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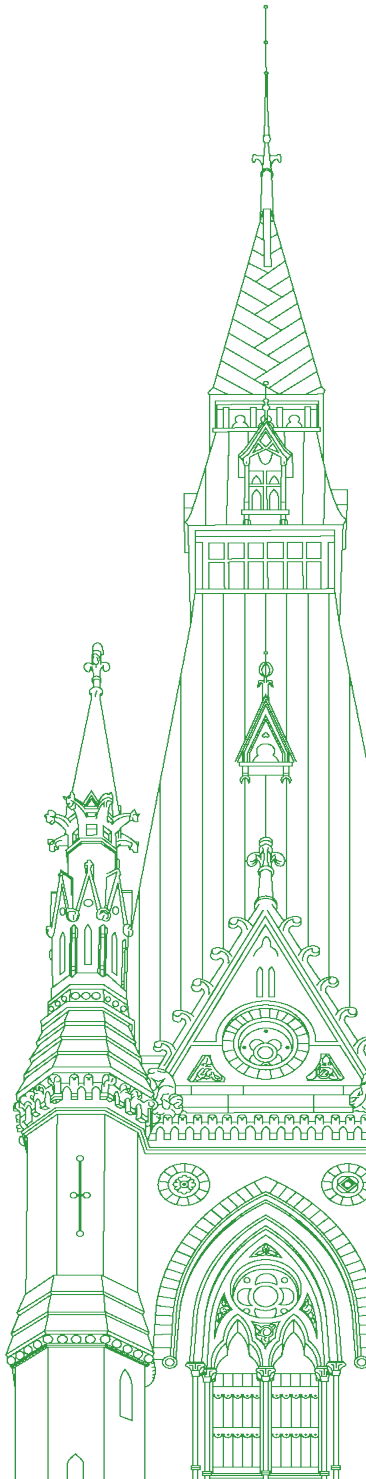
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Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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Chair: Hedy Fry

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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● (1540)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold (Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 50 of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to Standing Order 108, the committee is meeting to continue its study of Atlantic salmon populations.

Today's meeting will take place in a hybrid format, pursuant to Standing Orders.

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

I would like to remind participants of the following points. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. At the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor audio, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the desired earpiece to select the desired channel.

I'd like to remind witnesses that committee members may ask questions in French or English. If you need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the listening channel you need in advance in order to take full advantage of the time allotted for questions and answers.

This is a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will do our best to manage the speaking order, and we appreciate your patience in that regard.

I'd like to now welcome our witnesses, and I apologize for a bit of a delay in starting, due to a vote in the House. I'll start by welcoming, from the Fort Folly First Nation, Wendy Epworth, director of conservation programs, as well as Tim Robinson, director of salmon recovery programs. From Spruce City Wildlife Association, we have Dustin Snyder, president. From the Foundation for Conservation of Atlantic Salmon, we have Raymond Lacroix, president and chairman; as well as Charline McCoy, executive director.

We'll start with the witnesses' opening statements for five minutes or less—that's per organization. We will start with Wendy Epworth for five minutes, if you'd like.

Wendy Epworth (Director, Conservation Programs, Fort Folly First Nation): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the invitation to appear today.

My name is Wendy Epworth, and this is my colleague, Tim Robinson. We are here on behalf of Chief Rebecca Knockwood of Fort Folly First Nation.

Fort Folly is a partner in Fundy Salmon Recovery, which is an innovative collaboration involving academia, governmental organizations and the aquaculture industry to recover endangered inner Bay of Fundy Atlantic salmon on the New Brunswick side of the bay. That work covers the rivers in Fundy National Park, the Petitcodiac River and now the Big Salmon River.

We want to leave you with one message. Atlantic salmon and the communities and first nations connected to them deserve the same federal commitment as salmon on the Pacific.

For thousands of years, salmon have been food, ceremony and identity for nations of the Wabanaki Confederacy, and access to them is a constitutionally protected right. Salmon matter to rural communities, too.

A study for the Atlantic Salmon Federation valued Atlantic salmon in eastern Canada at about $255 million per year, but their worth goes well beyond dollars. When a river loses its salmon, a community loses part of who it is.

The inner Bay of Fundy population remains on the brink, and many other Atlantic salmon populations are in decline. Predation is one reason, and it weighs more heavily as salmon numbers fall. For more than a decade, people on the Miramichi have raised the rapidly growing striped bass population as a serious concern, while salmon numbers in that river have kept on declining. Seal populations on the Atlantic coast have also grown substantially. When salmon populations are this small, every predator counts, and these imbalances deserve timely attention.

The effects of climate change, while concerning, are not a reason to give up. We can focus recovery and habitat restoration on rivers with cold-water refugia and protect the headwaters and the land that keep them cool. Canada has already committed to protecting 30% of its lands and waters by 2030. Choosing lands that protect cold-water salmon habitat serves both goals at once.

On the west coast, DFO has funded salmon conservation, including freshwater hatchery capacity, every year since 1977, and in 2021, it added $647 million more. On the east coast, the response has been smaller and slower. This spring, the government committed $81.7 million over five years, which is the largest federal investment in Atlantic salmon yet. That is a real step forward, and I thank the government for it, but it is about one-eighth of the Pacific investment. Over time, support for salmon conservation here has been taken away, while on the west coast, it has grown.

We do not raise this to pit one coast against the other. Pacific salmon deserve that attention. Atlantic salmon, and the people connected to them, deserve it too.

