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Chair: Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1605)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 41 of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

[*English*]

I want to start by acknowledging that we are gathered on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108 and the motion adopted on Wednesday, April 22, 2026, the committee is meeting to begin its study on the publication of a report on four wind energy areas in the offshore of Nova Scotia.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Pursuant to routine motions, I would like to advise committee members that all virtual witnesses today have successfully completed their testing.

I would like to remind participants of the following points.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those on video conference, please click on the microphone icon to ensure you are able to get interpretation. Unmute yourself when you are not speaking. At the bottom of your screen, you will see a globe-looking icon. It will tell you the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French.

I want to remind witnesses that committee members will ask you questions in French or English. If you need interpretation, I'd ask you to put on your earpieces right now. All comments should be made through the chair.

Members, if you wish to speak in the room, put up your hands. The clerk and I will try to manipulate what we think is the right order of things. I want to remove the word "manipulate".

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

From the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we have Bernard Vigneault, director general, ecosystem science directorate; Wendy Williams, regional director, aquatic ecosystems, Maritimes region, by video conference; and Luke Gaulton, director, oceans and aquaculture management, Maritimes region, also by video conference.

I will start with the five-minute opening statement by whichever one of you is doing it, please. I will give you a one-minute and then

30-second literal shout-out, so you know your time is up and can adjust your speaking notes accordingly.

Mr. Vigneault, if you are speaking, you have five minutes, please.

Bernard Vigneault (Director General, Ecosystem Science Directorate, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Yes, I am. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, Chair, vice-chairs and members.

First, I wish to acknowledge that I am speaking with you on the unceded Anishinabe Algonquin territory. The people of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation have lived on this territory for millennia. Their culture and presence have nurtured and continue to nurture this land. I express my honour for the people and the land of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation. I also express my honour for all first nations, Inuit and Métis people and their valuable past and present contributions to this land.

My name is Bernard Vigneault. I'm the director general of ecosystem science at Fisheries and Oceans Canada. My colleagues and I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee on behalf of the department.

I'm accompanied today by Ms. Wendy Williams, regional director of aquatic ecosystems, Maritimes region, at Fisheries and Oceans Canada. In addition to marine planning and conservation, she's also responsible for the fish and fish habitat protection program and the species at risk management division.

Mr. Luke Gaulton is director of oceans and aquaculture management, Maritimes region, at Fisheries and Oceans Canada. He's also responsible for marine planning and conservation in the Maritimes region.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is responsible for managing Canada's fisheries, protecting aquatic ecosystems and ensuring the sustainable use of marine resources. We publish scientific information, research results and conclusions in support of open science.

On December 18, 2025, DFO published a Canadian manuscript report of fisheries and aquatic sciences entitled "Four Wind Energy Areas (WEA) 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".

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

The report was published in support of the Canada-Nova Scotia offshore energy regulator's call for information, which closed on January 13, 2026.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Vigneault, but we're not getting interpretation. If you could just hold on for a second, I will stop the clock so we don't take your time.

Is everyone hearing the interpreter?

Voices: Yes.

The Chair: We'll give you an extra minute. Go ahead.

Bernard Vigneault: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

The report was published in support of the Canada-Nova Scotia offshore energy regulator's call for information, which closed on January 13, 2026. The call for information invited indigenous groups and rights holders, the fishing sector, industry, government, the public and other stakeholders to provide feedback on a variety of topics, including the wind energy areas being considered and the location of potential parcels within these wind energy areas.

The Fisheries and Oceans report provides a high-level description of the marine ecosystem and human uses that may occur in or near each of the four designated wind energy areas on Nova Scotia's offshore. The report draws from Fisheries and Oceans published literature, data holdings, such as fishery landings and species detection data, and mapping products.

The report describes primary marine ecosystem features, significant and protected areas, at-risk and depleted species, fish and fisheries, science surveys, and other human uses to inform regulatory decision-makers, industry and members of the public.

The report does not assess the wind energy area sites for offshore wind energy suitability, nor does it evaluate the risk that offshore wind energy development poses to the marine ecosystem, marine species or human uses in each area. It may inform the scope of future risk assessments, but additional detail and analyses would be needed to inform project-specific assessments.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is committed to sustainably managing Canada's fisheries and oceans for the long-term benefit of all Canadians, while also providing advice and information about new opportunities within Canada's ocean economy. We recognize the essential role that science information and advice play in achieving these goals.

Thank you for your attention. We are ready to answer your questions.

[*English*]

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

We will now go to the question and answer session, which will start with six minutes. The six minutes, as you well know, include both the question and the answer.

I will begin with the Conservatives.

Mr. Small, you have six minutes, please.

• (1615)

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

Welcome, Mr. Vigneault and officials, to this meeting.

Mr. Vigneault, how many groundfish migrated through—

The Chair: Excuse me. Could you open your camera, please?

Clifford Small: I'm sorry.

The Chair: We'd love to see you.

Clifford Small: Yes, I know. Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Vigneault, how many groundfish migrated annually through the Scotian shelf and were harvested in the Scotian shelf before the collapse of the 1990s? Do you have that figure?

Bernard Vigneault: I don't have that figure. I can tell you that the report was a snapshot in time and, as I think you're alluding to, didn't include the period prior to the last 10 years. That's acknowledging the methodology of the report.

Clifford Small: Absolutely. In fact, the historical significance of the areas in which offshore wind is being planned on the banks off the eastern shore and off Cape Breton was not addressed in the documents.

Do you think, with the development of offshore wind on those banks, that there's ever the possibility of a recovery of the groundfish fishery, as has happened with the northern cod in Newfoundland and Labrador?

Bernard Vigneault: It is a possibility—

Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

The production order that was moved and adopted by this committee was very specific. It related to the report that was done. This committee has a lot of important work to do. We agreed to review this for two hours.

This is not relevant. We should stick to the subject matter that was adopted by the committee, which was the production of this report.

The Chair: Thank you. That is a point of order.

Mr. Arnold.

Mel Arnold (Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, CPC): Counter to Mr. Morrissey's argument, I believe the points Mr. Small is making are very relevant as to what is in the report, what's missing from the report and what should have been in the report. I think they're very relevant, Madam Chair.

Robert Morrissey: Madam Chair, I disagree with Mr. Arnold. The motion that was adopted by this committee was specific. It was a production order for the report. In fact, the motion put forward by Mr. Small asking for this.... This report has been public online since the fall of 2025.

I would ask for clarification, Madam Chair, on the current subject before the committee and the relevancy of the questioning that is occurring.

The Chair: Well, before I rule on whether that is a point of order or not, or on whether Mr. Small's questions are within the scope of the report, Mr. Arnold, would you like to say why you think his questions are focused on the scope of the report?

If I may remind everyone, the motion said that members of the committee should focus on the scope of the meeting, which would be the report.

Mel Arnold: The scope of the meeting would be the report. I think it's very relevant that we point out what was missing in the report and what work had not been done by the department in providing a report that the government would potentially be making recommendations or decisions on.

If there are shortcomings in what has been included in the report, that's very relevant to the report itself because it is lacking. That is why I consider this very relevant.

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey, Mr. Arnold is making the point that this is in fact relevant because focusing on the report focuses on not only what's there but also what isn't there.

Robert Morrissey: Madam Chair, it is your call, but the motion was clear. It was a production order related to the report and was specific to the report. Getting into what may or may not be there is, quite frankly, a whole different debate, which should have been encompassed in a motion identifying that.

• (1620)

The Chair: Mr. Deschênes.

[*Translation*]

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

When we study a report, I think we obviously have to cover the entity that commissioned it, the context of the report and everything that's included and excluded. I think it's entirely natural to ask questions about things that aren't in the report so as to fully understand the government's approach.

[*English*]

The Chair: I would agree with Mr. Deschênes and Mr. Arnold, Mr. Small, but be careful about how much you stray in your questions.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The grounds that are now going to be used—a lot of them—pretty much for the sole purpose of producing offshore wind energy supported livelihoods and produced seafood for nearly five centuries.

