HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

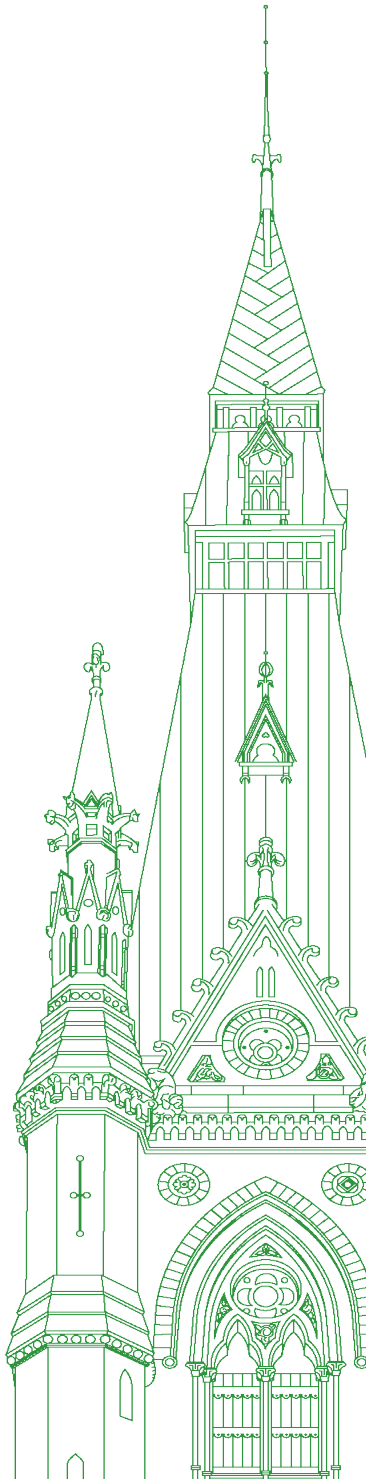
45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 032

Monday, April 20, 2026



Chair: Patrick Weiler

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Monday, April 20, 2026

● (1100)

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

Welcome to meeting number 32 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

[*English*]

I will start by acknowledging that we are gathered on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people and by expressing gratitude that we're 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 continue its study of the factors determining opening and closing dates of marine harvesting seasons.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to the Standing Orders, today's meeting is being held in a hybrid format. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

Before we continue, I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the table.

Pursuant to our routine motions, I can advise committee members that all witnesses have gone through the required testing.

For the benefit of members and witnesses, please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members participating via Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience in this regard.

[*English*]

Before we go to our witnesses, Mr. Small wants to raise a point.

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

Before we get going, this study motion called for a two-hour appearance by Minister Thompson. I'm wondering if the committee can get an update on whether she's been asked. Will she in fact be coming to this committee to testify on this study?

The Chair: I'll turn it over to the clerk to respond to that.

The Clerk of the Committee (Maxime Ricard): The invitation was sent to her office when we started the study, and I don't have an answer yet.

● (1105)

The Chair: With that, I would like to welcome our witnesses.

Participating via video conference, we have Melissa Collier, a commercial fish harvester.

[*Translation*]

We then have Daniel Desbois, president of the Association des crabiers gaspésiens inc.

[*English*]

We're going to start with the opening statements for five minutes or less, beginning with Melissa Collier.

Melissa Collier (Commercial Fish Harvester, As an Individual): Hello. Thank you for having me here today.

My name is Melissa Collier, and I'm a commercial fisherman. My husband and I fish off of our 42-foot boat, the *Lisa Jess*. Our home port is Campbell River, and we reside in Courtenay, B.C.

Like most fishermen in B.C., we are multispecies fishers. We fish for halibut, ling cod, swimming scallops and salmon. I'm not an expert nor am I representing any association or organization. I'm here to represent our fishing family and to present our personal experiences.

Fishing is an unpredictable industry. Our lives are driven by the tides, the weather and the life cycle of the very species we catch. There are so many unknown variables, and we often have to make big decisions with little notice and no information; however, there is some predictability that we've come to depend on. We know that halibut season opens in March. We know that prawn season opens in May. We know that summers are spent fishing salmon, and chum opens in October.

Fisheries openings, while subject to shift and change, used to be relatively dependable. You knew when to expect a notice. You knew when the opening would be, roughly around the same as last year, as long as the fish are there. Abundance meant access. You could build a business and roughly plan your fishing seasons, but there's been a big shift in fisheries management. Notices seem to come later. The lead times from a notice to actual openings are shorter. Abundance no longer means access.

When preparing for today, I really struggled to determine where to focus my words. There are so many examples of short notices and lack of clarity, such as how chum season used to consistently open in September, and now it is common to get less than 24 hours' notice for a mid-October opening. In the north, it's become common to get only two weeks' notice, which is not nearly enough when it takes me a week just to reach the fishing grounds.

The story that stands out the most to me is our 2022 sockeye year. My family has two salmon licences, an area F northern troller licence, which allows us to fish salmon around Haida Gwaii, and an area H troller licence, which allows us to fish on the east side of Vancouver Island.

There used to be a single salmon licence for the whole coast but, in the late 1990s, it was split into three. My father-in-law had the foresight to invest in two licences because, at the time, fishing in the north started primarily in June and July, and fishing in the south started in August. Having both allows us to access both areas in a given season and adjust as needed to the area that makes the most financial sense in a given year. That changed in 2019. Since then, our chinook opening has been pushed back to the second or third week of August, a month or so later. Due to that later opening, we can no longer fish both our north and south licences. We have to choose, which is what we did in 2022.

The big run of Fraser sockeye usually happens every four years, and 2022 was forecast to be really strong. The sockeye and chinook fisheries are financially comparable; however, the southern fishing grounds are closer and off-load ports are closer, so the overall cost to access the fishery is substantially less, especially with the price of fuel.

We chose to stay south. We got our boat ready. We got crew lined up. We stocked our boat with food and fuel, and we watched. At the end of July, we monitored the test fishing. We called around and talked to fishers who had decades more experience and knowledge to draw upon. Everything looked promising. “It's definitely going to open, maybe a bit later than usual, but definitely the second week of August”, we were told. The test fishing numbers continued to climb. FSC fishing occurred. It looked promising, but there was still no notice.

Within the first couple of weeks, we still had time to pivot. We could change. We could head north. That's why we have more than one licence. We can change and make plans to make decisions to compensate for when the fish just aren't there, but in 2022, that wasn't the case; the fish were there. Test fishing numbers were good. We had passed openings with lower numbers, so we waited. By the end of August, Washington had opened their salmon season. Catch report data showed that FSC fishing harvested over 670,000 fish, and the U.S. commercial fleet harvested over 318,000 fish. Cumulatively, over one million fish came out of the water, yet we still had no opening.

After waiting an entire month for an opening that never came, we gave up and started preparing for our next fishery. The day we put all of our gear on for the new fishery, totally different gear, a notice was sent. The date of notice was September 7 at 3:12 p.m. Sockeye would open the next day, September 8, at 12:01 a.m. That was less than nine hours' notice. Fishing was only allowed at the mouth of the Fraser River, where the fish are of less value compared to where we fish in the Johnstone Strait, due to lower quality and the river colouration. The quota was set for 123 pieces per vessel, the value of which would barely cover the cost of my fuel.

In 2022, as a result of a delayed northern opening, having to choose between two licences and a month late sockeye opening that was not financially viable, my family lost out on the income of two licences and about one-third of our expected income for the year. This is just one of many stories like this across fisheries and fishermen.

I'd like to finish with a quick analogy on fishing that I find is effective to explain our industry. Imagine you have a business, a store, let's say. You purchase the building, you pay for the electrical, the water, your business fees and any other licences you need to operate. You have staff, and you have equipment, but you don't have the keys to the door. You don't get to control when the store opens or closes. Most of the time, you don't even know when they're going to show up with the keys. You just have to be ready and hope. That's fishing.

● (1110)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Collier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desbois, you now have the floor for five minutes.

Daniel Desbois (President, Association des crabiers gaspésiens inc.): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to present the reality of the snow crab fishers we represent in the southern gulf. Although we do not speak on behalf of all fishers, the concerns we are raising today are widely shared on the ground.

First, it's important to recognize that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or DFO, has made significant progress over the years. Today, fishing plans are available earlier; licence conditions are issued on time; and fishers have access to the necessary tools, including online payment. Administratively, the system is ready.

Despite those advances, there's still a major challenge: the operational capacity to complete icebreaking on time. The system is ready on paper, but not at sea. It's also important to be transparent. This year, the ice conditions in the gulf probably wouldn't have allowed for a much earlier opening, but it still would have allowed for a few days earlier.

The issue we are raising is not tied to a single year. It doesn't concern a specific year. It's the repeat delays. Every spring, due to uncertainties and delays in planning and executing icebreaking, we systematically lose between three and four days of fishing that could be recovered. We aren't asking for the impossible; we're asking to recover the days that are lost every year.

This year is a very concrete example. Operations were originally scheduled for the end of March; they were postponed to April 5 and 6, and they were eventually carried out around April 11 and 13.

A number of problems were observed on the ground: difficult coordination of equipment; the use of icebreakers with varying capabilities depending on the area; and, above all, the absence of a tugboat, which is essential for keeping the channels open. Since there was no tugboat available and no alternative planned, some of the work that was done couldn't be fully utilized, and additional delays accumulated. Even after the icebreaking has been completed, fishers still have to wait for a safe weather window—often below 20 knots of wind—before they can go out to sea.