Salmon cannot adapt if they disappear while we are learning what is driving their decline. Some threats we will be able to address, and some may shift on their own over time. Meanwhile, innovative recovery work, including hatchery support, is what keeps salmon in our rivers.

On the west coast, new hatcheries are still being built. Here, they are being closed. In our careers, all three hatcheries that have supported inner Bay of Fundy salmon programs have closed or are closing, with Mactaquac in New Brunswick being the latest.

Hatcheries are an essential tool, but they are not the only one. Fundy salmon recovery requires hatchery capacity at this time but goes well beyond traditional juvenile stocking. It is showing positive results in published research and on the rivers for both salmon populations and the ecosystems they support, and others want to adopt a similar model. Together, hatcheries and approaches like ours can build salmon numbers over time, so that there are enough fish in our rivers for adaptation to be possible at all.

We would ask the committee to consider recommending real co-management with first nations, including decision-making roles in assessment and recovery on their rivers. Provide long-term, stable funding for Atlantic salmon recovery, including hatcheries and approaches like Fundy Salmon Recovery's, which means continuing the $81.7-million commitment, at its current level at least, beyond its five years, because recovery is a long-term commitment. Take timely action on the threats we can address now, such as predator-prey imbalances and the protection of headwaters and cold-water habitat.

Atlantic salmon have survived ice ages. Whether they survive this century depends on choices made in rooms like this.

Thank you. We welcome your questions.

● (1545)

Mel Arnold: Thank you, Ms. Epworth.

Mr. Cormier needs to do a sound check now. We can do that before we move on to our next witness.

Go ahead, Mr. Cormier.

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

I had some IT issues, so I wasn't sure whether everybody was able to hear me well in the room—whether my sound was good.

Mel Arnold: Your sound is good, Mr. Cormier. Thank you.

We'll now move to Mr. Snyder for five minutes.

Dustin Snyder (President, Spruce City Wildlife Association): Hello. Thank you to the committee for having me today. When I was first asked to speak to this committee regarding Atlantic salmon, I admit that I thought there was some sort of mistake, as I am from the Pacific region.

I'm the president of the Spruce City Wildlife Association, which operates a conservation Chinook hatchery in northern B.C. We're the most technologically advanced volunteer facility in B.C., and that's because we're the only volunteer facility in B.C. that works with threatened and endangered stocks.

Regarding Atlantic salmon, I feel we need to look at how we can move beyond these lasting declines and into a community-driven effort. I believe one answer may lie on Canada's west coast.

DFO's salmonid enhancement program, or SEP, offers a model worth considering for Atlantic Canada. SEP's 2019 report demonstrates what can happen when government investment, scientific expertise, indigenous knowledge and community can come together. In 2019-20, SEP supported community partners and released millions of juvenile salmon for conservation and rebuilding, supported habitat restoration projects and helped engage thousands of people through salmon education and stewardship initiatives. Remarkably, some of SEP's contributions helped leverage $25 for every $1 of SEP funding. This means that for every $1 the government put in, the community found and added $24 more. That's a powerful example of how strategic public investment can mobilize resources, and it demonstrates the power of partnerships and how they can multiply public dollars.

An Atlantic salmonid enhancement program built around local watersheds with some stable multi-year funding to indigenous communities, conservation groups and local non-profits could help change the future of Atlantic salmon. These partners could operate community hatcheries where justified, monitor salmon returns and spawning grounds, and restore habitat where necessary. It would put communities in partnership at the heart of recovery, engage youth community members in raising salmon under the expert guidance of the department, engage volunteers monitoring rivers and their conditions, and spur local organizations to help restore stream banks and remove barriers to migration. These activities would not simply support salmon recovery. They would create environmental knowledge, strengthen community connections and inspire the next generation of conservation.

Most importantly, we need to follow the science. Atlantic salmon face complex threats, degraded habitat, predator-prey imbalance and low marine survival. I will note that hatcheries alone cannot solve these problems. Any enhancement program must focus on healthy habitat, predator management and the protection of genetic integrity through carefully monitored enhancement, as well as the use of genetic diversity measures such as matrix spawning. Enhancement programs also open up the potential to learn more from the fish being handled. Tagging programs to monitor migration and survival, genetic samples and sampling for disease can all be done by the community with the support and oversight of the department.

I will note that success should be measured by increased salmon survival and natural reproduction, not by the number of fish produced and released from facilities.

Finally, government must recognize that it would be an investment in both the ecosystem and the communities. SEP's experience shows how public funding can attract additional investment, build local capacity, create employment and sustain public stewardship. An Atlantic version of SEP could apply the same principles as Pacific SEP while measuring its own outcomes and creating its own goals, including adult salmon returns, volunteer participation and, of course, long-term population recovery.

I'm not at all suggesting copying the Pacific program exactly. Learn what it has demonstrated and build something that reflects the unique rivers, communities and salmon populations of Atlantic Canada. The future of Atlantic salmon will depend on more than government policy or hatchery production. It will depend on whether government gives communities the resources, knowledge and opportunity to become active partners in their recovery. At the Spruce City Wildlife Association, this is what we call conservation for the future generations.

Thank you.

● (1550)

Mel Arnold: Thank you. So far, you've both been under time.

I will now turn to Raymond Lacroix for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Raymond Lacroix (President and Chairman, The Foundation for Conservation of Atlantic Salmon): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence before you today.

My name is Raymond Lacroix. I am the president of the Foundation for Conservation of Atlantic Salmon. I am accompanied by Ms. McCoy, who is the organization's executive director.