Mr. Vigneault, were the impacts to the future of Canada's food security considered in the making of this report?

Bernard Vigneault: If I can go back quickly to your previous question, yes, historical landing is something that will need to be discussed separately. It's on page 26 that we address that as a cap.

We'd like to remind everybody that this is not science advice or a decision report. It is just a compendium of the information that was available at DFO to support the input of all the stakeholders and the government in the decision process. It was never meant to be—

Clifford Small: Mr. Vigneault, there have been calls for bids in these four offshore areas. In making the calls for bids to proponents, your report was a very important part of that. Why was it not comprehensive with respect to historical landings and what the future could be for those fishing grounds and for Canada's food security? Why was that omitted?

Bernard Vigneault: It was a scientific methodological approach. For example, for some of the stock that you mentioned—Atlantic cod on the Scotian shelf—we have no indication and no expectation that the stock will recover in the foreseeable future, because of environmental conditions.

Clifford Small: Your own scientists said in the early 2000s that northern cod in Newfoundland was commercially extinct and would remain commercially extinct. Why is there no expectation that environmental conditions could change? This is a very small snapshot in time that we're dealing with when we look at grounds that have produced livelihoods and food for five centuries. Hopefully, there's a lot of history ahead for the fishing industry in Canada.

Will you consider the future impacts of these wind farms on food security and livelihoods in Nova Scotia, Atlantic Canada and the rest of Canada?

Bernard Vigneault: That is certainly a consideration, and we hope that the data we provide and put in the public domain will help that discussion.

For cod in the Scotian shelf, we haven't seen any signs of growth or recovery or any environmental signals for a while. In terms of food safety, the approach we took in the report was to look at the actual landings in the last 10 years, put forward in the report all the landings that have been recorded within the proposed offshore wind area and do a spatial analysis for those at a height that was higher than 1% of the landings in the area.

Clifford Small: Mr. Vigneault, I'd like to examine the effects of the construction and operation of these wind farms on whales. What studies have been done on the effects to whale migration? What studies have been done on this for the construction phase?

Bernard Vigneault: That wasn't part of this report. What we've documented is the overlap of the whales with the proposed potential construction zone in the offshore areas that have been identified. We have a body of work that's ongoing, annually, to look at the details of the whale presence in these areas. That will feed into a later stage of the discussion.

• (1625)

The Chair: The time is up. I'm sorry, Mr. Small.

I now go to the Liberals.

Mr. d'Entremont, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Chris d'Entremont (Acadie—Annapolis, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Vigneault.

[*English*]

This is a big issue for Nova Scotia as they look at offshore wind. Hopefully over time, they will continue to consult with fishermen from one end of the province to the other and, of course, include the other provinces that might be fishing in those areas. That's not particularly why we're here today. This is about the production order that was asked for on the report.

When was this report made publicly available for Canadians to see?

Bernard Vigneault: This report was published in December 2025. That was during the time frame of the open call for information from the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Energy Regulator. It was actually posted publicly both on the DFO website and as part of the record that the offshore regulator published, including comments from fisheries' stakeholders who were informed by the sharing of the data we did through this technical report.

Chris d'Entremont: December 2025 is before April 22, 2026. Isn't that correct?

Bernard Vigneault: Yes.

Chris d'Entremont: That's when the member for Central Newfoundland said the report wasn't public. That contradicts what Mr. Small said.

Bernard Vigneault: That's my understanding.

Chris d'Entremont: The report had been available prior to that.

In both the abstract and the conclusion of the report, it's noted that the report is meant to inform industry and the public about what is ecologically in these areas and what activities currently take place in the proposed wind energy areas. If someone was not aware of that, would it be safe to say that they did not read the report?

Bernard Vigneault: That was the main intent. Basically, this is a step to contribute to the overall engagement effort by my colleagues in that particular region of DFO...but mainly led by the regulator for those decisions to come.

Chris d'Entremont: Who ordered the report?

Bernard Vigneault: The report was tasked to us by our colleagues at Aquatic Ecosystem Health and Management. That work

was undertaken in 2025 in anticipation of the call for information requests and the call for bids.

I don't know if my colleagues from the Maritimes region have anything to add to that.

Luke Gaulton (Director, Oceans and Aquaculture Management, Maritimes Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):

The primary purpose was, as Bernard outlined, to respond to the call for information. There were also people from aquatic ecosystems within DFO identifying that there would be various information needs for the wind energy areas as the process for offshore wind advanced.

All of this information was existing information, and a data analysis was compiled in this report in anticipation of those needs.

Chris d'Entremont: The intention of the report was simply to provide a compendium of information that was already technically publicly available.

Bernard Vigneault: That's a good description. Some of the analysis data were in very different sources within DFO, and some were more difficult to access. It was all information that we already had at hand and that was put in the same report with a spatial analysis regarding overlapping new ecosystems and the proposed areas to inform the discussions.

Chris d'Entremont: In the work, we mentioned the four banks that are being looked at at this particular point, which are Sydney Bight, Middle Bank, Sable Island Bank and French Bank. What information in that paperwork would be pertinent to those who are making the decision, whether they be from the province or from fishing organizations that would be interested in what the decision-making was?

Bernard Vigneault: Starting with the fishing industry, that gives us quantifying data analysis that translates their recent use of the area in terms of the landing fishing effort. As we discussed previously, it's not the perfect way to provide data. There's the question of historical landings that was mentioned. Some fish harvesters have different spatial footprints, so there's additional discussion, but it's a good start for the harvesters.

It's also a good start for us to look at the overlap with our own science survey, either the one on oceanographic monitoring or the fisheries science survey, which are very important for the sustainability of fishing in order to maintain our capacity to advise.

There's also information on the ecosystems that we haven't identified as sensitive in those areas—potential protected areas. We also make reference to a previous publication, which is similarly in the technical report format, for the use of the stakeholders. It has a more detailed spatial analysis on potential overlapping uses with different scenarios of offshore deployment.

• (1630)

Chris d'Entremont: Does this report say anything about the future of offshore wind in Canada?

Bernard Vigneault: No. As I mentioned, very importantly, this is not what we call a science advisory report. It's not a recommendation. It's meant to provide factual data information. That's certainly true for this report, but this format—what we call a technical report for these types of data—has scientific knowledge that is useful and needs to be made available to support further analysis and further inputs by a variety of stakeholders.

Chris d'Entremont: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now go to Mr. Alexis Deschênes from the Bloc Québécois for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. It's good to be with you today.

Mr. Vigneault, who at Fisheries and Oceans Canada decided to produce the report?

Bernard Vigneault: For scientific advice and reports, the way we operate is that we receive requests from the ecosystems management sector.

Alexis Deschênes: So it's the ecosystems management sector. Is that correct?

Bernard Vigneault: That sector makes the request, and the science sector determines whether we have the information required to produce the technical report requested.

Alexis Deschênes: Which of you is part of the ecosystems management sector? Is it Ms. Williams?

Bernard Vigneault: Yes.

Alexis Deschênes: All right.

Then I have some questions for you, Ms. Williams.

To recap, I understand that, on July 29, 2025, the Government of Canada, through Natural Resources Canada, announced that the first four offshore wind energy production areas had been designated on Nova Scotia's offshore. It explained that this was a key step to develop an offshore wind industry. It said there would be a first call for bids to develop offshore wind energy later that year. That was in 2025.

Next, I understand that stakeholders were invited to provide feedback on various topics. At that point, you raised your hand and

said that Fisheries and Oceans Canada would produce a manuscript report.

Why did you decide that your report would not assess the suitability of these areas for offshore wind energy development or—and this is what really struck me—the risk that such development poses to the marine ecosystem?