The delays add up; they don't replace each other. Each day lost in the spring becomes very difficult to recover.

It's important to understand a simple reality of our industry: If a week is lost in April, it takes about three weeks in June to achieve the same catches. That means that every delay moves the fishing effort to a period with less favourable conditions, increasing costs and, most importantly, the arrival of right whales, which are becoming more and more present. The fishing effort is shifted precisely to the period with the most risk, and there's a major inconsistency there. Right whales start arriving in the southern gulf as early as the first week of May. However, we haven't observed any interactions with the whales over the past two years. Why not? That's because the fishing took place earlier. Whale protection requires the fishing to open earlier, not later. The longer fishing is delayed, the greater the risk to right whales.

Another important factor concerns regional fairness. In Quebec, our harbours generally aren't affected by ice. We're ready to fish earlier. However, the opening is delayed due to icebreaking challenges at certain ports in the Maritimes, particularly in Caraquet and Shippagan. As a result, a safe fishery in Quebec is delayed because of a lack of planning elsewhere. New Brunswick fishers understand this reality and share our concerns, but their reliance on DFO operations limits their ability to challenge decisions.

Another significant challenge concerns the complexity of the decision-making process. The committee now includes more than 100 stakeholders, which makes coordination more difficult and slows down decision-making. The diversity of stakeholders is essential, and we fully recognize the importance of the participation of indigenous communities and all fishers. The challenge we're raising has to do with the effectiveness of the decision-making process, not the participation itself. It's important to make sure that this diversity can be expressed while allowing for swift and effective decisions on the ground. The challenge isn't around the table; it's the table's ability to make decisions effectively.

In our reality, every day counts, and this red tape has direct impacts on the ground. The more cumbersome the process, the more difficult it becomes to respond effectively. Our position is clear and constructive: We want to maintain a simultaneous opening for everyone, but for it to work, DFO's planning has to live up to the decisions it imposes on the industry. In practical terms, that means guaranteed resources—icebreakers, tugboats and other specialized equipment—rigorous coordination and a contingency plan in the event of failure.

● (1115)

We're not asking for more rules; we're asking for the ones that are in place to be enforced. If these conditions are not met, there has to be a flexibility mechanism to prevent the entire industry from being penalized by operational issues.

The Chair: Mr. Desbois, your time is up. Can you wrap up your remarks?

Daniel Desbois: Okay. I have a minute's worth.

Finally, some thought could be given to setting clear targets for icebreaking. A reference date at the end of March to ensure access to the wharf in the critical sector, regardless of conditions elsewhere in the gulf, would improve predictability, fishers' preparation and the system's overall efficiency. The issue isn't the ice; it's the planning. Today, the system delays a safe fishery, increases costs for fishers and shifts fishing effort to a period when the risks to right whales are higher. Better planning today prevents conservation problems tomorrow.

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

[*English*]

That concludes our opening remarks.

We're going to go right into our first round of questioning, with Mr. Small for six minutes.

Clifford Small: I'd like to thank the witnesses for taking part in our study today.

My question for Monsieur Desbois relates to his opening statement where he mentioned the importance of avoiding right whales.

Monsieur Desbois, with all the things that we've heard over the years—we've had lots of consultations and whatnot, and we've spoken about gear technology and ways to avoid right whale entanglement—it's been a priority to make sure the whales have been kept safe in your region.

Is the number one way to avoid right whales by the use of technology or the use of opening dates that keep you away from the whale migration?

[*Translation*]

Daniel Desbois: Fishing as much as possible before the whales arrive, when the whales aren't there—no technology can replace that. To date, the technology isn't ready. It's moving forward, but it really isn't ready.

[*English*]

Clifford Small: With all that we've heard, seen and done—and in fact we've had a study at this committee over the last several years to study the right whale issue—why doesn't the government see the importance of avoiding right whales at the time of the opening of your season the same way that you do?

[*Translation*]

Daniel Desbois: Yes, that's why we're asking for an expected icebreaking date. To us, it seems that icebreaking isn't being taken seriously. The last two years, icebreaking was done at the end of March or very early in April. This year, nothing would have prevented the icebreaking from starting as planned at the end of March, but it wasn't carried out until two weeks later. That's unacceptable.

[*English*]

Clifford Small: You have a quota for snow crab, I understand. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

Daniel Desbois: Yes. The problem isn't the quota, it's really the fishing window before the whales arrive.

● (1120)

[*English*]

Clifford Small: If you have a quota and you're ready to fish, you're just going to go out and catch your quota. If you're ready to fish because your harbours are open and free of ice, why can't you go and fish when you're ready?

You're only going to take your quota, and you're going to take it in a timely manner and be off the water before the right whales come. Why won't they let vessels in areas that can be fished take part in the fishery where they're just going to catch their quota?

[*Translation*]

Daniel Desbois: Yes, of course, but we still have respect for our colleagues in the Maritimes. The goal isn't to go fishing before they do, unless there's a lack of effort put into icebreaking, which prevents us from going fishing. We're advocating for a simultaneous start to the season. There's no doubt that we're always much more penalized on the Quebec side if the icebreaking isn't done, because we can't go out. We're waiting.

[*English*]

Clifford Small: Have you had consultations with the Canadian Coast Guard icebreaking program and DFO to get reassurance that what happened this year won't happen next year?

[*Translation*]

Daniel Desbois: Yes. This year, it's pretty much the straw that broke the camel's back. The tugboat that was supposed to keep the channel open had broken down. We informed them of this at the first meeting, but there was no alternative. The icebreaker had to come back a week later to reopen the same channel, because the tug wasn't there; it was broken down. There was no planning whatsoever to replace the tugboat. There's a serious lack of planning.

That's why we think it's necessary for these people to set a date to free the harbours, because they seem to rely on the ice cover in the gulf rather than what's in the ports.

[*English*]

Clifford Small: Would you like to outline a recommendation that we could put in this study report when the time comes?

[*Translation*]

Daniel Desbois: Yes, we would like a date to be set in the last weeks of March for the harbours' ice to be broken.

[*English*]

Clifford Small: Thank you very much.

Ms. Collier, why do you think DFO is not more efficient in making season openings that affect your livelihood so much?

Melissa Collier: I wouldn't begin to understand what goes into making those decisions. All I know is I experience the outcome, and it just doesn't feel like DFO has the ability to make decisions fast enough or in a timely enough manner. A lot of our fisheries require in-season decisions, and it seems that the response time isn't there.

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

Next, we're going to go to Mr. Cormier for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Desbois, hello from the other side of Chaleur Bay. We're practically face to face today.

I think you know that I'm very familiar with the case you're talking about. The challenges with icebreaking and with opening the fishing season have been going on in area 12 and the other areas since 2018. The season has to open as early as possible, so that we aren't in the same place as the right whales when they arrive in the southern gulf.

I agree with you 99.9% on everything you have said today, because I experience it every year. As you said, sometimes it's a lack of planning from the Coast Guard, but sometimes it's also a lack of tools. Unfortunately, in some of our regions, especially in the ports you mentioned—such as Caraquet, Shippagan and Lamèque, ports that are in my riding—there's a need for the Coast Guard's tools.

Just so that everybody has the same understanding, the bulk of the problem is in two or three seaports and in the channels that lead to those seaports. Unfortunately, the Coast Guard's tools, such as the largest icebreakers that clear ice higher in the gulf, can't get there.

As you know, Mr. Desbois, the hovercraft is practically never available when it's needed. There's the amphibian, also known as the frog, which comes in to do work inside those ports, but unfortunately, since the channels are too narrow and shallow, the necessary tools aren't available to open the season as quickly as possible.

In this case, on your side of the bay, your harbours are almost always ice-free before ours.

Would you agree that the Coast Guard doesn't have the tools needed to open those three ports in our region, namely Caraquet, Lamèque and Shippagan, as quickly as possible and have as early a fishing season as possible?

● (1125)

Daniel Desbois: Yes. Of course, there are some shallower draft icebreakers that could do a better job, but they're never available or they're assigned to other places. That's really the problem.

Serge Cormier: When it comes to icebreaking by hovercraft, priority is given to places such as rivers, in Quebec and elsewhere, to prevent flooding. Do you think that's actually how it always happens?

Daniel Desbois: Yes, but that's why we want icebreaking to be brought forward so that we don't wait for the rains to make the rivers overflow.

Serge Cormier: I completely agree with you, but there's only one hovercraft.

Once again, then, do you think the Coast Guard has the necessary tools to carry out icebreaking quickly, or would it need more small icebreakers or another hovercraft for a specific region like ours, the southern gulf?

Daniel Desbois: That's for sure.

Serge Cormier: Ultimately, Mr. Desbois, I think the Department of Fisheries and Oceans wants to first protect the right whales. I think your industry recognizes that there's a duty to protect them, and an enormous pressure is being put on the industry to prevent any interaction with these whales, but you aren't being provided the necessary tools to go to sea on time.

If I understand your proposed solution correctly, it's also about having more equipment to open those ports. Is that right?

Daniel Desbois: Yes. Of course, if we want earlier icebreaking, there have to be better tools.

Serge Cormier: Mr. Desbois, it could be said that the season has started relatively early in recent years. There were even years when there was hardly any ice. Is that correct?

Daniel Desbois: Yes, the last two went quite well. Most of the quotas were reached before the whales arrived.