The foundation is a registered charity that was established in 2007 thanks to an endowment fund of over $30 million from the federal government. Indeed, it was this committee that recommended its creation back in 2004. Our mandate specifically focuses on the conservation, restoration and sustainable future of wild Atlantic salmon and their habitat in the Atlantic provinces and Quebec. We invest in conservation, support applied scientific research, bring partners together and promote the practical application of knowledge.

The foundation is not a lobbying or advocacy organization. It comprises a diverse and inclusive interprovincial board of directors, as well as advisory committees for each of the provinces—the four Atlantic provinces and Quebec—which include government representatives, first nations representatives and experts. We also have a scientific advisory committee that is similarly interprovincial, diverse and inclusive. The foundation comprises more than 65 volunteers. We also have four permanent staff based in Fredericton.

Over the past 20 years and more, the foundation has invested over $20 million in more than 1,000 conservation and research projects in the Atlantic provinces and Quebec. In 2027 alone, our contribution will exceed $2 million. These investments have helped to mobilize significant additional contributions from governments, indigenous organizations, conservation groups, researchers, communities and other partners.

This interprovincial experience gives the foundation a somewhat unique perspective on the challenges facing Atlantic salmon. We recognize that there is no single cause for the decline of wild Atlantic salmon and that, consequently, there is no single solution to this decline either.

Pressures vary from river to river and from region to region. These may include habitat degradation, changes in ocean and freshwater conditions, barriers to fish passage, predation—notably by seals and striped bass—aquaculture, climate change and other sources of mortality throughout the salmon's life cycle.

The issues examined by this committee, particularly those relating to striped bass, seals, mortality during migration and other factors, are significant. They also demonstrate why decisions concerning Atlantic salmon must be based on robust, up-to-date and transparent scientific data.

Our foundation has a scientific advisory committee which sets research priorities and recommends funding for applied research projects. Through this committee, we have supported research into several of the issues affecting Atlantic salmon populations. These projects undergo scientific evaluation, and the results help to build the knowledge needed to understand the decline of salmon and guide conservation decisions.

At the same time, advances in scientific knowledge must be translated into concrete action on the ground. Every year, the foundation supports community and indigenous organizations, catchment groups and other partners carrying out practical conservation work: habitat restoration, improving fish passages, monitoring populations and water conditions, collecting data, raising community awareness and building local capacity.

One of the lessons we have learned from these investments made over the past 20 years and more is that local organizations play a vital role in the recovery of Atlantic salmon. They know and love their rivers, they have long-standing relationships with their communities and, in many cases, they have been collecting valuable data for decades.

However, these organizations cannot do this alone; they need medium and long-term support.

The recovery of Atlantic salmon will require ongoing collaboration between various governments—namely the federal and provincial governments—as well as indigenous partners, conservation organizations, researchers and local communities. We need to coordinate our investments and data more effectively so that limited resources are directed where they can have the greatest impact.

● (1555)

The foundation supports the national strategy to ensure the future of Atlantic salmon. We believe this strategy represents a significant opportunity to move from individual efforts towards a better-coordinated collective approach based on clear priorities, measurable outcomes and accountability for the results achieved.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): We are now at five minutes. Could you please wrap up quickly?

[*Translation*]

Raymond Lacroix: Agreed.

I would like to make three points: We must continue to invest in scientific research; we must invest for the long term; we must continue to improve coordination.

The foundation has been in existence for 20 years, and we are here to continue contributing to the conservation of Atlantic salmon.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you for wrapping up quickly.

We'll now go to the first round of questions, starting with Mr. Small for six minutes, please.

Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Epworth.

Ms. Epworth, do you agree that Atlantic salmon river runs need to be in critical condition before salmon enhancement by use of hatcheries or by use of the technology that Cooke provided in the inner Bay of Fundy can be deployed to bring up salmon populations in Atlantic Canada?

Wendy Epworth: No, I don't agree. I think it poses a great risk to wait until the population is critically depleted before intervening, because once a population is so depressed, it takes a much bigger effort to recover it.

From a genetic perspective, if you are waiting until enhancement fish pose a huge genetic risk to your remaining wild fish, you have waited too long. You can imagine that your wild population are the fittest fish in your river, so any enhancement that you do to keep those numbers up should be at a lower degree so as not to pose a risk to those fish. If you wait until there are hardly any fish left, then I would say you have waited too long.

Clifford Small: Is it widely known that this attitude exists within the DFO? Does the general public or do anglers in general know that the DFO is opposed to enhancing rivers until they're basically wiped out? Is that a well-known fact?

Wendy Epworth: I think on the east coast it is, at this point, because there have been a lot of groups that have been advocating intervention for quite some time, and the DFO has not acted on those recommendations.

Clifford Small: You mentioned groups that are advocating salmon enhancement. Are there any groups that are standing in the way of it and trying to influence the minister or influence those within our department who will be making decisions on salmon enhancement by telling them that salmon enhancement would harm the gene pool?

Wendy Epworth: I think there are members of the department who hold the genetic purity of fish to a very high standard, but anybody who works with Atlantic salmon and who works on the ground level understands that these communities want salmon to persist in the rivers and that it is essential to the fabric of Atlantic Canada that Atlantic salmon remain in the rivers.

● (1600)

Clifford Small: You are involved with the Petitcodiac project with Cooke.

Wendy Epworth: Yes.

Clifford Small: Do you know if Cooke has offered to provide that program on the Miramichi?

