do you think it addresses any of your concerns? What are your thoughts on how the review is currently going?

Michael Kelly: It's currently wrapping up, and it's definitely right at the final stages. I understand that a briefing will go to the minister on that.

I sat as a representative for the recreational fishery. It was a very challenging process. I'm not going to get into the details of it, but it was certainly very challenging to tie that in. That's one aspect of, basically, the process by which the government is going to allocate those resources, and this lays it out.

As Jesse mentioned before, the previous policy wasn't always adhered to, and the example he gave was Fraser sockeye. To tie this into technology is challenging because they're two different things. Really, the technologies around catch monitoring are going to be important. Technologies around stock assessment, those will be important. Such things as marking trailers, mass marking...there are some technologies that are being used to fin clip fish—put a fish in on one side, it comes out missing a fin on the other side. I hope this answers your question.

Paul Connors: I promised Mr. Morrissey I'd share my time with him, so I'll let him go ahead.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

I'm always amazed by how many times my colleague in the official opposition gives me the opportunity to remind committee members of how badly the department was gutted after years of Conservative government. It's taken us 11 years to rebuild it in the important areas that are being addressed today.

Mr. Zeman, you made an interesting comment: We need more than good science, and we hear that often in a whole host of areas. What's the disconnect with science that would lead you to make that statement?

Jesse Zeman: Using the example of the Fraser, we had the science. The Pacific Salmon Commission said, "The fish are there. People can go fishing." We said, "Here are places we can do it sustainably." It took two weeks to make that happen.

Adhering to policy is very challenging. We've all had the steelhead file. We talked to the committee about that as well. We paid a post-doctoral student to go through steelhead management on our behalf because, during the SARA listing process, all kinds of interference occurred. A lot of times we don't have the science, we don't have enough monitoring, but there are times when we have it and we have the fish, but we don't get fishing.

Robert Morrissey: The science was all good, but what you wanted, exactly, was a decision.

Jesse Zeman: Right.

Robert Morrissey: It was slow in getting made. Thanks for the clarification.

Mr. Brown, you made a comment in reference to the loss of predictability in managing. Could you expand on that?

Dave Brown: Yes, because one where there's a potential for openings....

I'll go back to asking, "How sound is it?" We could have an opening that would be very predictable, that DFO and science staff support. There's been catch monitoring done, where they paid guide boats to go out and determined that there weren't Fraser River stocks of concern present. There was an abundance of hatchery fish, and it was a sustainable fishery.

This is not occurring, and we've been working on it since 2019. We've been in the Vancouver area seven years, and the chinook fishery essentially closes from April 1 to September 1. We really

hope, with the announcement the minister has made about increased mass marking, that opportunities for chinook salmon are going to quickly follow for Vancouver-area anglers, who have been some of the most curtailed on the coast.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

Chair, before we go, Mr. Arnold raised a very good question about any examples of a fishery that was put in jeopardy, I believe, because of a recreational fishery. Through the Chair, could we find a way of validating or getting information on it? I would like to see it as well, if we could find the resources to give an opinion. I'm not aware of this either, but I would like a robust review and a report back.

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

Maybe I'll just hand it over to the analysts.

Okay. The analysts are going to look into that, and I'll be happy to share that with the committee when we have it.

Robert Morrissey: Thanks.

The Chair: This concludes our second panel. I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today. They came a long way to provide some testimony on this important study and for the recommendations that are going to flow from it. We really appreciate all of your input.

With that, we're going to be adjourning the meeting. Our meeting on Monday, April 20 is going to continue this study. We look forward to seeing everybody then.

Thank you.

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