Serge Cormier: I may have time to ask you more questions later, but I'd like to raise a point that isn't a disagreement, but a major concern for the industry as a whole.

Earlier, you said that some regions were ready for fishing before others because they were ice-free, and that's understandable. However, imagine that fishing starts in your region earlier than in the port of Caraquet, for example, or of Shippagan. You know that before the fishing season starts, the economic activity around the wharves is extraordinary. Fishers are buying fishing gear, bait and fuel, and they're eating out at restaurants, among other things.

Imagine that the fishing starts in one region earlier than in the others. Aren't you concerned that some fishers will moor their boats in other regions and that certain regions will lose very significant economic activity?

Daniel Desbois: As I said earlier, that's not what we're advocating. We advocate a simultaneous opening, but the federal government doesn't always have the means to get proper equipment, which makes things hard for everyone. Sometimes, we aren't able to meet our quotas, because the departure was delayed by three or four days, which means that we finish in June and we end up with a bunch of closed areas. We don't want to end up being penalized either. We know the impact of that.

Serge Cormier: I understand 100% what you are saying, and you did a good job of explaining it. However, based on that, I'll ask you my question again: Right now, do you think we lack some tools to be able to open the season earlier and simultaneously for everyone?

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we're already over time. You can give a very brief answer, and then we'll have to move on.

Daniel Desbois: Yes. We need to have a shallow-draft icebreaker, we need to have access to the hovercraft, a tug and all the necessary equipment. Right now, we're not quite up to date.

Serge Cormier: Great, thank you, Mr. Desbois.

● (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

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

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

Good morning to my colleagues.

Mr. Desbois, thank you for being with us, and I hope everything is going well in Hope Town.

I want to summarize what I understood from your presentation. Basically, the bureaucracy of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the DFO and the Coast Guard is slow to act to clear the shipping channels around the Acadian peninsula, and that is causing you problems.

First, why is it important for the crab fishing season to begin as early as possible?

Daniel Desbois: It's to avoid interference with right whales. As I was saying earlier, we have quotas. In the past, we weren't really concerned that the opening of the season would be delayed by a week or two. It ended later, so it wasn't a big deal. However, now that the whales arrive in early June, there are a lot of areas that are closed. Often, these are also large fishing sectors. That restricts and concentrates fishing effort in the same places, which makes fishing much harder and much more expensive.

Alexis Deschênes: You say that it is much more efficient to harvest the resource in April than in June. Why is that?

Daniel Desbois: Fishing in June is less efficient because very large fishing areas are closed. For us, that means moving away from the coast of Quebec and towards the Îles de la Madeleine sector all the way to Cape Breton Island. That's a long way away. It takes somewhere between 15 and 20 hours to get there, give or take. That greatly increases costs and, with a very high concentration of fishers, catch rates drop drastically, which makes it extremely expensive.

Alexis Deschênes: Then, you're in the same area as our fishing friends from the Acadian peninsula. In the interest of fairness, we want all fishers to start at the same time. The important thing is for the shipping lanes to be cleared of ice in a timely manner, precisely so as not to delay the opening of the fishery.

You touched on this a little earlier: How does the decision-making process work between DFO and the Coast Guard? How many people are around the table, and how does it work?

Daniel Desbois: We have what is called the opening committee that used to be run by traditional harvesters, about seven or eight stakeholders. Now there are 105 of us at the table, representing all the provinces, all the indigenous groups, all kinds of small groups. [*Inaudible—Editor*] to decide on an opening date. It doesn't make sense.

Alexis Deschênes: There are a lot of people around the table. The committee is very representative, but is it effective?

Daniel Desbois: It can't be effective. I'll give you an example. There is an ice fishing opening committee, but only one area, in some harbours, gets dredged. It's like that everywhere.

The more stakeholders there are, the more little problems don't get resolved. Some fishers have seven or eight boats, which amount to maybe 1% of the quota, but they had trouble getting their boats into the water this year, which is hurting them. The vote doesn't really represent the catch volume.

Alexis Deschênes: Therefore, the committee proceedings complicate matters.

Otherwise, when the DFO and the Coast Guard make the decision to open the fishery on a given date, does it work? Do they have that capacity right now?

Daniel Desbois: Of course, they don't have the perfect tools, as Mr. Cormier said earlier. They never have the right icebreaker, for example, or the budget isn't big enough for the frog to do its job earlier.

This year, the tug wasn't even available. It had been in Paspébiac for a month, it was not at all available and there was nothing to replace it. Everyone was relying on the amount of ice in the gulf, but the ice is disappearing fast. The weather is extremely hard to predict, even for how fast the ice melts. That's why efforts should be made to set an icebreaking date. If it's known, it might be better for them too. It would be easier to plan if there were a date.

Alexis Deschênes: What happened this year, in concrete terms?

Daniel Desbois: The icebreaker was supposed to come in early March. There's still a big icebreaker, the one that goes to Belledune, that came to do the initial work, but it can't go past a certain point. The one that was supposed to come in early March came on the 5th or 6th. It cut a channel, but it can't get all the way to Shippagan because there's a bridge that blocks it. You need equipment like the frog or the hovercraft, which can also come in because it has a deep draft. It did its job, it left, but the tug wasn't there to keep the channel open, and nobody seemed to know what was going on.

● (1135)

Alexis Deschênes: Was it covered in ice again?

Daniel Desbois: The ice closed up. It froze again. The second icebreaker was forced to come and redo the work. After that, we had to wait for the hovercraft, and all that time, there was still no equipment to keep the channel open.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

That completes our first round.

We're going to start our second round of questioning with Mr. Gunn for five minutes.

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

Ms. Collier, you were talking about the delays and the failure to open the sockeye fishery despite near-record abundance back in 2022, and it happened again this past summer.

From your vantage point, do these decisions being made at DFO have any correlation with abundance, science and evidence, or does it seem that they're being made based on ideology or other factors?

Melissa Collier: I have no idea how those decisions are being made, but once upon a time, abundance meant opportunity and access. Abundance no longer means that. We'll see huge runs of fish, yet we will not be able to access them.

Part of this is that some of the information needed comes from test fishing; we can monitor test fishing and see the numbers that are coming back. In the past, we could usually use that as a fairly good gauge as to whether or not the fishery was going to open, but now we can't. It's very unpredictable. Sometimes the numbers are good but we don't get an opening, and sometimes the numbers are not so good.

You mentioned the 2025 sockeye fishery. I know you discussed that a lot in the last panel. For reference, the area H trollers—the hook-and-line fishery—did not get any openings for the 2025 season despite that historical run.

Aaron Gunn: Wow.

Is it fair to say that fishermen and their families are okay with closures and restrictions if they're genuinely based on conservation concerns but that, on the other side of that coin, if there is abundance, people should be allowed to get out and fish?

Melissa Collier: Absolutely. Nobody wants to fish if the fish aren't there, because it's not economical and it's not good for the population, but if the abundance is there, we don't understand why we're not able to fish.

Aaron Gunn: Have you noticed how the way the decision-making process around these openings and closings has been communicated to you has changed over recent years? Can you give us a 30,000-foot view and take a look back in time?

Melissa Collier: Sure. I have two really good examples.

Before 2019, our chum fishery in area H consistently opened on March 28. It happened like clockwork. The fisheries are managed by fishing days, and there's a peak of a run, so you have to fish *x* number of fish days before the peak and *x* number after. Guys would find out when that peak was, and then they would look at the test fishing and use that to gauge whether or not they should get their boats ready and to gauge when to expect fishing, when to plan their businesses and when to go.

After 2019, we had a historically low chum run. Ever since then, there seems to be a new arbitrary opening date of October 12, not that that's an official thing, but it's what's on our notices. The lead time between our notices and the actual opening date could be five days, three days, eight hours or 10 hours. It's always fluctuating.

We no longer know where the goalpost is; we can't look at test fishing and use that as a reliable measure, so we have to sit there and wait. We have no idea how close we are to being able to go or not, because we don't know what that threshold is.

Another really good, quick example is area F. It's a troll fishery up in Haida Gwaii. Before 2019, again, our chinook opening used to be consistently at the end of June or in mid-July, and now it's a month later. Since 2019, it's been in August, and that has a huge economic impact. We used to fish when the run was at its peak, so we could go out, fish our quota in a couple of weeks and go home. Now it takes us a month or more, so the overall cost of access is higher with fuel.

It's also no longer as viable for small fishing boats. During the peak of the run, the fish are in smaller seas that are more protected, have better weather and are closer to ports. Now, later in the season, the fish are in bigger seas that have much worse weather, are far more exposed and are days from the nearest port, so small boats have a hard time making it work economically. To give you an idea, our vessel used to be a medium-sized vessel in the fleet, and now we're the little guy.

I have another example from area F that includes figures, should time allow, and talks about what those delays look like economically.

● (1140)

Aaron Gunn: You spoke of the financial impacts on your family of this uncertainty around when a fishery was going to open and close. What is the human impact of these delays in decision-making and the uncertainty surrounding them? How has that impacted your life and that of your family?

Melissa Collier: It's stressful. It's really hard to plan a season and make a business case. The overall mental health of fishers in general, including in our family, has gotten worse because we don't have predictability and reliability. How do we plan our business? How do we plan our income? How do we plan our financial situation throughout the year? How do we plan when to go and not go, especially when our fishing grounds are so far away?