[*English*]

Wendy Williams (Regional Director, Aquatic Ecosystems, Maritimes Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): The answer to that is that we were trying to provide information that was relevant in that time frame to the call for information. The intent of the study was to pull together information that the department already had. It was not really a report to look at the risks of offshore wind vis-à-vis the fishing industry.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Ms. Williams, what the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Energy Regulator wanted was to ask the fishing sector, the industry, the government, the public and other stakeholders to comment on various topics.

Under the Fisheries Act, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is responsible for fish conservation and protection and for pollution prevention. Now the government is saying that it will develop offshore wind energy and has designated areas for this purpose, but that it will issue a call for bids later this year.

Why did you restrict which questions could be asked? You asked officials at Fisheries and Oceans Canada to describe marine species, which is relevant, but why didn't you also ask them to examine the risk that offshore wind energy development poses to the marine ecosystem?

Why didn't you ask the people at Fisheries and Oceans Canada to answer that question?

• (1635)

[*English*]

Wendy Williams: DFO's role is to provide information in these processes. We had a regional assessment for offshore wind that was done the year before last, and we provided data for that. We provided already existing data for this particular manuscript. We were also expecting that there would be a call for information as a result of... Perhaps it's not an official call for information, but information from Fisheries and Oceans will be provided for the impact assessment reviews as well. Those impact assessments, as well as the regional assessment, tend to gather that information and look at those risks.

I also want to add that we at DFO promoted the call for information to the fishing industry so that the industry understood it was happening and understood how they could get involved in that. We also provided funding—

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Isn't it partly your responsibility to look into the potential impact of offshore wind energy production on fish?

You mentioned that a regional report was done beforehand. What were its findings?

[English]

Wendy Williams: I apologize. I meant to say the regional assessment that was administered by the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Energy Regulator. That was a process that we provided data into the year before last. The call for information came out after that.

In both cases, DFO provided information. We mainly focused on trying to identify areas of compatibility between what could be areas for offshore wind...and fishing activity.

The manuscript also went into information on species at risk, as well as landings data, as my colleague Bernard mentioned.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: I have read the report, and it does indeed provide a good overview of the various species. However, one crucial question remains: Does installing offshore wind turbines pose a risk to the marine ecosystem?

Didn't you feel you needed to address this question?

[English]

Wendy Williams: No, that's not the case. It's just that it was not the right time to answer that question. The impact assessments for these projects, which are to come from the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, will be opportunities for assessments of risk, and we will provide information at that—

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: However, the government said it wanted to issue an initial call for bids in 2025. I understand that this hasn't been done, but you believe that this is an issue to be addressed later and that there's no need to address it right now.

[English]

Wendy Williams: Yes, that was not the reason, at that time, to answer that question, because that will come during the impact assessment processes.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I now go to the second round. It's a five-minute round.

I go to Mr. Arnold for the Conservatives.

You have five minutes, please, Mel.

Mel Arnold: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Vigneault, can you tell me if this report is pertaining to a project of DFO?

Bernard Vigneault: Yes, this report was produced by our Major Projects Office, which has the task, similar to that report, to provide information in support of major project reviews.

Mel Arnold: Is this considered a project of the Province of Nova Scotia or the Government of Canada?

Bernard Vigneault: No, this is considered a project for DFO, for the Government of Canada. There's another ongoing project we have related to this. We have a body of monitoring and research ongoing right now that's funded by Natural Resources Canada. It's looking at addressing the gaps that have been identified in the regional assessment to gather, as I mentioned earlier, additional information on whales and other species at risk, looking at—

Mel Arnold: Are you telling me that all of this research and the report have been done but not in response to any project that's being proposed? Is that correct?

Bernard Vigneault: This report was done, as we alluded to earlier, in response to the identification by the offshore regulator of the four areas. They are DFO products that look at putting in the public domain the scientific information and spatial information we have, for the use of stakeholders and for our own use—

Mel Arnold: Okay.

Bernard Vigneault: —when we look at future details of the project proposal.

Mel Arnold: When does a project become a project for the proponent or for government partners in this project?

Bernard Vigneault: I will turn to my colleagues in the Maritimes region, especially in the context of the offshore wind development.

• (1640)

Luke Gaulton: After there's a call for bids and there's a successful bidder, there will be a project-specific review. For some of the processes we spoke about earlier, there was a regional assessment led by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. NRCan, the Province of Nova Scotia and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Energy Regulator are still at the point where they're going to establish where exactly, within the wind energy areas, there will be a call for bids.

Mel Arnold: Someone else has requested this information, then, and DFO has put their time, resources and everything into it. Is there any transfer of funds from the requester of the information to DFO? We hear from stakeholders across this country about lacking resources within the department, and here is a department apparently chasing after ghosts requested by another department. Can you square that circle?

Luke Gaulton: As we've outlined, the report does not contain... We didn't undertake any new analysis for the report, but some of what is in the report is an analysis comparing suitability of areas for offshore wind with areas where fishing occurs. That would have been under the marine spatial planning funding that the department had at that time. As the lead department for marine spatial planning, that analysis was undertaken.

I'm not sure if my colleague from the science directorate has more to offer, but I believe NRCan is funding certain DFO science activities as well.

Bernard Vigneault: NRCan is funding the incremental data collection research that I alluded to earlier. We have received dedicated funding under the implementation of the Impact Assessment Act to do that work. We're not displacing resources for other parts of the science sector to do this work. We have received incremental funding.

Mel Arnold: That helps to answer my question.

We've heard that boundaries were moved for proposed marine protected conservation areas. When does the process for establishing a marine conservation area begin?

Bernard Vigneault: I'll turn to my colleagues in the Maritimes region.

Luke Gaulton: There's a site-specific process for a marine protected area or another spatial conservation tool. An area of interest is established. There's a lengthy consultation process with rights holders, stakeholders—

Mel Arnold: My question is, when does it begin? Who initiates the potential for a marine conservation area?

Luke Gaulton: That's part of DFO's mandate: to examine where are suitable or appropriate areas for marine protected areas.

Mel Arnold: Okay. I'll have more questions in my next round.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I go to Mr. Morrissey for the Liberals.

Robert, you have five minutes.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Vigneault, first of all, some are trying to characterize this report as an approval by DFO of something that may occur. That is not the case. This is not DFO analyzing an area and saying that it is acceptable for wind development. Is that correct?

Bernard Vigneault: That's accurate.

Robert Morrissey: This was simply, as you indicated, about preparing documents to show correctly the species that inhabit this part of the ocean.

Bernard Vigneault: It was about the species, the human use and the other spatial information, like the existing or proposed protected areas.

Robert Morrissey: It's simply an inventory of what's going on.

Bernard Vigneault: Yes.

Robert Morrissey: To characterize it as somehow the government has given prior approval to a potential development would simply be false and spreading misinformation.

Bernard Vigneault: That's correct.

Actually, the only decision appearing in the report, as context, is the previous announcement of the four established areas. That's what the report is based on: DFO information for those specific areas that had been announced in July 2025 by Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada.

Robert Morrissey: On the resources that would have been used by the department to compile this information, there's no new information here. It's just compiling information that exists and that you would be aware of. Is that correct?

● (1645)

Bernard Vigneault: Absolutely, and as I mentioned earlier, we have secured resources from Natural Resources Canada for new data collection. This is to feed into the future discussion on the impact assessment and project review.

Robert Morrissey: Was new data collected during the scope of this report?

Bernard Vigneault: No. I'm sorry for the confusion. It's totally separate from this report.

Robert Morrissey: It was just about compiling.

Bernard Vigneault: This report was from what we had in our data holdings and our spatial analysis. That included the science data, but also the landings—the catch data—from our colleagues at fisheries management and some data holdings from our colleagues at aquatic ecosystems management.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

I think it's very important for those following this to know that, as you stated, there was no approval process. This is not a blanket approval to do any development in the subject area.

Again, to clarify, it is simply one source of information on species that exist in these areas. Is that correct?

Bernard Vigneault: Yes, that's correct.

Robert Morrissey: Also, you did not provide any recommendations to any government about suitability for any development or anything else.