Wendy Epworth: I'm not specifically aware of other entities that Cooke may or may not be in discussions with. I know that a lot of groups have been expressing interest in a similar model. They have been very supportive, in our experience, of what we're doing, so I would suspect that they would help other people keep Atlantic salmon in the rivers.

Clifford Small: Thank you.

Mr. Snyder, thank you for coming all of the way from "Super, Natural" British Columbia, where you've done fantastic work in maintaining the salmon runs in your rivers.

Last year, someone in the riding of Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame who was interested in boosting the salmon population in the Indian River went to DFO and wanted to form a volunteer group to reactivate the salmon enhancement program that existed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They were told by DFO that this was impossible unless that river's salmon run was in danger of going extinct.

Do you agree that a river's salmon run should be in danger of going extinct before DFO would support some kind of enhancement?

Dustin Snyder: No, definitely not. I'd support the previous statement by Wendy that being proactive is a lot more beneficial than being reactive. Setting targets for where these fish should be at certain levels and keeping them there or working to maintain that level is very important, again, to getting down to the genetic diversity issue that we've faced in northern B.C. with our endangered runs. There's a lot more work and effort that has to be put into that to ensure that you have that genetic diversity. Again, if you're getting volunteers involved, that's a win-win. As I said, in B.C., for every dollar the government puts into SEP, our founder created $24 more to put into that program. That's a pretty good bang for the buck.

Clifford Small: Setting my next question, Mr. Snyder, how much per year does your program receive from DFO in funding?

Dustin Snyder: We currently receive $15,000 a year. That is on a year-by-year basis. That is not a guaranteed thing.

Clifford Small: Do you run your entire program on that river for $15,000?

Dustin Snyder: We run two rivers at opposite ends of our region, and our region is about the size of Vancouver Island.

Clifford Small: Wow.

Do you think that rivers in Atlantic Canada could benefit from citizen-led initiatives like your own with basically minute amounts of money going in from the taxpayer?

Dustin Snyder: Yes, 100%. It should have been in place a long time ago.

Clifford Small: That's my time.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you.

Next, we move on to Mr. Earle, please, for six minutes.

Philip Earle (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for your testimony.

Just to declare my bias, I'm an avid Atlantic salmon sports fisherman. I grew up in a small fishing community where fish was ceremonial and sustenance for our family. I have a large indigenous population in my riding, and I do support the indigenous fishery and know the importance thereof.

I will look towards Mr. Snyder from the Pacific coast.

Thank you again for coming all the way here.

For decades, we've had conservation measures and means around Atlantic salmon. It feels like we have a continued decline in the Atlantic salmon population. Coming from the west coast with knowledge of the Atlantic salmon, could you give us your feedback as to why we're seeing that continued decline?

Dustin Snyder: I would say that again, as was mentioned here, unfortunately, when it comes to salmon, it's usually kind of a death by a thousand cuts sort of thing. There is no silver bullet solution and, again, as I mentioned, something like hatcheries should be put in place as a stopgap.

I would say that, for our conservation hatchery program that I oversee in B.C., our goal is to put ourselves out of business. We want the fish to be able to sustain themselves. Again, there are habitat issues, climate change and predator-prey imbalance, whether it's bass or seals. Being able to monitor these fish closely and have people put their hands on these fish and keep an eye on them brings community that much more into it. As you said, you've been involved in fishing, so you know how important those fish are.

● (1605)

Philip Earle: Thank you for that.

Given your knowledge of Pacific salmon and salmon more generally, can you talk to us about real evidence that you may have seen, evidence that may exist for Atlantic salmon, where reseeding a river brings forth fruit: The salmon mature within the river, go into the ocean, and come back in to spawn and continue the cycle of Atlantic salmon? Does that evidence exist?

Dustin Snyder: That I'm not 100% sure. I'm sorry; I'm not well versed. I think that you guys would probably have some better input on that than I do.

Philip Earle: Thank you. I appreciate your forthrightness.

Would somebody else on that side of the table like to answer that question? Do we have real evidence of success by seeding a river with young salmon?

Go ahead, Mr. Robinson.

Tim Robinson (Director, Salmon Recovery Programs, Fort Folly First Nation): Thank you.

On the inner Bay of Fundy, within Fort Folly's territory, there are four rivers on the New Brunswick side. One of those rivers, notably, is the Petitcodiac River. Historically, it represented 20% recruitment for the inner Bay of Fundy population, but the Atlantic salmon in it were extirpated altogether because of a causeway structure that was built back in 1968. The gates weren't functioning properly and weren't opened until 2010.

Through Fort Folly's efforts, in partnership with DFO and other partners, and through the Fundy Salmon Recovery model in particular, we now have salmon at all life stages existing on the Petitcodiac, and we have returns. They are modest, but adults return to the Petitcodiac every year.

The Petitcodiac River is a big system that is impacted more by climate change and human impacts, but the other three rivers are showing even stronger returns. The Big Salmon River, which was DFO's index river, is now part of the Fundy Salmon Recovery model, along with two rivers at Fundy National Park, and we're showing really strong returns.

Enhancement and innovation work, and collaborative partnerships work so that one entity isn't carrying the full burden financially. Partnership and innovation are key.

Philip Earle: I have about one minute left, I believe.

Thank you for the great work you're doing and for that added evidence that we can bring back important salmon rivers.

As somebody who's done the work, as you've illustrated, how disappointing is it for you that we continue to fight seals, cormorants and bass in river systems, which basically erode the great work you're doing?