It's a big risk to get our boats ready to go out, spend all that money and invest in our gear when we're not even sure if we're going to be able to fish, so it's definitely a mental health situation.

It's also hard on our kids to never really know what's going on. They're very resilient and they're used to the lifestyle, but it is really tough when all of a sudden dad jumps up from a soccer game and is gone for a couple of weeks because we had no idea and then all of a sudden we have an opening.

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

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

We collect a wealth of information from all of you.

Hearing your stories, Ms. Collier, I get the sense that the industry must be a difficult lifestyle for you. Obviously, we hope to make it a little easier.

You talked about how in 2022 the date was given so late and at such short notice. I think you said you had less than 12 hours' notice and you had converted your fishing boat to go to another licence that you have.

How far apart are the two licences for the fishing areas you were talking about, and how long is the travel time between the two?

Melissa Collier: In my opening remarks, I spoke about an area F fishery and an area H fishery.

Area F is around Haida Gwaii, and it takes me about a week to get there. We can get to area H within about a day, but to travel to the mouth of the river where the opening was that year, took two days from my location.

When I say we changed over gear, we changed over to our scallop fishery gear, which is a local fishery. The gear takes us two to three days to swap out.

Having an eight-hour notice doesn't even allow me to change the gear in my boat.

Ernie Klassen: Were you able to change the gear over that year? How did that affect your catch?

Melissa Collier: We did not fish sockeye that year. We were not able to change our gear. Plus, as I said, the initial release was only for 123 fish, and I can't even justify the cost of fuel for only 123 fish. Economically, not being able to fish our salmon season that year cost us about a third of our annual income.

Ernie Klassen: That had quite an impact on you, for sure.

You also talked about fisheries requiring in-season decision-making. Can you expand on that? Could some decisions be made a little sooner so that they aren't as last minute from your perspective?

Melissa Collier: Yes. I don't understand exactly what is feeding these decisions, where the pinch points and delays are, and why things can't be done more quickly. Before 2019, it seemed that decisions were made in a timely manner, and now they are not. I don't know why that is.

The reason in-season is so important is that the salmon are moving. Since 2019, a lot of the opportunities that we've been given have come after the fish have gone south. If we don't get that timely opening, we literally miss the fish, because they continue moving out of our area and they're no longer there in numbers that are economically viable for us to access. That's why it's so critical that we have those faster decisions.

● (1145)

Ernie Klassen: You alluded to 2019. Prior to that year, were decisions made earlier than you've seen since then?

Melissa Collier: Yes, they seemed to be made earlier. They seemed to be made with more information, and everything was more reliable and consistent.

Ernie Klassen: Do you think that climate change has had an impact on how these decisions are being made?

Melissa Collier: I'm not sure. I wish I understood the decision-making models within DFO. I think a piece that commercial fishermen struggle with is a lack of clarity and information. Maybe somebody out there has the information, but among the general population of fishers, we feel like we're making big decisions blind. We just don't have the information we need.

Ernie Klassen: I think you said your family has been fishing for 40 years. How many people do you employ in your business?

Melissa Collier: In a given season, we can employ two to six. It depends on whether we have the same crew or not. We're a small vessel, so usually it's my husband fishing with two crew and myself, which would make us a crew of four. Sometimes our crew fluctuates through the season, but it's definitely two and sometimes more.

Ernie Klassen: Thank you for those comments.

Mr. Desbois, I don't really understand the icebreaking myself, not being an east coast person. You said that the icebreaking needs better planning. How do you see that happening? Could you expand on that?

[*Translation*]

Daniel Desbois: That's the goal. It's because of the ice coverage in the gulf. Often, the opening date at sea can vary from the end of March to mid-April at the latest. We often lose two, three or four days because ice wasn't cleared from the harbours in New Brunswick quickly enough.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Klassen.

[*Translation*]

I will now give the floor to Mr. Deschênes for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to continue the discussion with you, Mr. Desbois.

You explained earlier how this fishing season couldn't start as quickly as people would have liked, and that this will complicate matters. Is there a way for you to quantify the consequences of that for crab fishers? What does it mean financially for them when the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Coast Guard aren't able to open the shipping lanes on the Acadian peninsula, thus delaying the start of the season?

Daniel Desbois: It is already hard to hire our staff at the best of times. Often, staff are hired up to two weeks before the required time. For example, this year, there is a risk of area closures because the whales are heading out to sea later. There is a risk of not making the quotas. It's hard to assess.

In recent years, many guys have had to release 25 tons of crab back into the water. If we are also unlucky enough to have a mechanical breakdown on top of it, we can barely make up the shortfall because of the number of closed areas. It's hard to put an exact figure on it, but the losses can be huge for some people.

Alexis Deschênes: You said that one day's delay at the start of the season is equivalent to three or four more days in June. Is that about right?

Daniel Desbois: Yes, that's about right. It's because of the catch rate and the distance you have to travel to get to the fishing grounds.

Alexis Deschênes: For example, how much does a crab fisher spend per day on fuel?

Daniel Desbois: It depends. It's at least $5,000 to $10,000 per day for the largest crab fishers who have to go from the Gaspé coast to the Îles de la Madeleine.

Alexis Deschênes: In closing, Mr. Desbois, what would it take to improve things?

● (1150)

Daniel Desbois: We definitely need better equipment, the right icebreakers and better planning. I think we need a predictable opening date and we need to stop relying on the ice conditions in the gulf. The focus should instead be on the conditions in the harbours of the Maritimes. That's where the icebreaking needs are. That's what's delaying the opening year after year.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

Colleagues, I'm looking at the time here. We'll have enough time for three minutes for the Conservatives and three minutes for the Liberals before we wrap the first panel.

With that, I'm going to hand it over to Mr. Morrison.

Welcome to the committee.

Rob Morrison (Columbia—Kootenay—Southern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Collier, my questions are going to be in your area. You have a generational history of fishing, much like our loggers in the interior and our guides and outfitters. I know that you know you need to have fish to support your family, generation after generation.

Why is it so difficult for DFO to sit down and talk with our generational fisher people and get some of the expertise? I struggle with this because you are the real experts who know what's going on, not necessarily an academic who sits in Ottawa. Common sense is not all that common here. It certainly isn't common in this area because of some of the challenges you have. I wonder if you could comment on that.

Melissa Collier: There are a lot of different panels and harvest committees that do sit down with DFO. It just seems that a lot of the time the advice that's provided is not taken. I have a letter here from a harvest committee for area F that talks about a delay in our season of six days in 2023. It was a sudden, last-minute decision. It was going to cost $25,000 to $50,000 per vessel in loss of income, but that delay wasn't even supported by DFO's own science.

That's the kind of stuff we're dealing with. There's science and advice, but it just doesn't seem to be taken into account.

Rob Morrison: Here's a really big question: How do we somehow change that?

Melissa Collier: If we knew the answer to that, we would be pushing for those solutions. I don't have a magic way of understanding how to fix that. I wish I did.

Rob Morrison: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: There is one more minute for Mr. Gunn.

Aaron Gunn: Thank you, Chair.

I have another quick question for you, Ms. Collier.

Has the uncertainty surrounding opening and closing dates also been exacerbated by the effects of MPAs and other spatial closures in the fishing grounds you're used to fishing in?

Melissa Collier: Absolutely. All uncertainty adds up and makes it really challenging.

Here's a prime example: We no longer have an are H licence. We chose to sell our prawn licence for a variety of reasons, one of which was being displaced by MPAs. There was also a change in the fishery to faster boats and more crowded fishing areas. Our licences were married, so we couldn't just sell that licence. We had to sell the package and then try to find individual salmon licences to purchase back, ones that fit our vessel—that were for the right length. We did find them, but when we went to do that exchange, the licence cost was so high. It's really hard to incur that cost for an areas fishery where I haven't had a meaningful open since 2018.

All of it was exacerbated. All that uncertainty adds up. Then you end up making these huge financial decisions, such as having to walk away from an entire licence that your family has been fishing for 30-plus years.

Aaron Gunn: You have uncertainty around when you can fish, whether you can even fish and where you will be allowed to send your boats to fish. Obviously, these compound.

Do you think this makes it harder and harder for the next generation of fishers to enter the market? Who would make any investments or try to continue in this industry at all?

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm afraid I have to jump in here.

Please give a very quick answer, Ms. Collier. Then we have to go to our next intervenor.

Melissa Collier: Absolutely. Who would want to invest that much money in licences and boats in an industry so incredibly uncertain that you have no idea what kinds of finances you will have to support your family with?

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

We're going to finish this first panel with Mr. Cormier for three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For my colleagues around the table, I know we talked a lot earlier about the ports in my region that aren't opened on time, but in other years, there have also been problems with ports in Nova Scotia and even in Prince Edward Island. Some years, in Quebec, ice in the gulf meant that, unfortunately, it was sometimes unsafe to go out to sea.

Mr. Desbois, we talked earlier about the Canadian Coast Guard's lack of planning and a lot of bureaucratic red tape. However, at the end of the day, if there isn't the equipment needed to clear ice from some parts of the harbours and channels to allow early fishing openings, it doesn't help.

I want to make sure I hear you correctly: What would your recommendations be for an early opening of the fishery?

● (1155)

Daniel Desbois: Our fishers think that if the Coast Guard set a date for icebreaking, it would help the situation a lot. That would help them plan, never mind the ice conditions in the gulf.