Bernard Vigneault: No, there's no recommendation. The reports specify that we would need additional information analysis to make recommendations, and it would be a different process, a different format. It wouldn't be what we call a "technical report" like this one.

Robert Morrissey: It's important, because if somebody, like the Government of Nova Scotia, the provincial government, chooses to pursue an agenda of developing offshore wind, they would have to go through a very rigorous process to get approval to do that. Is that correct?

Bernard Vigneault: If you want more information, my colleagues and friends can provide that, but that's correct. That's a process that will be led by the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Energy Regulator.

Robert Morrissey: I don't want to get into that, but there is a process to go through that's very transparent and very vigorous. The interests of fishers will be taken into consideration if we get to that. At this stage, there's been no approval, but there's a concept that's been referred to by the Government of Nova Scotia. Again, the department's role in producing this report, which is over six months old, was simply to compile information that would have been available.

Bernard Vigneault: That's my understanding as well. As we state ourselves, further engagement of the fishing industry is important, because the data we provide is just one way to look at the issue, and there are other considerations.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

If a party were philosophically opposed to this type of development—green energy or wind energy—you would try to phrase it as a prior approval, which is not the case, as your testimony indicated. Clearly, this was a simple fact of compiling information that was within the department at the current time and makes no recommendation for or against any potential wind development. Is that correct?

Bernard Vigneault: I can't comment on that, but I can confirm that the report was factual, and it didn't have any recommendations.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now go to Mr. Deschênes for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Williams, do you think it would be useful and relevant to investigate whether the presence of offshore wind turbines could have an impact on marine ecosystems?

[*English*]

Wendy Williams: Yes, I do think it's important to do that, and there will be opportunities for us to provide that information in the impact assessment process.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: As I understand it, in July 2025, when the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources announced that he was designating the first offshore wind energy production areas, you

had not been asked for your input beforehand to determine whether this was a good thing for the future of offshore fishing in Nova Scotia.

Is that correct?

[*English*]

Wendy Williams: No, and we would not be giving our opinion. Our job at DFO is to provide information and data into the process.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: You just said that, in your opinion and that of scientists, it is useful and relevant to know whether there will be an impact on marine ecosystems.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Wendy Williams: My apologies. I meant that in the context of a risk assessment that would be done as part of the impact assessment process.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Vigneault, what do you know about the potential impact of offshore wind turbines on marine ecosystems?

Bernard Vigneault: This is a region that has been relatively well studied, as evidenced by the amount of data we provided in the report. We work with international partners, including the Europe-based International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, which has much more experience. Our scientists are working with international scientists to truly understand the effects this will have on marine ecosystems.

We need to understand the baseline conditions of marine ecosystems. One section of the report highlights that, from an oceanographic perspective, the designated areas are relatively dynamic zones. Many significant changes are taking place within the ecosystems.

Furthermore, we need to know exactly where the facilities will be situated. Only general areas have been designated so far. Our data show that biodiversity varies considerably within these areas, so a more in-depth analysis will have to be conducted once the precise locations are known.

We also need to consider the type of tidal turbines that will be used. Some are anchored to the seabed, while others are floating. Additional information will be included in future risk assessments. Right now, our work focuses primarily on species at risk, commercial fish stocks and marine mammals. To carry out this work, we are collecting the necessary information to thoroughly document baseline conditions and to make projections regarding the potential impact of wind turbines on surface currents, for instance.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vigneault.

[English]

I'll now go to the Conservatives for five minutes.

Ms. Kronis, go ahead.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm very happy to be here today, and I want to thank you for having me at this meeting.

I'm going to ask some questions of Mr. Vigneault, and if anyone else needs to answer them, I'd be grateful if you'd just jump in.

The DFO report that we're looking at considers four wind energy areas off Nova Scotia where large wind farms could eventually be built. Am I correct that some of those areas overlap with existing or proposed marine protected areas?

Bernard Vigneault: Yes, that's part of the document. There are partial overlaps. It's fully described in the report.

Tamara Kronis: Thank you for that.

Were the people who were doing this report aware of how a wind farm is built?

Bernard Vigneault: As I alluded to in my previous answer to Mr. Deschênes, it is difficult to assess a priori the impact without knowing the exact location or the....

Tamara Kronis: The question I was asking is, do you have expertise within DFO around how a wind farm is built?

Bernard Vigneault: We don't have—

The Chair: This is going outside of the report.

Tamara Kronis: No, it's not, with all due respect. I'd ask you to stop the clock.

We've had a number of discussions about what's in the report and what's not in the report and what the boundaries were. I think it's perfectly relevant to ask what kind of expertise was around the table when people were considering what to include in the report or what not to include in the report.

The Chair: If that's your question, that's a valid one. The earlier one didn't sound as if it was valid.

Can you answer that question, Mr. Vigneault?

Bernard Vigneault: No, the report doesn't address that. The engineering aspect of wind farms is totally outside of the scope. The goal of the report was to share the expertise DFO has and, within the expertise we have, the data we have on our activities around that.

Tamara Kronis: Are you saying that DFO has no expertise on how a wind farm is actually built?

Bernard Vigneault: That's not part of the mandate of DFO.

Robert Morrissey: Chair, I have a point of order. This is clearly outside the scope of what was requested.

The Chair: Yes, I agree, Mr. Morrissey, that this is outside the scope of the report. Obviously, it's very clear that the report is a compendium of existing data that DFO already had. This is not about assessing the impact of wind farms. It's just about existing data.

Tamara Kronis: I wasn't asking about.... With due respect—

The Chair: There was no need for the people around the table to assess the impact. They shouldn't have that expertise. They were collecting data that was already there.

Tamara Kronis: I'm sorry, Madam Chair, but I wasn't asking whether or not they assessed the impact. I was asking whether or not there was anyone in the room who knows how a wind farm is actually built.

• (1655)

The Chair: It wouldn't be relevant. I'm sorry.

Robert Morrissey: Chair, on a point of order, that's not relevant.

The Chair: Move on, please. I've stopped the clock, but let's move on to questions focusing solely on the report and its mandate.

Tamara Kronis: Okay.

When you were considering what data to include in the report, did you make decisions about what should be included in the report or what shouldn't be included in the report based on the geography that was under consideration?

Bernard Vigneault: Exactly. It was based on the four areas that were identified. We looked at what datasets and relevant information we had on the ecosystems and fisheries. That's what brought in the—

Tamara Kronis: Did you focus more on the ocean floor or the water or the surface?

Bernard Vigneault: It was all included. There was information on the geology of the subsea surface, there was information on the biota and there was information on the water column. All the information we had in our holdings was put in the document so that stakeholders could have access to it. It's not meant to be the full dataset; it's meant to be a place to start understanding what knowledge and information we have within DFO.

Tamara Kronis: That's what I wanted to get at. You've said over and over again that it's not intended to be the full dataset, so my question is, did you take into account how a wind farm is actually built when you were trying to decide what you should put in that wasn't part of the full dataset?

Bernard Vigneault: I know that question was discussed, but it was not relevant to the scope of the report. The report was about fishing activity, the sensitive biological systems and the geology within those geographic areas in the context of those areas having been identified as potential offshore areas. There was no intent to look at the impacts of offshore, no intent to do any analysis—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Kronis, but I'm going to ask you to focus on the report, please.

Tamara Kronis: The question isn't about the impact.

If you have 10 datasets and you're telling me that this report was the starting point, there is the possibility that you included in this report datasets one through seven and number nine, but not eight and 10. My question is, did you take into account what might eventually be built there when you were deciding what to include and what not to include?

With due respect to the Chair and the members opposite, that is exactly relevant to this report.

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): No, it's not.

The Chair: No, it is not. I am sorry, Ms. Kronis.

Tamara Kronis: If you chose—

The Chair: My ruling is that it's not, so the point of order is taken.

Let's move on. Please focus your questions on the report.

Tamara Kronis: In terms of the things you didn't include, why didn't you include them?