Tim Robinson: Shifts in predator-prey relationships, like those throughout the Atlantic salmon range, are very challenging. Action has to be taken to try to move toward more of a balance. One thing I think we need to do, as our colleagues here have alluded to, is really increase the presence of Atlantic salmon throughout the range to help them, in part, survive those threats as we work toward achieving more balance.

That's my quick answer.

Philip Earle: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

Mel Arnold: Thank you.

We now move on to Mr. Champoux for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

I think we're going to keep Mr. Lacroix and Ms. McCoy busy. It's their turn.

First of all, good afternoon.

You are no doubt aware of the government's announcement last September regarding the investment of $740 million for ocean protection. Do you have any idea how this money will be used and allocated? Do you have any information on this that we might not yet have, or do you have nothing at all?

Raymond Lacroix: We don't have any information yet.

Martin Champoux: If you had any recommendations to make on this, what would they be? Obviously, you would surely say that the sum of $740 million should go towards the protection of Atlantic salmon, but let's say, realistically, that it is for the protection of the oceans. What do you expect?

● (1610)

Raymond Lacroix: We expect this to be channelled into research, particularly scientific research on the oceans.

As far as salmon are concerned, we know quite a lot about what happens in rivers, of course. However, once the salmon reach the sea, it becomes a black hole. There are several theories to explain why salmon are under threat at sea, but we don't really know. There is a lack of scientific analyses or studies on what happens at that stage.

As for future funding and what we would favour, we would obviously like to see more research into what actually happens at sea.

Martin Champoux: That's more or less what I heard you say earlier in your opening address.

Would you say that, generally speaking, there is a certain shortfall in the government's commitment to involving the scientific community in tackling these immense problems? We know that the problem is complex and that there is no easy or single solution. There is a whole range of factors and measures that need to be put in place to successfully tackle this problem.

Raymond Lacroix: I would say that problems at sea are more frequent or are a relatively recent phenomenon. That is what we are observing from our perspective. We certainly need to do more. We obviously hope to see more scientific research in this area. That is what we are promoting.

We need to understand what is happening at sea. We can, of course, continue to support the rivers—and that is what we must do—and we can create the most favourable habitats for the return of salmon; but if all the salmon disappear at sea and we do not understand why, we cannot take coordinated action afterwards. We must therefore continue to prioritize this and, of course, give priority to scientific research at sea.

Martin Champoux: Clearly, your foundation is very committed. Do you collaborate with other stakeholders? I am thinking, amongst others, of fishermen's groups and first nations, who are stakeholders deeply concerned about the decline in the Atlantic salmon population and very involved in this issue. How is this coordination going? Does everyone agree that we need to give greater priority—and more funding, too—to scientific research and the use of scientific data? Is there a general consensus on this? In short, how is the collaboration going?

Raymond Lacroix: The collaboration is going very well. As I mentioned right at the start of my opening address, we are an organization bringing together people from many different provinces. We have people from all over. That is what makes the foundation so rich. There is a diversity of viewpoints.

As I mentioned earlier, we are finding that concerns vary from one province to another. However, there is one thing that is common to all the provinces, and that is what is happening at sea. There is a consensus on this.

In the summer of 2022, as the salmon swam down the rivers, something happened in the Gulf of St. Lawrence or at sea which meant that there was no run, or very few, in 2023, 2024 and 2025. In 2026, the situation improved. We believe that season was better. Not all the statistics are available yet, but it was better. So, something happened at sea, and everyone agrees that more research is needed to understand what is going on.

It is certainly true that some rivers have more specific problems. This is the case with striped bass, for example, at the mouth of the Miramichi River. This is a cause for concern. We also know that, on the Basse-Côte-Nord in Quebec, there can be incidental catches of young salmon. In Nova Scotia, there are other issues, occurring between the mainland and Cape Breton Island.

However, there is one thing common to all the provinces, and that is what is happening in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. This is something that really needs to be investigated because, subsequently, when the salmon return, it is what has happened at sea that determines the number of runs. I would say that people agree on this point.

Martin Champoux: We are not even able to determine, by a process of elimination, what the causes might be—for example, a change in ocean temperature or overpopulation of a species. We know that predation is an important factor in the equation. That said, we are unable to pinpoint any specific cause. There is not enough scientific data available for that. So, something significant enough to have such a severe impact on salmon populations must have happened at sea, but we are unable to identify what it was, and this has been going on for several years.

Raymond Lacroix: It lasted three years.

● (1615)

Martin Champoux: That's quite a long time, after all.

Raymond Lacroix: We were unable to determine the exact cause. As with many things, it is probably a combination of several reasons. Nevertheless, something fundamental happened in the summer of 2022, and we need to identify what it was.

It doesn't seem to have happened again since then, but we have no guarantee that it didn't happen again in the summer of 2026, for example. We will only see the results in 2027, 2028 and 2029, or later. So we really need to understand what happened if we want to preserve the salmon. We can certainly create the best habitats for the salmon to return to, but if they no longer swim upstream, we will be no further ahead.

Martin Champoux: There's no way of knowing, in hindsight, what happened three or four years ago to cause this. So, it's difficult to predict. It's difficult to prevent, too. So, it's a bit negligent, if I understand correctly.

Raymond Lacroix: What happened in the summer of 2022 only came to light in the summer of 2023. Very few young salmon migrated upstream. It wasn't until 2024 that we realized this wasn't an isolated incident. Indeed, it wasn't an isolated incident, and this was confirmed in 2025.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you. That's your six minutes.

We'll move on to our next round of questions. It's a five-minute round.

Mr. Lewis, you have five minutes.

Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for some really excellent testimony this afternoon and also for a lot of the other testimony that I read before the meeting. Unfortunately, some folks couldn't make it. Thank you for all your efforts.

Ms. Epworth, I'm going to start with you, if I could, please. DFO routinely claims that it supports wild salmon recovery, yet there is a lot of red tape and there are delayed permits and short-term funding uncertainty.

In your experience in running Fort Folly's restoration program, how has DFO's approach hindered your conservation efforts?

Wendy Epworth: Thank you for the question.

I think there are improvements that could be made, certainly. There are a lot of permitting requirements, especially in our program, where we move fish from one location to another. I think there's a huge benefit to looking at longer-term funding arrangements and also at longer-term permitting: blanket permits for movements of fish, for example, that require reporting regularly associated with those moves. I think there certainly could be improvements made. I and T permitting is a challenge for sure.

Chris Lewis: Thank you, Ms. Epworth.

Through you, Chair, my question is for Mr. Robinson,

Fort Folly's program proves that smolt-to-adult supplementation and wild release can stabilize critically endangered runs like the inner Bay of Fundy. While the nation works with Parks Canada and private partners to save these runs, DFO is shutting down federal biodiversity facilities. How does DFO's defunding of these facilities undermine first nation-led recovery models across Atlantic Canada?

Tim Robinson: It's a huge challenge. Like all of the programs that strive towards maintaining and recovering salmon populations in the Atlantic region back to self-sustaining levels, it requires some hatchery support. It's a critical component of all the programs, a number of which are slightly different in their nature, like geared towards the rivers or the specific units of salmon throughout the range, but they all require some hatchery support.

With Fort Folly and the Fundy Salmon Recovery model, we relied on freshwater hatchery space at the Mactaquac facility, but that's now slated to be closed. We are establishing a new freshwater capacity through our Fundy Salmon Recovery partnership, where Cooke Aquaculture is making a dedicated space available in one of their facilities for our requirements on the Petitcodiac, on the Big Salmon River, and on the two Fundy National Park rivers. The population requires the means by which to maintain some brood stock to support efforts by groups across the board.

Chris Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Robinson.

I have a final question for you, sir. A lot of folks aren't aware that we used to have Atlantic salmon on Lake Ontario. Right now, there's some very good work being done by Lake Superior State University, as well as the Michigan DNR, on a hatchery on...I believe it's St. Marys River, between Lake Huron and Lake Superior. There's actually a small Atlantic salmon sport fishing fishery there now.

As a special adviser to the Great Lakes, I firmly believe that our Great Lakes are one of our most important natural resources in Canada, which ought to be protected. Atlantic salmon in Lake Ontario is one of those things. Based on your experience working with endangered Atlantic salmon in the inner Bay of Fundy, I'm wondering if you could speak to why salmon recovery succeeds or fails in practice.

● (1620)

Tim Robinson: There need to be salmon present in order for people to care about the salmon, so programs that engage the public and reconnect the public to salmon are critically important. It's my experience that Canadians across the board want to see salmon in their rivers. It's one of those iconic species that scores so high across the board, representing high value to Canadians. It's one of those species that Canadians just don't want to see disappear.

Chris Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Robinson.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you, that's almost exactly five minutes.

We'll now move to Mr. Cormier for five minutes, please.

Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being with us today.

Thanks to my good friend, MP Philip Earle, for being with us. Just like him, I've been an avid salmon fisherman for the last 30 years. When I proposed this study, it was because the numbers are extremely concerning, as you probably all imagine. In several rivers, salmon returns are at historically low levels. We need to find some solutions, but we need to talk also about the problems that we're facing.

My first couple of questions will be for Ms. Epworth and Mr. Robinson.

I missed the first couple of minutes of the meeting because of a technical issue, so just so I know what you guys are doing, you're working for the Fort Folly First Nation in New Brunswick for the hatchery program. Is that what you guys are doing?

Wendy Epworth: Fort Folly Habitat Recovery has worked with endangered salmon in the Bay of Fundy for over 20 years. Our most recent work has centred on the Fundy Salmon Recovery partnership, which sees wild juvenile salmon captured and then transported to the world's first marine conservation farm, operated by our industry partners, where these fish are grown to maturity and then released back in the river to spawn naturally.

Serge Cormier: If I'm not mistaken, there was a similar project in the Miramichi area. It was called the CAST program. Is that something similar to what you are doing?

Wendy Epworth: Yes, I believe the goals of CAST were similar, in that they wanted to collect juvenile salmon, raise them to maturity in a freshwater environment and then release them to spawn.

Serge Cormier: Let's go to your role and what you're doing. Do you see improvement right now in some of the rivers where you're doing this restocking?

Wendy Epworth: Yes, absolutely. In the Upper Salmon River within Fundy National Park, they reliably expect adults to come back every year, which is a wonderful thing to see. It represents a 30-year high for that river in the national park. We're also seeing positive effects on the ecosystem itself in terms of improved productivity and no loss of genetic diversity within the project fish.

Serge Cormier: That's great.

I'm not sure if it was you, Mr. Robinson—or maybe it was Mr. Lacroix—who was saying that there is probably a problem when it comes to mortality at sea. We were also talking, Mr. Robinson, about some tagging of Atlantic salmon. If I'm not mistaken, the Atlantic Salmon Federation had some kind of tagging device, or whatever, attached to some salmon. Am I mistaken, or was there a tagging program in the past to understand what the mortality at sea was?