Serge Cormier: The Coast Guard already has the dates. It knows that there are whale protection measures imposed by the DFO. People say that they have to go out fishing as soon as possible. The Coast Guard knows that seaports must be cleared of ice as soon as possible. However, if it doesn't have the tools to do so, that's a problem.

Wouldn't you agree that we should have our own tools so people can go out fishing earlier?

Daniel Desbois: Yes, I agree. However, it can't be said that they don't have tools either. This year, the Coast Guard came by on April 5 and 6. Last year, we were at sea on April 2. Why did it come by on April 6 this year? Of course, the conditions at sea were not the same, but having our own tools still requires planning. We also have to use the tools when the time comes.

Serge Cormier: Some of those tools were used. The frog cleared ice from the ports of Shippagan and Caraquet. The big icebreakers cleared ice further offshore. The small icebreaker also went as far as it could go. As for the hovercraft, there is only one for a very large region. The small icebreakers that are used to go into the shallower channels are used more for the larger lakes.

Given all the measures we're putting in place to protect right whales and the pressure your industry is under, don't you think we should focus more on our region and acquire our own tools so that we don't have the same problems every year?

Daniel Desbois: Yes, we would definitely like to have our own tools. It remains to be seen whether it's possible to have our own tools, but in an ideal world, yes.

Serge Cormier: That's great, Mr. Desbois. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

[*English*]

Colleagues, that brings us to the end of the first panel.

I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today and providing some really important testimony for our study that is surely going to help inform some recommendations to government.

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

● (1155)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1200)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I just want to make a few comments for the benefit of our new witnesses.

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

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

All comments should be addressed through the chair.

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

Appearing by video conference, we have Michael Griswold from the British Columbia Salmon Purse Seiners Association.

We have David Summers from the Serengeti Fishing Charters, and Warren Barker and Ivan Chu from the Vancouver Sport Fishing Guides Association.

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

Michael Griswold (British Columbia Salmon Purse Seiners Association): I am a long-time fisherman. For 46 years, I've fished salmon, herring, dogfish, prawns and a few other things. I have been involved in co-management with the Department of Fisheries for many of those years—since 1982 to be exact. I was an industry adviser to the Canada-U.S. negotiations, which resulted in the Pacific Salmon Treaty. As a result of that, I was appointed to the Fraser River panel at its inception in 1985.

I was on the Fraser River panel for approximately 40 years, until 2025, when I found that, as a matter of conscience, I had to resign from that position. There were significant changes occurring within the department, which left a large component of the stakeholder community out of those decisions. It was a strategic resignation. It was meant to bring attention to what was happening in 2025. There was a very large, unanticipated run of sockeye salmon, and the department found no way to provide meaningful commercial access to that fish. In my history of co-management on the Fraser River panel, I found that it was a significant change. It was an alteration this industry could not withstand.

We, in this fishing industry—the B.C. Salmon Purse Seiners Association, trollers and gillnetters—rely on fish for our livelihoods. We have been sitting back for a while, without much opportunity, because there haven't been many fish. This year, in 2025, because of the unexpected abundance, we forgot how to manage the fisheries, and I thought the department needed a wake-up call.

We are embarking upon a new year, in 2026. It is what they call an Adams River dominant year, when there is expected to be a lot of fish. We have seen an opening with DFO and other communities that have a bearing on how fish are managed in British Columbia. They're willing to at least talk to us, which didn't happen last year. This is all well and fine. However, there is no formal agreement.

DFO and the government have entered into a relationship with a body of first nations groups on the salmon management plans, specifically sockeye and chinook in the Fraser River. It is a formal agreement. There's a memorandum of understanding. That provides first nations with priority in how escapement goals are set, which is the underlying foundation of how we manage fish.

We in the non-native community need some kinds of reassurances and guarantees that our needs and wants will also be taken into account. There will be a change of administration sometime in the future. Unless there is something in black and white, we do not have the protections they have given us this year but were absent last year. We're asking for our needs and wants to be considered. We are willing to work in a round table with other stakeholders, particularly first nations that have a very strong call on this resource. That call should not be taken to mean that it diminishes other stakeholders' resources, such as the commercial fishing community and the recreational fishing community.

● (1205)

I should note that this last year, in 2025, we ended up with a run of 19 million pink salmon. The total commercial catch of Fraser River pink salmon last year was 27,000 pieces. We ended up with a run of around 9.5 million sockeye, and the total commercial catch of that was around 150,000. This is abysmally low. We do not want to find ourselves in that circumstance again.

I'm willing to further expand on this, but I'll leave my comments at that.

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

Next, we're going to Mr. Summers.

David Summers (Serengeti Fishing Charters): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me here today. It's a pleasure to be back in Ottawa. I graduated from Carleton University what I like to think was just a short while ago.

My name is David Summers. I have owned and run our family business, Serengeti Fishing Charters, in Port Hardy on northern Vancouver Island for the past 20 years. We take guests from all over Canada and the U.S. fishing, primarily for chinook salmon and halibut, but also ling cod, rockfish and coho salmon. I have also recently become involved in various committees and working groups on the sport fishing advisory board.

To say that the purview of this study relates not only to my company but also to the entire sector would be an understatement. Unexpected and inconsistent closures truly would destroy our sector, my business and my ability to provide for my family.

While I have a deep love for the fishery, my primary motivation is supporting my family—my wife and our two daughters, Saige Grace, who is named after a fishing rod, and Kaia Saylor. As their names suggest, our connection to the ocean and fishing runs deep. It's not just a passion, but a meaningful part of who we are. Like so many families on the west coast, we do not live near the ocean; we live on it.

While on the east coast the commercial fishery has deep impacts on the social fabric of communities, on the west coast, it is in fact the recreational fishery, or the public fishery as I refer to it, that runs deep in our culture. The public fishery in British Columbia plays a significant social role by enhancing connections between people and nature. For many in our small, local communities, fishing is more than a pastime; it is a way of life that brings family and friends together. Activities like salmon fishing are deeply embedded in our coastal identity. The public fishery also allows many to get out into the wilderness and heighten their personal environmental responsibility, potentially creating more environmentally conscious-minded individuals going forward.

Further to the social importance to the coast, the public fishery is an economic driver of B.C.'s blue or ocean economy. Our sector's salmon fishery has an economic impact similar to the snow crab fishery on the east coast. The public fishery as a whole contributes the second most of any fishery to Canada's GDP, behind only the lobster fishery. Our fishery brings the most money into the economy with the least environmental impact and the fewest actual fish harvested. Historically, our sector has harvested only 7.02% of salmon on B.C.'s coasts and only 15% of halibut, yet we contribute more to the economy than all commercial fisheries, aquaculture and fish processing combined.

My company alone has four full-time employees and six part-time employees. It spends nearly three-quarters of a million dollars annually at other Vancouver Island businesses. Port Hardy has 13 charter operators doing this, plus literally hundreds of people bring their own boats with their families to the area. This is only Port Hardy, never mind other coastal communities with significantly more public fisheries activity, like Port Renfrew, Bamfield, Gold River and Port Alberni. I could name dozens more.

It is not only the charter operators that benefit from this, but also local restaurants and hotels, fish processors, mechanic shops, tackle stores, marinas, fuel docks, grocery stores and the list keeps going. All could not survive without this industry in our town, as it has become an economic driver while our other resource industries—forestry, mining and aquaculture—continue to struggle.

What is the biggest economic threat to these coastal towns and their public fisheries economies? It is closures that are not based on data or science and come with very little notice. Whether it's closures due to killer whales or restrictions on Fraser River stocks of concern, over the last 10 years, DFO has created policy after policy that hurt the public fishery. Now we are in the middle of a salmon allocation policy review that truly could ruin our public salmon fishery on the coast of B.C. and all the economic and social benefits that accompany it.

Families and guests plan their trips over a year in advance. It is vital that we have stability in our fishery. Proposed changes to the allocation policy will result in uncertainty on openings, closures and even our already minimal harvest limits.

My family is my world, as many of you can relate to. Without a consistent and reliable fishery, I could not provide for them. The same could be said for thousands more families across the coast. Any early closures or closures not based on data or science would take away my ability to ensure that my family and many others on the coast are economically secure.

I thank you for your time, and I look forward to any questions you might have.

● (1210)

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

We are going to conclude with opening remarks from Mr. Barker for five minutes or less.

Warren Barker (Vancouver Sports Fishing Guides Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members.

I'll be sharing my comments along with Ivan Chu, who's also a part of the Vancouver Sport Fishing Guides Association. My name is Warren Barker. I'm the president of the Vancouver Sport Fishing Guides Association. I have 20 years of guiding experience and I'm a second-generation fishing guide. We represent the Vancouver Sport Fishing Guides Association's about 25 charter boats.

The importance of recreational fishing, salmon fishing, coho and chinook are integral to B.C.'s cultural, economic and tourism identity. These species support a globally recognized recreational fishery that attracts visitors from all over Canada and internationally. British Columbia is widely regarded as a premier salmon fishing destination, contributing significantly to tourism revenues.

There are impacts to delayed regulation decisions. Approximately 80% of our customers participating in fishing charters in the greater Vancouver area travel from outside British Columbia. Delays in announcing fishing regulations limit visitors' ability to travel and book accommodations, increase costs due to last-minute bookings and reduce overall tourism activity.

For charter operators, uncertainty prevents effective business planning and advance bookings. Peak tourism demands occur in July and August, which often coincide with chinook retention closures, further reducing our ability to produce revenue.