Bernard Vigneault: It was a question of time to do the analysis of information that was readily available elsewhere. For example, we listed the species at risk that are documented in those areas, but there are other more detailed documents, like the recovery strategy for those species, that are readily available and are not all included in full detail in this report.

Tamara Kronis: Are you saying that this report is incomplete?

Bernard Vigneault: As stated in the report, it is an overview of our main datasets with the intent of orienting anyone who's looking for information on what is in those proposed areas. There are other sets of information that could be available as well.

Tamara Kronis: Is there—

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up.

I'll now move on to Mr. d'Entremont for the Liberals.

You have five minutes, please.

Chris d'Entremont: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Let me go back to some of my questions.

What was the department's intention in creating this report?

Bernard Vigneault: I will turn to my colleagues in aquatic ecosystems management, which mandated us to do the report.

Luke Gaulton: We were anticipating what the information needs would be for the department and anticipating what information regulators would need. In some cases, the future regulators are people looking at fish and fish habitat as part of DFO or impacts under the

Species at Risk Act, which is part of DFO, as well as other regulators.

The report is clear that we've provided the information we had that we thought would be relevant and that we thought we would get requests for. The information is not exhaustive. Not everything that all regulators will need is in the report.

Chris d'Entremont: Does the creation of this report say anything about the future of offshore wind in Canada?

• (1700)

Luke Gaulton: No.

Chris d'Entremont: Since the report is for information and is not actually about the process of creating offshore wind, would other steps, like consultation with industry, the Province of Nova Scotia or other organizations, take place before future projects go forward?

Luke Gaulton: Yes.

This report, as we mentioned, responded to the call for information. The fishing industry also responded to the same call. The lead regulators on offshore wind and the offshore energy regulator have had discussions with the fishing industry, some of which DFO facilitated or brought together, but the fishing industry is speaking with the regulators separately from DFO.

Chris d'Entremont: Who are the regulators?

Luke Gaulton: They are the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Energy Regulator.

Chris d'Entremont: What connection does DFO have to that organization?

Luke Gaulton: We have an MOU whereby we provide data and information. Much of the analysis that is contained in this report we would have also provided to them.

Chris d'Entremont: Does this report make claims about the suitability of these four areas to offshore wind projects?

Luke Gaulton: No.

Chris d'Entremont: I have a few more minutes. Can you explain what the peer review process is and what it means in the context of this report?

Luke Gaulton: For the peer review, I might turn back to my colleague from science.

If I could, I'll clarify something. In some of DFO's analysis of, say, where fishing occurs, we did look at what areas were suitable for offshore wind from an industry point of view. That wasn't a DFO decision around what areas are suitable, but we did layer that with where fishing occurs. The data we provided was just on where fishing occurs.

I'm sorry for making that correction.

I'll turn to my colleague from science.

Chris d'Entremont: Maybe I can continue there and ask the last question again. Who identified these four areas? If I remember correctly, when the province was looking at this, they were looking at far more than four different areas, but it came down to these four. I think that's what helped prescribe the department in providing the data on these four banks.

Luke Gaulton: That's correct.

Bernard Vigneault: My understanding is that the decision stems from the regional assessment that was completed. DFO science provided input into that exercise.

On your earlier question about the peer review of this report, for a technical report like this, we do a peer review. It's internal to DFO, but other independent experts who have not drafted the document review it and provide comments on errors or, for instance, missing key datasets that they would propose adding.

Chris d'Entremont: In the future, if we're looking forward, what would be the next step? If the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Energy Regulator—I want to call it CNSOPB, because for a long time that's what it was called, but it's now CNSOER—makes another request of the department, will they be providing further study or further information as times goes on?

Bernard Vigneault: The next step for the science sector will be to share the data collected, with ongoing work to address the gaps that have been identified by the regulator. That's with funding from Natural Resources Canada.

I'll let my colleagues from the Maritimes region speak to the management side of the next steps.

Luke Gaulton: We continue to provide them with data that will inform exactly where the call for bids will be.

Chris d'Entremont: Okay.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Chris. You've finished your time. Thank you.

I will now go to the next round, starting with the Conservatives.

Mr. Small, you have five minutes, please.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for Mr. Vigneault again.

Given that Emerald Bank—I know it's not included in this report, but it's a marine protected area—and parts of Sable Island Bank are to be protected, what features of the ocean floor are being protected at Sable Island Bank?

• (1705)

The Chair: Once again, Mr. Small, I would ask you to stick to the report. It's very clear in the motion that led to this that you should stick to the report. If they didn't do anything about Sable Island Bank, then we shouldn't be discussing it.

Clifford Small: Okay.

Let's talk a bit about transparency. We have emails from the department where a reference is made to not using all the information supplied by the fishing industry, and that this might be "uncomfortable". What would be so uncomfortable about providing all the information that was supplied by the fishing industry in creating this report?

Bernard Vigneault: I'm not sure what the member is referring to. We have provided all the information we got on fisheries through our colleagues at fisheries management regarding the landings. There's a recognition that it's incomplete information, as I described earlier, and there is a need to continue to engage the fishing industry to provide more granularity on the information.

Clifford Small: I'm referring to an email from Manon Cassista-Da Ros, where she said the following:

My concern is that, so far, we've only incorporated internal input, which may limit the completeness of the documents. They could be much stronger if the fishing industry were given an opportunity to review and provide feedback.

I understand that my suggestion may be somewhat uncomfortable, but the fishing industry is uniquely positioned to offer valuable context and insights that we may not fully capture internally. I just don't want us, as DFO, to miss the opportunity to give this fair consideration.

It's indicated in the internal documents we've obtained that there were people involved in creating this report who held back information because they were uncomfortable. What do you have to say about that?

Bernard Vigneault: There's no reference to anything being held back. The email exchange refers to the process about further engaging the industry. We at science—and you made the point yourself, Member Small—saw the value of further engaging the industry. The Nova Scotia Fisheries Alliance for Energy Engagement has been kept abreast of this report and is using it, as are other associations—

Clifford Small: The production—

Bernard Vigneault: The point there is that the industry would perceive that it's just part of the information and they have additional inputs to provide.

My understanding is that that wasn't the scope of this exercise. Again, it was about basic DFO information on the fisheries. My colleagues from the Maritimes region could speak more broadly on the engagement process and the next steps.

Clifford Small: Okay, go ahead, Mr. Gaulton.

Luke Gaulton: Although it wasn't produced specifically for the report, there's an analysis of where fishing occurs, comparing it with what areas are suitable for offshore wind. It's called the Marx-an analysis with zones in the report. There was extensive consultation with the fishing industry on that analysis.

As my colleague mentioned, the Nova Scotia Fisheries Alliance for Energy Engagement was consulted on that analysis and had an opportunity to provide input.

Clifford Small: You have areas there that are already protected areas. Sable Island Bank is about to be protected. Why did you not have in the report that areas that are now marine protected areas should remain protected areas, given what the fishing industry has sacrificed? Why are you not saying that protected areas are unsuitable for wind development?

Luke Gaulton: The report does mention where existing marine protected areas and marine refuges are. The report also shows the areas that are part of the draft conservation network. As part of the call for information included in this report, and also provided through other means to this process, DFO made it clear where existing protected areas are and where the areas under consideration are. Then a decision-maker who—

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there no more questions from the Liberals?

Robert Morrissey: Chair, we've covered all of this report clearly. Some others are looking for an agenda that doesn't exist here.

The Chair: There are no questions from the Liberals. You pass on your round.

Mr. Cormier, go ahead.

Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Madam Chair, we pass on our round. We have no more questions, so just keep the rounds of the other parties.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Deschênes for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm kind of surprised that the federal government is designating areas for offshore wind energy development in Canada before obtaining scientific advice to determine whether there will be an impact on fisheries, which are an important activity in the region. In July 2025, it stated that its goal for the designated areas on Nova Scotia's offshore was to develop a generation capacity of up to five gigawatts by 2030. That's very soon.