Tim Robinson: You're not mistaken. There have been several tagging initiatives over the years—some of the first ones by Gilles Lacroix in the early 2000s—and through to the present day. Now there is tagging of smolts and adults, kelts, with acoustic tags. The DFO and other partners—Fundy National Park, Fort Folly and other participants—have a huge grid of receivers out in the Bay of Fundy, and there are a number of master's students analyzing the data.

There have been some preliminary results—

● (1625)

Serge Cormier: What are those results? I should have asked the Atlantic Salmon Federation when they came. Are you aware of the results from tagging those salmon?

Tim Robinson: Back in the early work, in the early 2000s, smolts were tagged, and there was some pelagic trawling that happened out in the bay. Salmon were in good shape out in the bay. They exit the Bay of Fundy, and part of their marine life cycle has them in the outer Bay of Fundy, in the Gulf of Maine region, where they succumb to marine mortality, it's assumed, because so few return as adults.

What we're finding through this research is that there need to be more adults. They're better equipped to endure the rigours of their marine life cycle and return. In order to get more adults, you have to prime the pump and have more smolts exiting and existing in the marine environment. The way to do that is to have more adults.

Serge Cormier: Thank you.

Mel Arnold: Thank you. That's five minutes.

Mr. Champoux, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll come back to you, Mr. Lacroix.

Earlier, in her opening address, Ms. Epworth spoke of the difference between the resources that have been put in place for salmon conservation in the Pacific, on the west coast, and those deployed for the Maritimes, the east coast and the region you represent.

Is this a recognized issue? Could you tell me a little about the impact this difference in federal commitment might have?

Raymond Lacroix: Back then, more than 20 years ago, the federal government set up two foundations: one for the Pacific and one for the Atlantic. The Pacific foundation still exists. We too, in the Atlantic region, 20 years on, are still here. We have similar mandates, which are the protection and conservation of salmon, whether Atlantic or Pacific salmon.

Indeed, funds have recently been donated, pledged or announced. I believe this amounts to nearly $400 million or $420 million for the west coast and $81.7 million for the east coast.

Martin Champoux: Would you say that the problems people have to deal with there cost a great deal more than the ones you have to deal with?

Raymond Lacroix: I can't comment on what's happening on the west coast.

What I can tell you, for example, is that obviously, the more money these people receive to protect the salmon, the happier they are. As for us, the more we have to protect Atlantic salmon, the happier we'll be too.

Martin Champoux: The fact remains that this is $400 million compared to $80 million. That is still a significant difference.

As I understand it, the issues are more or less the same. So there must be a reason why the west coast is receiving $400 million and the Maritimes, the Atlantic provinces, are receiving less than a quarter of that.

Raymond Lacroix: Yes, but we have not received a response regarding the allocation of funds.

Martin Champoux: You'd know what to do with those $400 million, wouldn't you?

Raymond Lacroix: Yes.

Martin Champoux: All right. I imagine that would be included in your recommendations.

Raymond Lacroix: You see, we are a trust fund that invests money and donates it to worthy conservation projects. So, obviously, the more money we have to invest, the more we will be able to donate for conservation.

Martin Champoux: Do you have any promising projects that you have funded in relation to the situation we are discussing today?

Raymond Lacroix: Yes. Every year, we receive numerous funding applications. Obviously, we cannot accept them all, because funds are limited. That is to be expected.

That said, if we had more funds, we could distribute more, given the challenges we face in the east, particularly those caused by the summer of 2022.

Martin Champoux: For my part, if I'd had a little more time, I would have asked you to tell us a bit more about it, but that's all the time we had.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you, Monsieur Champoux.

Now, for five minutes, we have Mr. Small, please.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Robinson.

Mr. Robinson, do you think that runs on specific salmon rivers need to be basically near extinction before DFO will allow the groups who want to to form citizen science groups or raise money to start hatchery programs or whatnot? Do you think the DFO should raise their lower reference point on those rivers to allow salmon enhancement to occur?

● (1630)

Tim Robinson: Absolutely. Wendy and I have been part of the inner Bay of Fundy recovery team since its inception back in the early 2000s. The late Chief Joe Knockwood of Fort Folly First Nation was among those who pulled that committee together. It was a really good team for a number of years.

The geneticist for DFO at the time, who developed a live gene bank program, Patrick O'Reilly, pointed out that he wished they had started sooner, because there were some families they weren't able to collect. That was one of our key messages to the committee: Don't wait too long.

Everyone on the panel has referenced that. You have to act more quickly and decisively and not watch the populations decline to a point where it's very hard for them to successfully come back up.

Clifford Small: Do you think there are groups that are lobbying people within DFO with this genetics argument, and are winning with that argument, to stop the recovery of Atlantic salmon?

Tim Robinson: It's perplexing that this sort of argument, which seems to be here in the east, is seemingly carrying so much weight or authority. It is contrary, in our opinion, to what Canadians expect and want, which is action that's rebounding the populations quickly, as opposed to just limiting actions based on purity politics around genetics.

Things change. Nature selects, ultimately, and people want salmon in the rivers. Whether they're first nations leaders, citizen scientists, or actually really accredited scientists, they're saying that we need to do more and more quickly.

Clifford Small: If there were a million people left on earth in a fashion similar to that of the million Atlantic salmon, do you think human beings would be getting super focused on genetics?

Tim Robinson: Not in any world that I want to be part of.

Clifford Small: Are you flabbergasted that folks are lobbying against salmon enhancement?

Tim Robinson: It is really perplexing. I can't appreciate the logic. I think it's representative of people knowing more and more about less and less. There needs to be an appreciation for what Canadians want and value.