There are regional inequities in fisheries access. Current management measures create significant disparities between regions. Chinook fisheries in the Vancouver area, Strait of Georgia, Burrard Inlet and Howe Sound are closed from April 1 to August 31, while fisheries on the eastern side of the strait, i.e., Nanaimo and up near Gibsons, open July 15. These differences place metro Vancouver-based operators at a competitive disadvantage because they need to travel across the strait and are constrained by weather conditions, rising fuel costs and customer affordability.

Since 2019, the businesses in the Vancouver area have experienced, in certain times of the year, a 65% decline as a result of chinook closures.

● (1215)

Ivan Chu (Vancouver Sports Fishing Guides Association): Hi. My name is Ivan Chu. I am the vice-president of the Vancouver Sport Fishing Guides Association.

My background in fishing started when I was a young boy growing up in Steveston, a community commercial fishing village. My job back then as a teenager was working in the fish cannery. It was such a good living that my brother and I at 15 and 16 years old were making more money per hour than my father who was working for Canadian Pacific Air Lines. We worked there every summer in the fish cannery. I also went fishing with my friends, whose dads were Japanese fishermen. We learned how to fish. I grew up fishing. I became a police officer, and I maintained my fishing. I became a fishing guide on the weekends and on my days off to support my family of three, because my wife chose to stay at home to raise kids while I did my job. I also had a small boat that I could take people fishing in.

I'll get into scientific evidence and missed opportunities of DFO-funded test fisheries. For the last two years, 2024 and 2025, we've had test fisheries in the months of April and May in Howe Sound. They go out and intentionally catch fish from which to take DNA samples. Of all the fish caught, 90% of the legal-size chinook salmon were of hatchery origin. They were clipped, meaning that the adipose fin was missing, so they came most likely from an American hatchery or some test hatcheries that were clipping chinooks, because we were not clipping chinooks at a 100% rate; local hatcheries were only clipping anywhere from 10% to 15%. The fish that were caught were in the 90-percentile range of hatchery origin.

What is significant is that there is a mark-selective fishery 17 miles away from us and beyond, where they're allowed to fish in April and May in the Southern Gulf Islands, around Victoria and further up the coast, for hatchery chinook salmon. We are not allowed to. That is a big economic hardship on our local operators and for our tourism. Potential clients would rather jump on a ferry and go fish with somebody across, and we tell them to. We tell clients, “If you want to keep fish, go across and fish the Southern Gulf Islands. Go to Victoria, spend your money there and you will be able to retain a salmon”.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Chu, but we are at time. Could you conclude? There will be some time for questions afterwards.

Ivan Chu: Mr. Summers and other witnesses have already talked about the 1.38 billion dollars' worth of revenue being generated by the recreational fishing industry. There are 9,100 jobs. Five per cent of British Columbia's tourism dollars come directly from people coming to British Columbia to go fishing.

The other point we want to make concerns the southern whale restrictions on us. Right now, the north arm area is closed during the prime summertime return. It has been since 2019. We're not allowed to fish there. It's forcing us to go farther towards the south arm and middle arm. Now there is a proposed closure. They're looking at closing the south arm area, meaning that everybody who fishes in metro Vancouver will go to one small area to fish. We're really affected by what's coming, and—

● (1220)

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to jump in. We're quite a bit over time.

We're going into the first round of questioning with Mr. Gunn.

Aaron Gunn: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Summers, off the coast of Vancouver Island, DFO is actively considering additional fishing closures and restrictions on top of those already in place, whether it's for the notional goal of protecting killer whales or weak stock management on the Fraser.

Do you believe these proposed closures are based on abundance, science and evidence or on ideology?

David Summers: I would say that it depends on where you are.

The additional ones they're looking at—at least from what I've seen at the main sport fishing advisory board meeting—would be based more on ideology, in the sense that they're listening to only one stakeholder, not all stakeholders involved.

Aaron Gunn: Why do you think they're pushing ahead with these decisions and not taking into account the views of all stakeholders?

David Summers: Since 2015, essentially, the fisheries have become—on the west coast anyway, especially the public fishery—a pawn in the reconciliation game, if you will. We give up a lot of what...more restrictions for one user group. In certain places, the FSC fisheries have priority over us, which is absolutely fair, as do commercial indigenous fisheries.

I wish DFO would listen more to all stakeholders because this affects livelihoods and everyone on the coast's ability to go out and fish.

Aaron Gunn: Obviously, there's been a lot of talk about the salmon allocation policy review.

In your view, could this affect the opening and closing dates for recreational fishers like you?

David Summers: Absolutely. It would be the biggest thing to affect it in my lifetime.

My understanding is that they're looking to put a cap or quota system on our chinook and coho fishery. That would most likely result in a mid-August, beginning-of-August or even late-July closure on certain species. Some places, as mentioned before, don't even open until August 31.

Aaron Gunn: If the opening date, for example, was pushed back, what would it mean for your business, your family and coastal communities like Port Hardy?

David Summers: It would be devastating, obviously, especially since August is the busiest or second-busiest month in Port Hardy for fisheries—between July and August. If, all of a sudden, you take half of that out, it would halve our revenue. It would halve our ability to make a living for our families. Most of our costs are fixed, too. It would almost make the business unsustainable.

Aaron Gunn: Over the past few years, we've had this big increase in technology everywhere, obviously, and a number of resources at DFO.

Has the way they've been able to communicate opening and closing dates gotten better or worse in recent years?

David Summers: It's worse, in the sense that the integrated fisheries management plan for this year, for example, isn't coming out until June 30. In the past, it would have come out in March or April. Alaska announces their chinook limits for the year in March.

In my season, I have guests showing up on July 1. I can't tell them with 100% certainty that they're going to be allowed to keep a chinook. I could tell them in the past that they would be able to, but I can't tell them for sure now because the IFMP for this year doesn't come out until June 30.

Aaron Gunn: We hear a lot here in Ottawa these days about there being a new government.

Have you noticed any changes in how DFO makes and announces decisions since Mark Carney became the Prime Minister?

David Summers: No, I haven't yet. I'm hopeful because I know he was elected on an economic priority, and the public fishery contributes, as I said earlier, the most to the economy of the coast among all the fisheries combined. I hope so. The mass marking announcement was a welcome thing for our community.

Other than that, I would say, “Not yet, anyway”.

Aaron Gunn: My next question is for Mr. Griswold.

Can you explain why the Fraser River sockeye opening was so late and the catch opportunity so limited despite the near record returns here in the past summer?

Michael Griswold: Well, the timing of it wasn't necessarily late. It usually happens around the first week of August. The problem was that the forecast for 2025 was approximately a quarter of what returned, and part of the problem—a significant part of the problem—was that there was a component of the Fraser sockeye with the late runs, which were essentially all expected to die in transit there.

There have been problems with late-run sockeye for many years, starting in 1996 and 1998, and the management plan basically assumed that these fish were going to die. It was sort of the marching orders that the Pacific Salmon Commission had given, and a significant problem was that those fish did not die this year. They survived. They survived very well, but the management—

● (1225)

Aaron Gunn: Did DFO know that well in advance?

Michael Griswold: No, they did not. They were looking at a magic date of September 13 in the Fraser River as the date that said that anything that passed by Mission after September 13 was going to live and everything before that was going to die. Therein lies part of the problem. If they expected that all these fish were going to die beforehand, might there not have been an opportunity to harvest those fish that were not going to survive, in addition to the surplus summer stocks?

That is a sort of double jeopardy for the commercial fishing fleet, because we're paying two times. We're paying once because there's the assumption that the fish are going to die, and then we pay because we lose that access. To get back to it, there—

The Chair: I'm going to have to jump in here, Mr. Griswold. We're over the time, but there are going to be some opportunities to expand on that answer going forward.

Michael Griswold: Okay.

The Chair: With that, I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Klassen for six minutes.

Ernie Klassen: Thanks so much.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Griswold, in your speaking notes that you submitted to us, you say that in 2025 “it became known that the 2025 run size far exceeded the preseason forecast”.

When was the forecast prediction made known? Also, can you talk a bit about how the forecast is created and when it became known that the actual run was different?

Michael Griswold: The forecast is generally presented to the fishing community from the Pacific Salmon Commission in February. The forecast is derived from a bunch of different scientific analyses. A lot of it is based on the returns to spawners from the brood. There are other considerations, such as projected marine survival and freshwater survival. There's a small enumeration that is done on a couple of runs, but it all goes into this big mixing pot and out of it comes the forecast.

The forecast was derived primarily because it was considered to be.... As you know, the last few years have not been very kind to Fraser sockeye. Things were not coming back very well.

Well, 2025 was a big surprise, and we began to see the beginnings of the survival, the increase in marine survival, with the earliest component, which was the early Stuart run that came back approximately seven times greater than the forecast.

Then the other runs started to follow suit, not quite to that same extent, but everything, every component of the Fraser run—the early Stuarts, the early summers, the summers and the lates—came back significantly greater than the forecast, so by the time the middle of August came along, we had a big run.

Ernie Klassen: Thank you.

Mr. Summers, will the announcement about mass markings that you alluded to, and PSSI, be helpful to the recreational fishers?

David Summers: Absolutely, they will be, too. They obviously need to be coupled with other things. For example, the minister announcing that the salmon allocation policy may remain unchanged would be one of those, because if we don't have opportunities, there won't be volunteers for these hatcheries to do all this. Every hatchery that I know up and down the coast has hundreds and hundreds of hours of volunteer work from public fishers going there and helping out. If they don't have an opportunity to catch those chinook and keep them, I doubt that you'd see that kind of volunteer engagement as well.