Here's what I take comfort in knowing, Mr. Vigneault. Earlier, you told me that you were collaborating with scientists from European countries that have installed offshore wind turbines. You also

said that it would depend on the wind turbines themselves. I get that.

Based on the information you have, is the question whether the wind turbines will have an impact on the marine ecosystem, or is it rather what the extent of their impact will be on the fish and other marine species around them?

Bernard Vigneault: There will certainly be impacts, and we need different kinds of expertise to assess those impacts. I mentioned our European colleagues, but our colleagues at Natural Resources Canada, who have the necessary engineering expertise regarding the installation of wind turbines, are also involved.

As an example of a direct impact, there can definitely be use conflicts. Navigation is one example. Our department's expertise allows us to conduct spatial analyses to assess these impacts.

There will certainly be impacts. Any new offshore infrastructure that interacts with the seabed, with currents and, by definition, with winds, is bound to have an impact on the ecosystem. The key is to be able to model and quantify the actual risk that these changes pose to the marine environment.

Alexis Deschênes: According to this report, some species migrate through that area. That's where it really hits home for me, as a Quebecker and as the member of Parliament for Gaspésie. Atlantic salmon can be in that area. The report also mentions mackerel.

My understanding is that the forthcoming analysis could show an impact on fish that migrate off the coast of Nova Scotia and end up in Quebec. Is that indeed the case?

Bernard Vigneault: Potentially. We're actually in the process of launching a new research initiative that will focus specifically on migratory fish. We will use technologies that allow us to tag the fish and track their movements using detection devices. We will also use environmental DNA to determine which species were present in the proposed areas and when.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now that one party in this committee no longer has any questions, we can end our round with Mr. Deschênes—

Mel Arnold: No.

The Chair: —because we cannot continue rounds with just one party.

Pardon me.

Mel Arnold: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

We still have many questions.

The Chair: I know. The round is supposed to be for Conservatives, Liberals, Bloc, Conservatives and Liberals. The Liberals have no more questions.

Mel Arnold: If the Liberals wish to concede their time, we will gladly take it. We had two hours scheduled for this meeting because there was a series of rounds of questions we planned to get through.

• (1715)

The Chair: It's going to be difficult to have only one piece of the committee working on this and the other piece not playing.

Do we have a quorum in terms of questions?

Tamara Kronis: I think it should work.

The Chair: That's my question. Do we have a quorum in terms of questions if we have one party not asking questions?

Tamara Kronis: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. d'Entremont.

Chris d'Entremont: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm just looking at the motion. Item (c) says:

(c) pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertakes one two-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.

All I'm seeing at this point are questions about all the things that might not be in the report. It is very clear that this should be questioning on the report. I haven't seen many questions on the report.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, do you have something to say?

Mel Arnold: Yes.

I'll also go back to the motion. Look under item (b)(i). It says:

(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....

I don't believe we've been provided with the document that provides the request. The committee still hasn't received the documents required, as per this motion.

The Chair: Is that so? Has the committee not received the documents the motion asks for?

Mel Arnold: If anybody can point out, among the documents we received, the document that shows any requests for its preparation, I'll gladly retract what I'm saying.

We have not received all documents requested.

The Chair: I don't know. I'm asking the committee this question.

Chris d'Entremont: The committee has received all the information it requested that is available.

Mel Arnold: Can you tell me which document shows the request for the study for the report?

Chris d'Entremont: Let's take a time out so we can get that.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I wasn't here for this, so I'm asking the committee to fill me in on what actually happened.

Mr. Arnold is saying that, in fact, not all documents were received. You are saying, Mr. D'Entremont, that all documents were received.

May I ask the clerk?

Chris d'Entremont: It's a report.

Robert Morrissey: It's been public for eight months.

Mel Arnold: Item (b)(i) states:

(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....

Where are those documents?

The Chair: I'm reading the motion in its entirety, and it is requesting that.

Mr. Arnold is saying those documents were not received. Perhaps we can find out from the clerk and the analysts if those documents were received. It's a valid question to ask.

I'm going to suspend for a minute while we get some information.

• (1715)

(Pause)

• (1725)

The Chair: I'm calling the meeting back to order.

The question that caused the suspension of the meeting was to check whether what's in (b)(i), which was "all documents, including but not limited to", was received by the committee.

I will ask the clerk to indicate if that is the case or not.

The Clerk of the Committee (Maxime Ricard): It would be up to committee members to judge the content, but under (b)(i), as organized by DFO, they've numbered their responses and documents according to our motion's numbering. There are three documents under (b)(i).

The Chair: Obviously, "all documents" meant three documents. They were sent by DFO, and that is what the committee received.

Mr. Arnold.

Mel Arnold: Can we ask the clerk if any of those documents were titled as the request for the report?

The Chair: As requested under (b)(i), I think that's all they got. That's what he's saying. You have three documents.

Go ahead, Maxime, and answer the question.

The Clerk: The short answer is no. The titles are "Request for Advice", "Planning Notes" and "Planning Notes".

Mel Arnold: There was no request for the report, because that's what it said.

Paul Connors: The report was a public document.

Mel Arnold: It says:

(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....

The last part says, "including any requests for its preparation".

Was a request for the preparation of the report included in the documents that were provided to this committee?

The Chair: That was in the motion. That was requested. What the committee received was what DFO sent, which was three documents. The documents that were received were, I gathered, all that DFO sent to us. That's it.

You asked for the documents. You got three. They may not be everything you wanted, but the bottom line is that documents were received.

Mel Arnold: When documents are ordered to be produced for the committee, someone else doesn't get to pick and choose which documents are provided. It was very specific in the motion which documents were to be provided. Who picked and chose which documents they would provide and decided to leave other documents out?

The Chair: I think DFO would have had to make a decision about whether they had any documents they could send, such as requests for preparation and associated allocation of resources. Obviously, they did not have that.

Mr. d'Entremont.

Chris d'Entremont: Those three documents that were sent are hundreds of pages. If we want to review them again, I suppose that's our prerogative. A number of documents were presented. It might not be exactly what the Conservatives thought they were going to get, and it didn't fit their narrative, but it's the information.

The request is pretty straightforward about reviewing the document that's before us. If we want to talk about offshore wind at some other juncture, let's bring a motion forward on looking at offshore wind. That's not contained in this report.

The Chair: I think you're making a good point.

Mr. Arnold.

Mel Arnold: Through all of this debate, we could have fitted in more question rounds and simply avoided this. I have simply two questions. I want to know what data gaps were identified when they compiled the report and how they identified what those gaps were.

If I had a couple of minutes to ask those questions, we could have been past mine. Perhaps Mr. Small could have gotten his questions in as well, and we could have been finished.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, I am getting a sense that nobody would deny you the right to ask your one question left in this round.

Ms. Kronis.

• (1730)

Tamara Kronis: The issue I have is that the motion asked that we receive all documents, not some documents. I was repeatedly shut down for relevance. The document I want to see is the one that asked for this report. The reason I want to see it is that this report is effectively homework that has been delivered. I want to see what the assignment was, because that tells us what this report will be used for. My questions were related to what this report will be used for, and I wasn't allowed to ask them. The documents we are missing are directly relevant and related to the questions I was asking.

This meeting wasn't supposed to happen. We were supposed to have two hours after we received all of the documents we asked for, not after we received some of the documents. I want all of the doc-

uments. The committee is required to comply with its motions, and right now we see a situation where the motion has not been complied with.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Morrissey, and then it's Mr. Klassen.

Robert Morrissey: Madam Chair, clearly what we have here is one party that's disappointed it didn't find documents that would have suited its narrative.

The officials here explained quite clearly that this is not a report endorsing anything. It is a compilation of existing information within the ministry on a particular area of ocean in Canada. To say that full documents were not received... We're being told that the committee has received all pertinent information.

The Chair: Mr. Klassen.

Ernie Klassen (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): I'll just expand on that.

The department has submitted all relevant information from the requests with regard to what this study was all about. No more information that was requested and was relevant is to be submitted to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kronis.

Tamara Kronis: Paragraph (a) of the motion that led to the production of documents requires "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".

We do not have the request for its preparation. There's no agenda here. The only thing I want is all of the documents. I want this committee to comply with the motion. As my colleague said, if someone can show me where we have the "requests for its preparation and associated allocation of resources" from the DFO, then I would be happy to withdraw my question.

This committee has not complied with its own motion. We get into very dangerous territory in this place when we make motions and then don't comply with them.

Robert Morrissey: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kronis.

Mr. Morrissey, yes, your name is down. I was going to ask a question, but go ahead.

Robert Morrissey: Madam Chair, you're the chair of today's meeting, and there's been an accusation made that this committee is not following proper mandate and is not proceeding with a motion that's been adopted. I do not believe that's the responsibility of a member to make.

Tamara Kronis: Then where are the documents?

The Chair: A member has the floor. Please do not interrupt.

Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Some of us have sat through the whole committee process and listened to what was going on. We've been told ad nauseam that the department provided all the information that was requested. Obviously, it doesn't suit the official opposition and their narrative. They're still looking for something that doesn't exist.

Madam Chair, it's your call. You're chairing the meeting, and you make the decisions on procedure.

The Chair: Thank you. I am trying very hard to do that, Mr. Morrissey. I'm trying to stick to procedure according to the book.

We still have Mr. Arnold—you still have your one question.

Mr. Small, go ahead.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I heard Mr. Morrissey accusing our side, the Conservatives, of having an agenda. We don't have an agenda. This document production order was done on behalf of fishing industry stakeholders who feel threatened and feel that their family livelihoods are on the line. They feel that offshore wind is going to displace their livelihoods and push them off the fishing grounds they've continuously fished for generations.

I think we should get to continue our questioning.

• (1735)

Robert Morrissey: Is this debate or a point of order, Madam Chair?

An hon. member: This is debate.

Clifford Small: Well, you can call it a point of order.

The Chair: That's not what we're discussing right now. We're discussing documents.

Mr. Deschênes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Perhaps I can clarify, Madam Chair. I'm currently going through the documents received by the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, and I see that there is a request for advice. That tells me a request was made. If the witnesses could tell us more about the documents they submitted, that might answer everyone's questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

My next suggestion is this. If you asked for all documents the department had based on this specific subparagraph (b)(i), I'm going to ask DFO whether it sent all the documents it had, as outlined in subparagraph (b)(i).

You can't send something you don't have. Did you send everything that you did have?

Bernard Vigneault: I can testify for the department that we provided all the information that was requested in the motion. All the documents have been provided to the committee.

The first document that Member Deschênes pointed to is the initial call for science advice that, in the context of any major project, is always very general. The tasking—we put it that way—gets re-

fined through discussions with our colleagues at aquatic ecosystems.

The third document that was produced for the committee is the planning note. You'll see that the discussion focused on the compilation of data for the four areas, as the report provides.

I don't know if my colleagues from the Maritimes region have anything to add in terms of the tasking.

The Chair: Who wants to answer that question?

Go ahead.

Luke Gaulton: I can clarify that, for the meeting summaries that were included, my understanding is that they are summaries of meetings where aquatic ecosystems within DFO was talking to science within DFO, and they determined that this report would be an appropriate thing to do.

I'm the director responsible for the people from aquatic ecosystems. I was aware that those discussions were taking place. I was aware that the decision was made to produce the report. The meeting summaries have been included for those discussions that took place.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kronis.

Tamara Kronis: While we were on break, there was a document that my colleague and I looked up online that was on the regulator's website. It was not included in this package.

When I look at the document here—the request for advice that was included—it's very clear that the terms of reference for this say, “there is need for science advice to inform anticipated project-specific Impact Assessments, as well as science advice to inform more general knowledge gaps regarding potential impacts”. The questions I was asking around what kind of expertise DFO had is relevant to that if that is the assignment.

I would like to continue with this meeting. I would like the documents that we didn't get. I would also like, at a minimum, to continue with this meeting and get a chance to ask my questions.

Chris d'Entremont: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. d'Entremont.

Chris d'Entremont: This is from the regulator, from what we understand, not from DFO. The motion is for the DFO report, not the regulator's.

If we want the regulator to come, someone has to go back and come up with a motion. Write the motion, and maybe we'll look at it on some other date.

The Chair: Absolutely.

I just want to finish with my list. I have Mr. Arnold and then I have Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Arnold.

Mel Arnold: Thank you.

This pertains to the point of order that was raised against Ms. Kronis asking questions about wind farms. I'm seeing a CSAS review panel request. I want to read part of it. It says:

The development of an offshore wind industry in Atlantic Canada is likely to impact marine ecosystems and species in new ways that have not been investigated in a Canadian context. Consequently, there is need for science advice to inform anticipated project-specific Impact Assessments....

Wind farms were specifically in the request that was provided to us, so Ms. Kronis's questions regarding the expertise of the department in wind farms is very much relevant, contrary to what the Liberal members were trying to propose.

• (1740)

The Chair: Mr. Cormier.

Serge Cormier: Madam Chair, we just heard two officials say that all documents were provided. What started that, for the public watching at home, is that we, the Liberals, didn't have any more questions.

We were giving the opportunity to the Conservatives and the Bloc to ask the questions they wanted to ask. It was just us who did not have questions. They would have had two more rounds of questions if we had gone with the rounds that we usually do at this committee in the second and first hours.

There was no intention for us to not let them ask questions. It was just that we didn't have questions. They can go on and ask questions, but we've spent 15 minutes searching for documents that don't exist. Everything was provided to the committee. Can we just go on, please?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Cormier.

Whether there were on different websites different things, the request, if you read the document, asks for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to provide the committee with certain documents. The department has told us that they've provided us with all the documents they have. Regardless of whether other people on other websites had documents, we did not ask for those. We asked the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to provide the documents they had. They told us they did. As far as I am concerned, that question is already put to rest.

We have Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Deschênes had his round in this round. The Liberals said no.

Perhaps, Mr. Arnold, you can ask your question.

Mel Arnold: Thank you. I have two questions, and then I'll pass my time to Mr. Small so he can add it to the time that he should have.

Mr. Vigneault, what data gaps did you identify when compiling this report?

Bernard Vigneault: The report wasn't specifically looking at data gaps. It was just sharing the information we have. The inputs we provided on the data gaps are on the regional assessment—

Mel Arnold: I understand that, but what data gaps did you identify?

Bernard Vigneault: The data gaps that we identified are being addressed. That was the prioritization of the additional data collection that we're doing: information on the fish stocks and the use of the areas I described earlier, like by some of the migratory species. We will be collecting additional information on that and additional information on the species at risk, in particular marine mammals, including the North Atlantic right whale, and will do additional work on that—

Mel Arnold: I'd like to move a motion asking that the data gaps Mr. Vigneault just referred to be provided to this committee so we can fully understand what might be at stake here and the good work the department may be doing in this process. As part of that, please provide in writing how the data gaps were identified.

Bernard Vigneault: We can provide the gaps that have been identified and the ongoing science to address them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vigneault.

Have you finished, Mel?

Mel Arnold: I'll pass my remaining time to Mr. Small, to add to his five minutes.

The Chair: Mr. Small, you have two minutes and 30 seconds. Go ahead.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think right whales were mentioned 18 times in the documents we have.

Mr. Vigneault—

Robert Morrissey: There's no interpretation, Chair.

The Chair: Excuse me.

Can we try it again?

Clifford Small: I think right whales were mentioned 18 times in the documents we have.

Mr. Vigneault, do you think the issue of right whales is adequately addressed in this report given the conservation measures that fishermen throughout Atlantic Canada have undergone?

• (1745)

Robert Morrissey: Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey, what is your point of order?