● (1230)

Ernie Klassen: Mr. Summers, you did talk about fishing being the economic driver in the small west coast communities. Obviously we want to ensure that the fisheries and the small family businesses carry on. Have you seen a decline in the industry, or are you only forecasting that there will be a decline? How can we prevent a decline from happening?

David Summers: There's definitely been a decline since 2019 when the Fraser River 52 restrictions came in. No longer can I fish five minutes from the dock until July 15. I have to run for an hour to an hour and 10 minutes. Locals who have small boats under 25 feet don't have the ability to run up to where I've run to to go fishing. It has really restricted even locals to go and have the ability to catch salmon five minutes from the dock for the majority of the summer.

Ernie Klassen: Mr. Chu, you talked about the killer whales; we all want to make sure that we keep the population going. How does this affect your industry? Do the current policies around the killer whales, from your perspective, need to be revised?

Ivan Chu: I've said that right now a big section of the north arm of the Fraser River is closed, so we can't fish there during prime fishing season. They're proposing to close the south arm as well, and then force us into the middle, between the two closures, so everybody will have to fish there.

We should adapt the American policy of a bubble zone, which they have in Canada now. We used to be at 400 metres, now we're at 1,000 metres if killer whales are involved. You can't have a static closure for three months hoping that whales might show up there to feed, and keep us out of there, and then have us move 1,000 metres away if there's a killer whale. The eight whale monitoring associations out there have only reported one sighting of the southern resident killer whale, on September 13, 2024. There hasn't been a sighting at the north arm since 2019, when they closed it. There was one sighting in 2024 during our fishing season in September down at the south arm. Up to this date, there's been one sighting of killer whales up by Keats Island, which is in the Howe Sound area, and they were transient killer whales, not the southern resident killer whales.

Yes, we want to protect the whales, but we should move to that bubble zone and not have static closures. That's what we're trying to get across to DFO.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Griswold, in your opening remarks, you talked about how you had to reluctantly resign from the Fraser Panel in 2025 because you felt that Canada's commercial fishing sector was caught up in a process that you felt was compromised. Why did you write that?

[*English*]

Michael Griswold: I wrote it because I felt it.

Basically, I had given 40 years of my life to the Fraser River management process, working on behalf of Canada for the Fraser River panel.

As I said in my statement, I worked collaboratively with the DFO. We negotiated fishing plans that were based upon conservation and whatnot. In 2025, things changed. There was an iron door in front of expanding opportunities when the conditions warranted. The warranted conditions this year were that the run came back four times greater than the forecast. This, under normal circumstances, would have allowed more fishing, but the department would not allow expanded opportunities there, because they had made an arrangement with a group called the Fraser Salmon Management Board. This basically stymied and blocked any opportunity because of the anticipation that they would want to put a lot of fish on the spawning grounds, which is another issue.

My issue was that there were significant changes in how the department was allowing opportunities to go fishing, allowing openings. It needed a spotlight on it. The only way I could figure to put the spotlight on it was with a very public resignation.

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: If I understand you correctly, you're saying the system is corrupt, meaning that the decision-makers at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans did not make a rigorous, consistent and fact-based decision, but rather a decision to favour certain interests.

[*English*]

Michael Griswold: I wouldn't say the system was corrupt. I think that the system had changed and there were a whole bunch of new players from both DFO and from other groups who influenced the decision-making. In my kind way of putting it, they did that very naively. This is a common misperception for a lot of people—that if you put more fish on the spawning grounds on salmon streams, you always get more return. That's not necessarily the case.

In this particular case, that was the guiding influence of why DFO, in conjunction with the Fraser Salmon Management Board, went the way they did. There was enough information. In my 40 years of participating I have learned a few things. It is my estimation that putting all these extra fish on the spawning grounds could actually have negative effects, not necessarily good effects. Unfortunately, they were not listening to me. They weren't listening to others who were saying the same things.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: At that time, how did you understand the actions of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans? Which group was it trying to accommodate?

[*English*]

Michael Griswold: They had entered into a formal arrangement with Fraser River first nations. It was some marine area. It's called the Fraser Salmon Management Board. They had provided, through a memorandum of understanding, the right for that group to set the escapement goals. As I said earlier, setting the escapement goals is the foundation for end-times fisheries management. It was their naive belief on some of those established escapement goals that had a very negative effect on all our fisheries, particularly, as I said earlier, upon the late run, which basically was the determining factor on how we managed the fish there in 2025.

All salmon stocks tend to mix together. Some of them come earlier, some of them come later, but at some point they overlap. You might have a whole bunch of abundant stocks, but if they overlap with smaller stocks or less abundant stocks then you fish to the lowest common denominator.

In this case, the late runs obligated a 10% harvest rate, which was a lot less than the 50% we were allowed on the early summer runs.

● (1240)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

That finishes our first round of questions. We're going right into the second one, with Mr. Small for five minutes.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to start by putting a motion on notice.

Mr. Chair, it reads:

> That,
>
> (a) considering the concerns around the publishing of the report: Four Wind Energy Areas (WEAs) in the Offshore of Nova Scotia: A Description of the Primary Marine Ecosystem Features, Significant and Protected Areas, At-risk and Depleted Species, Fish and Fisheries, Science Surveys, and Other Human Uses that May Occur In and Around the French Bank, Middle Bank, Sable Island Bank, and Sydney Bight Areas (Report) in the Canadian Manuscript Report of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 3312;
>
> (b) pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) be ordered to provide to the committee, within 30 days of the adoption of this motion, the following:
>
> (i) all documents, including but not limited to memoranda, briefing notes, and internal communications, related to the decision to produce this report, including any requests for its preparation and associated allocation of resources,
>
> (ii) all documents related to the timing of the report's public release, including any correspondence or briefings concerning its publication in relation to announcements on offshore wind development for the Scotian Shelf,
>
> (iii) all documents relating to internal review processes for the report, including any peer review, inter-branch consultations, or assessments conducted within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, including Science and Fisheries Management,
>
> (iv) all documents relating to consultations, or lack thereof, with the fishing industry in the preparation of the report,
>
> (v) all documents relating to the omission of Integrated Fisheries Management Plans (IFMPs), Recovery Potential Assessments (RPAs), or SARA-required recovery strategies in the report,
>
> (vi) all internal communications, records of decisions, briefing materials, analyses, and other documents relating to the use of this report in departmental decision-making; and
>
> (c) pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertakes one 2-hour meeting with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, to be held one week after all requested documentation is received by all Members of the committee, and the scope of the meeting be on the report.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Now—

The Chair: The motion's been received. Obviously, you need to give 48 hours' notice, so it can't be moved at this time.

Clifford Small: No.

The Chair: It's now been received.

Clifford Small: Thank you Mr. Chair.

Now, I have a question for Mr. Griswold.

Mr. Griswold, how could DFO have gotten last year's Fraser sockeye estimate so dreadfully wrong?

Michael Griswold: It is one of the surprises that happen in Pacific salmon management. We have had really good surprises and bad surprises. The great unknown is what happens in marine survival.

Basically the salmon spend two years in fresh water and then go out into the ocean. It was really benign. While there were signs, there was no definitive sign that said we were going to see this increased marine survival.

In 2010, we ended up with a run of 30 million sockeye, which was almost two and a half times bigger than expected. This was also a product of marine survival. Marine survival can also cut the life right out of the fishery there too.

What happened was that we had been experiencing bad marine survival for a while. That might have had some downward influence on the forecast, but not that much. Nobody was really expecting quite the surplus, the bounty, that came back last year. It was a good surprise.

Clifford Small: The minister is ultimately responsible for decisions that affect the livelihoods of groups such as those we have here today at this committee. Do you think the government cares about your livelihoods?

● (1245)

Michael Griswold: I think it is one component of their job to care, but sometimes it is eclipsed by other issues. Sometimes it's hard to understand why.

In particular, there's another fishery that I participate in. It's called the B.C. chum salmon fishery. We are locked into this unfortunate circumstance in which we've had half our fishery taken away in order to protect interior Fraser steelhead, even though, in the group that I participated in, we had caught something like only 40 of them there over the last little while. It has basically decimated half our livelihood there.

When we ask whether the department or the minister cares, it is hard to balance with those decisions that have eliminated those opportunities. We are asking, at least, to get real science, real data before the minister, to provide her with better decision-making tools that might provide us with a relaxation of the restrictions we're seeing. Yes, it's a mixed message. Yes, she cares, but she balances it against other things.

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

Next, we go to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes.

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

My first question is for Mr. Summers. You began answering a question on mass marking and PSSI, as they impact the recreational fishery. You ran out of time, but could you expand on that and advise the committee? Do you see this as a progressive step?

David Summers: Absolutely, it's a progressive step, but on its own, it doesn't.... It helps certain areas, for sure, but it definitely needs to be coupled with other things as well.

There's no doubt that the fishery is in decline, as I mentioned earlier, and it won't be just one thing—such as mass marking 100% of our hatchery fish—that's going to save it. There definitely need to be more steps taken...allowing access to British Columbians and Canadians to the fish that are a public resource.

Robert Morrissey: You stated that the fishery is in decline.

David Summers: Yes, absolutely. I meant that the public fishery is in decline.