Robert Morrissey: The member's questioning is not relevant to what this committee is studying, which is a report from the department that was submitted and was a compilation of existing information that's been public for ad nauseam.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Small.

Clifford Small: Madam Chair, with all due respect, right whales were mentioned 18 times in the documents that we've had produced. The impact on right whales of offshore wind development is very serious. Fishermen get blamed for the demise of right whales, so I'm asking Mr. Vigneault if he thinks that this matter was adequately addressed in the report.

The Chair: Mr. Vigneault, this is on the issue of right whales. I think you spoke to that earlier about other species, but go ahead and answer the question quickly, because we're running out of time in this session.

Bernard Vigneault: I'd like to remind Member Small that risks or impacts are not part of this report. That's out of scope. However, we have properly described all the information we have collected to date on the North Atlantic right whale as part of the report. The report is correct...as part of the scope. We are doing additional work to make sure we understand where they are.

I share the member's concern regarding continuing to support the successful effort in recovering that species. Whale strikes from increased traffic in the offshore are an example of potential impacts. We need to know and to have detailed information on how they use the proposed area. That work is ongoing.

The Chair: You have one minute and 30 seconds left, Mr. Small.

Clifford Small: Getting back to the future marine-protected areas that are being identified and that are part of these four areas, I'll note that it's bewildering that areas are to be shut down or have been shut down to fishing where simply a baited hook for halibut hasn't been allowed to make bottom contact. There's nothing in this report that cautions against allowing areas that were shut down for fishing to protect benthic habitat to be turned into offshore wind areas.

Ms. Williams might be able to shed some light on why there wasn't something stronger in this report about that.

The Chair: Before I go to Ms. Williams, I would say that, while I was not here for any of this discussion originally, I heard clearly from Mr. Vigneault many times that the issue here is that this is a compilation of information they already had. Any new analysis or research is obviously something to be done, so that's not meant to be in this report at all.

Go ahead, Ms. Williams, if you want to answer quickly. You have four seconds to answer.

Wendy Williams: We did provide information in the report on conservation areas that already exist.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we have Mr. Gunn, and then it's Mr. Deschênes.

Aaron Gunn (North Island—Powell River, CPC): Chair, I'm going to yield my time to Ms. Kronis.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Tamara Kronis: Mr. Vigneault, was this report prepared in response to "Science support for offshore wind activity in Nova Scotia", with request ID 1753?

Bernard Vigneault: Yes. As context, this was the initial request. It doesn't reflect the full status of the discussion that followed on what the precise need was of our client's sector, which in this case

was the aquatic ecosystems sector. It was a general request for advice.

As we alluded to earlier, in terms of providing science advice for a specific risk, specific project location or specific technologies, that will be part of the future evaluation of the project proposals.

• (1750)

Tamara Kronis: I understand that. The question I have, though.... The issue requiring science information and/or advice that was outlined in the document specifically references this:

The development of an offshore wind industry in Atlantic Canada is likely to impact marine ecosystems and species in new ways that have not been investigated in a Canadian context. Consequently, there is need for science advice to inform anticipated project-specific Impact Assessments, as well as science advice to inform more general knowledge gaps regarding potential impacts of OSW development on aquatic ecosystems....

My question is, did you seek to understand how offshore wind works before you went to gather the data?

Bernard Vigneault: That was a parallel effort, as I mentioned earlier. This was to share with all stakeholders the information we had in terms of data and current spatial analysis. At the same time, in parallel, we have a body of research to address the gap we identified.

This is a new industry. It will have an impact that we haven't seen before on the ocean environment and on our aquatic resources, so there's ongoing research. This includes better documenting of the environment and resource before development. Also, there's a modelling component where, through the use of an oceanographic model and an ecosystem model, we will try to see what the impact will be of different types of structure construction, for example.

Tamara Kronis: In deciding what to include in this report and what not to include in this report, did you think at all about the infrastructure that would be required?

Bernard Vigneault: We did not do that specifically for this report, because it was on the state of the environment and the state of the fishery. This would necessarily be required for future steps of the reviews, when we'll get actual detailed proposals.

I don't know if my colleague from the Maritimes region wants to add to that.

Luke Gaulton: I will add that the regional assessment process that was led by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada and its report would have informed the types of information that DFO was anticipating would be needed. That would have informed what we decided to include in this report.

Tamara Kronis: Given the way the ocean works, when you have a geographic area, are the fish generally unaware of the boundaries of it?

Bernard Vigneault: [*Inaudible—Editor*] for currents and oceans.

Tamara Kronis: Did you think about the fact that the people doing this assessment might actually need information from outside of the area, given the impact that offshore wind has outside of the immediate location where it's located?

Bernard Vigneault: Absolutely, this is part of the report. In many of the analyses, we talk about the adjacent areas, adjacent information on fisheries and fish stocks and so on.

Tamara Kronis: When it comes to a report like this, is the precautionary principle relevant at all? Do you think about the precautionary principle and the mandate of DFO?

Bernard Vigneault: It's not relevant in the sense that it's not a decision document. We don't make recommendations. We don't make management decisions. This is the information we have. The precautionary approach comes next, followed by a regulatory decision.

Tamara Kronis: What use is this document to anyone doing impact work?

Bernard Vigneault: I can describe how we use it for ourselves, as an example.

We are concerned. We mentioned the very important concern of fish harvesters. We are also concerned about the viability of our science survey for fish stocks long-term.

This exercise compiled all the information from our own survey. The survey we conduct, in collaboration with the industry, overlaps with areas where there is a potential for conflict in terms of usage of space and either we won't have access to the area to do the survey work because of the infrastructure, or there would be an indirect impact, like if there's an impact on the oceanography that would change the signal we're measuring. That's an example.

Tamara Kronis: None of that is in this report.

The Chair: The time is up. Thank you.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

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

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I've had time to take a closer look at the documents that were provided, and I still have questions about certain things.

Ms. Williams, we see that you had a meeting in May 2025. At that time, Natural Resources Canada was reaching out to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans about measures to mitigate the anticipated impacts on fisheries.

Your notes state that the fish and fish habitat protection program will assess the impacts on fish and their habitat in accordance with the spirit of section 34 of the Fisheries Act, which specifically addresses the protection of fish and their habitat in relation to fisheries management objectives. Furthermore, the request for advice is clear: "...there is a need for science advice to inform anticipated project-specific impact assessments."

Based on what was done back then, in May 2025, I don't understand why, in your December report, you deliberately refrained from examining the potential impacts of the wind energy industry.

Was there any political pressure on you to scale back the scope of your report?

[*English*]

Wendy Williams: No, we were not approached politically. We were really responding to the call for information that concluded in January of this year.

Fisheries compensation is ongoing. We are engaged in discussions with colleagues in the department on that. There's more information that DFO continues to provide as this process moves along. The report we are discussing here today is not really the complete series of information that we will be providing going forward.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: I get the sense that your department has made a bit more progress on the marine ecosystem impact assessment than one might think from reading the first report.

[*English*]

Wendy Williams: I have no response to that. I'm not quite sure what you're getting at with that question. Could you give me a bit more context?

[*Translation*]

Bernard Vigneault: As I tried to explain earlier, the challenge when providing scientific advice on projects of this scale is that the needs and when those needs will arise are not known in advance.

Regarding the first document you referred to, the goal is to keep an open file for all the scientific advice that will be needed over time to assess projects.

That specific request for information was not a request for advice on the impacts of a project. It was really to reach out to partners, including Fisheries and Oceans. We were asked to provide regulatory agencies with any relevant information or data to support the decision regarding the specific areas to be used within the larger designated areas. That's what we did.

The first document is therefore an open file with all the scientific advice we'll provide as part of our collaboration with our colleagues in ecosystems management.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank the witnesses for their discussion of this report. It was a very interesting discussion, to say the least. Thank you for being here.

I'm now going to suspend so that we can move to the in camera component of our meeting, which is on the Fisheries Act. *[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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