Robert Morrissey: Yes, so, prudently, you would have to take some steps to prevent it from total decimation.

David Summers: Absolutely, yes.

Robert Morrissey: Thanks.

Mr. Chu, you referenced a bubble zone. I believe you made some reference to that. Could you explain the difference between Canada and the U.S.A.? Explain it a bit more, if you could.

Ivan Chu: In a bubble zone, if we're fishing and killer whales are present, we have to pick up our gear and move at least 1,000 metres or 1 kilometre away—and that's everybody. When the pod of whales has gone through, we go back to fishing. Whereas, when we have static closure, it means this whole area is out of bounds, whether the whales are there or not. It's simply out of bounds. Washington state has adopted the bubble zone, which they find works really well: If there are killer whales present, you pick up your gear and go. You generally know when killer whales are present because the whale-watching boats are there.

Robert Morrissey: Could you explain to the committee, with the U.S. adopting this in the state of Washington, if there has been any negative impact on the killer whale population there because of their using this methodology?

Ivan Chu: No, because we're staying away from the whales. They're staying away from them, because prior to that—

Robert Morrissey: Why should Canada follow a different protocol from the U.S.?

Ivan Chu: I don't know why. They just brought in the bubble zone as part of the law now, but they still have—

Robert Morrissey: Who brought it in as part of the law, the U.S. or Canada?

Ivan Chu: Canada did. They're following what the U.S. did.

Robert Morrissey: We're going to follow in line.

Ivan Chu: We have the bubble zone now. It's taken effect.

Robert Morrissey: Okay.

Ivan Chu: However, we also have the static closure, which means we can't go in the area where the fish are, because it's closed for the killer whales, and there's no scientific data to show that they were there. In the last two years, there's been one sighting in the new area they're proposing, which is the river's southern arm—that was in September 2024—and zero in the northern arm, where they've had it closed for six years now.

● (1250)

Robert Morrissey: I have a question for Mr. Griswold. You made a number of comments about good and bad surprises, and then you also referenced real science. “Real science” is a term I hear quite often in this committee from witnesses, depending on which side of the science they fall on. Could you expand for the committee on your definition of “real science”?

Michael Griswold: Well, real science has a foundation of data. It has real information that is—

Robert Morrissey: Is the department not operating with real data?

Michael Griswold: No. Sometimes it has compromised data.

In my allusion to the chum fishery, it is somewhat mixed there. What happens for our chum fishery in British Columbia is that, if there's any encounter whatsoever with a steelhead—we were looking at conducting test fisheries to basically establish whether there was a real steelhead problem—the demonstration fishery would be shut down immediately because of one encounter. This does not provide any scientific information for the necessary study, so it is, as I said, compromised.

We need to come to a common understanding of the criteria needed for demonstration fisheries, test fisheries or whatever. I hope this will provide real results. Whether it's good for us or bad for us, we can live with the outcome, but if we don't get the opportunity to undertake those demonstrations, we don't know, and that's compromised.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Griswold, I'd like to continue the discussion with you to make sure I fully understand your allegation that the system was corrupt. You spoke earlier about the agreement between the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the group you mentioned, the Fraser River first nations. How did that agreement prevent the department from making the right decision?

[*English*]

Michael Griswold: Essentially, the Fraser Salmon Management Council mandated that there would be only a 10% harvest rate on late runs. Unfortunately, because of the abundance there, we ended up taking this 10% very early in the season, and that obliterated any further fishing opportunity.

In normal circumstances, we would have seen that the run size had increased, and though there were expected problems with the late runs, we would also have increased the margin, the allowance, of the late-run catch. This would have provided further opportunity for us to access pink salmon and more abundant summer runs there.

There was a mandate put forward by the Fraser Salmon Management Council that DFO, which is a participant in it, basically accede to the demand not to move for any expanded harvests there. FSMC is a bilateral group between Fraser River first nations and DFO. In my estimation, expanded harvests, additional harvests there were warranted, and that's why I resigned.

● (1255)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to have time for a last round, shortened to four minutes. With that, I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Morrison for four minutes.

Rob Morrison: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Griswold, not to hammer on this too hard, but did the DFO learn anything from 2025—for example, quicker change? More importantly, you also mentioned in your opening statement having stakeholders at a round table, government officials and indigenous. Do you think the DFO is going to learn from this and perhaps have expertise from actual fishermen who know what's going to happen if it doesn't follow some of the real science you're talking about?

Michael Griswold: Yes, I am optimistic for 2026. It basically came back and acknowledged that there were problems last year. It won't accept, necessarily, that it was to blame, and I'm not going to point fingers either. I just want to say that we cannot do such things as we did last year and that a round table at which all the stakeholders who have yet to put their views forward.... At a round table, there are no vetoes. This was the problem in what happened last year. The round table provides expertise.

Rob Morrison: Okay, that's great. That's a good answer. Thank you.

Mr. Chu, first of all, thank you for your 34 years in policing, law enforcement, with the RCMP and the New West Police Department.

Ivan Chu: Thank you.

Rob Morrison: We talked a bit earlier about the guiding part. The numbers you have for hatchery-origin salmon are somewhat different from those of the DFO. How can we address this? When will the DFO finally bring in experts such as guides to help it develop policies rather than go off and not even listen to what you're saying?

Ivan Chu: The study it did over the last two years was on fishing in Howe Sound through April and May, and it sampled thousands of fish it caught, from which it took DNA samples. This is how it determined that 90% of the legal-sized salmon it caught were of hatchery origin.

The report is sitting on somebody's desk. That's why we don't have a mark-selective fishery for 2026. It's because the DFO is still sitting on the reports from 2024 and 2025. Until it gets the report out and lets the minister make her decision to open a mark-selective fishery, that's where we're sitting.

Rob Morrison: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

I'm going to take the last round of questioning that we have for our last four minutes. I want to pick up on the questions from Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Chu, you spoke to the disparity of a number of areas on the south coast, particularly around the Gulf Islands' having access to retention in a selected fishery and Howe Sound's not having the same opportunity. How do you justify this disparity in the two areas?

Ivan Chu: I look at it as a total economic disadvantage to our local guides and our local fishermen, the recreational fishing sector. We can go catch-and-release, but we can't keep one hatchery salmon, whereas 18 miles away they can do it. As early as July 15 on the Nanaimo side of the strait, they can keep a salmon under 80 centimetres, which we can't keep until September 1.

As fishing guides, we're taking out clients, and we tell them, “If we were just 17 miles to our west, you would have been able to keep that fish.” They look at us and ask why. Then we try to explain to them about decisions made.

It has hampered our business. We're losing a lot of business. Our clients will phone people on the island and ask, “Can we keep any salmon?” Plus, they have the ability to keep ling cod, which we can't keep yet, and they have the ability to catch halibut.

Doing business on the Vancouver side is very difficult for those reasons.

● (1300)

The Chair: Absolutely. I know layering on to this is the impact of the pandemic, of course, and a lot of other fishing businesses. We had a couple of witnesses last week who spoke to the same concern about the lack of access in Howe Sound.

Of course, a couple of weeks ago, we had the announcement of mass marking for salmon on the south coast in the hatcheries. What impact do you see this having on the potential access to a mark-selective fishery in an area like Howe Sound?

Ivan Chu: That would be excellent. There will be more fish missing the adipose fin, because it has been.... If we go the route of the Americans, who mass mark 100% of all their hatchery fish—coho and chinook—and we go to mass marking of 100% of our chinook salmon, then the majority of the fish we catch in Howe Sound will be hatchery fish. We will then have the ability to keep fish, and more people will be able to participate in recreational fishing and use guide services.

The Chair: Thank very much, Mr. Chu.

With my last question, I'll probably get one question into Mr. Griswold.

First, thank you for your long-standing work as part of the Fraser panel of the Pacific Salmon Commission. There's one thing you spoke to that I wanted to get your opinion on. You mentioned the negative effects of not allowing a sufficient amount of harvest on the salmon returning to the Fraser. I was hoping you could explain why that is an issue as we look ahead to how this issue could be approached this year and future years on the Fraser and otherwise.

Michael Griswold: In this last year, in 2025, the late-run component was all expected to die en route there before it got to the spawning grounds. There was not expected to be very much. Whatever stragglers they could get to the spawning grounds there, this was considered a plus.

The issue was that this is a relatively recent phenomenon of this early mortality of the late runs there. Nobody really knows why it happened and whether it was predation or chemical contaminants in the river or whatever. However, something was forcing those fish not to delay.

In 2025, these fish ended up reverting to their normal migratory behaviour, which allowed them to delay. What we need to do in order to get out of this box is have more assessment. We need better assessments in the Strait of Georgia, off the mouth of the Fraser, to see whether these fish are migrating in the river or if they're holding. If they are holding, it basically tells us that there is not much of a problem. This was one of the recommendations put forward last year, to have assessment fisheries, and unfortunately there were not enough resources there to enable that. It is basically going to be necessary for some scientific collaboration to agree on information and how it goes about there. That's the answer. It is more information.

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

I'm afraid that's going to conclude this panel. I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here in person and by video conference. It's very interesting testimony. I know there was mention of recommendations. If there is anything we didn't get to, you're always welcome to submit it in writing to the committee as we move forward to finalize the report that will flow from this.

Our next meeting is going to be on Wednesday, when we're going to resume our study of the Atlantic mackerel and Atlantic herring fisheries.

The meeting is adjourned.