Clifford Small: Do you think the work you folks are doing in the inner Bay of Fundy could be moved throughout Atlantic Canada and Quebec? Could you take your model and try it out in several other locations to see how that would work? We always hear people saying that hatcheries don't work and the returns just don't happen, but you have a program that's proven. Do you think it could be taken on the road?

Tim Robinson: I do, and I think that components of it can be applied. In some instances, it could be mimicked. In other instances, there could be components of it. A big part of our program, and the success of our program, I feel, is the collaborative and innovative nature of it. The live gene-banking for the inner bay population worked insofar as it kept the population from going extinct, but it didn't move the needle on recovering the population back to self-sustaining levels. New, innovative and collaborative approaches have the best chance of doing that.

Clifford Small: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you.

We move back to Mr. Earle, please, for five minutes.

Philip Earle: Thank you, Chair.

Again, I need to say, you're excellent witnesses. I really appreciate the diversity of testimony and geography.

I want to go to Mr. Lacroix.

The question I have for you relates back to your comment about 2022. You talked about returns back to the rivers being very low and said something happened in the ocean. Certainly, I don't disagree with you, but I want to ask my question from the standpoint of getting the information you hold, because of the great work the group you're associated with does.

Have you looked at occurrences like weather? For example, in 2022, notwithstanding that it wouldn't have brought the return in that year, we had hurricane Fiona. In years previous to that, we had complete blowouts of river systems that may have caused colossal impacts on salmon being born out of a particular river, with those storms being more fierce and happening more frequently. Do you care to comment to us about some of those impacts, if you've looked at it at all?

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

Raymond Lacroix: Yes.

Naturally, our organization receives grant applications to restore salmon rivers, or to carry out scientific projects.

As regards your question on the probable causes of the 2022 maritime disaster, our foundation has not necessarily received, amongst the applications submitted to us, any requests for scientific projects aimed at analyzing what might have happened in 2022—namely, whether it could have been Hurricane Fiona or something else.

What we have observed, however, regarding this period, is that, although Fiona passed through the maritime provinces and along the western coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, a similar phenomenon was observed in Quebec. Whether it was the rivers of Quebec or those of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, the return rate of young salmon the following season was extremely low. This is what enabled scientists to determine that something had happened at sea in the summer of 2022. The Labrador coast, however, was not affected, or very little. This is therefore a factor that has helped to pinpoint the event to the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Unfortunately, of the grant applications we have received so far, none focuses on what happened at sea in the summer of 2022.

Philip Earle: Thank you, sir.

[*English*]

The next statement is that, anecdotally, Atlantic salmon stocks are weaker in the south and stronger in the north. For example, in Nova Scotia, and as you come into New Brunswick and western Newfoundland, they're so-so, and in Labrador, salmon stocks remain strong. Could one conclude, anecdotally, that it's directly related to water temperature?

Any one of the witnesses can take that question.

[*Translation*]

Raymond Lacroix: It could be a temperature issue. As I mentioned at the outset of my remarks, we believe there are multiple causes. In fact, the people we speak with in each province point to different reasons to explain the decline.

Is it aquaculture to the west of Newfoundland and Labrador, warming waters in the gulf, acid rain in Nova Scotia, the presence of striped bass at the mouth of the Miramichi River, bycatch on Quebec's Basse-Côte-Nord, predation by seals or striped bass, or a combination of all these factors? One thing is certain: Taken together, these factors aren't helping. Nevertheless, something unusual did occur in the summer of 2022.

[*English*]

Philip Earle: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Robinson or Ms. Epworth.

Purely from an indigenous perspective and the requirement for food for sustenance, and understanding that in the Atlantic salmon run, particularly in coastal Labrador into northern New Brunswick, there's the height of the run, the beginning of the run and the end of the run, would it be prudent, considering the current state of the salmon stock as we understand it, to manage the indigenous fishery by setting nets targeted for fish for sustenance at the end of the run rather than at the height of the run, so as to catch fewer fish at a time?

Would you care to comment on that for the committee?

Wendy Epworth: I can comment somewhat. I'm not going to speak on behalf of the nations in regard to food, social and ceremonial activities. However, I know I can speak for Fort Folly First Nation, in that they have not taken salmon for food, social or ceremonial purposes for decades.

I also personally know first nations individuals on the Miramichi River who are choosing not to harvest salmon because of the stark difference in numbers between their childhood fishing with their dad and now. I know there are concerns within the broader indigenous community about the salmon numbers, and they're grappling with that, I think, in some communities.

● (1640)

Philip Earle: Thank you very much for that.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you.

We now move to Mr. Lewis for five minutes, please.

Chris Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. McCoy, in the Great Lakes basin, native Atlantic salmon were completely extirpated from Lake Ontario in the late 19th century because governments relied on passive management and delayed intervention until the runs vanished entirely. Today, bringing them back requires millions of dollars in importing brood stock from Nova Scotia and Quebec.

Looking at the collapse of runs in the Maritimes today, are you concerned that the DFO strategy of funding studies and symposiums while allowing wild runs to drop into single digits is repeating the same management failure that wiped out the Great Lakes salmon a century ago?

Charline McCoy (Executive Director, The Foundation for Conservation of Atlantic Salmon): I'll repeat a little of what's already been said by all the witnesses here.

I think being proactive is far better than being reactive. I think this new initiative of Canada's national strategy is a great opportunity to collaborate and have those really important conversations, and those can be held at these symposiums and so forth. That would include all partners. They would have a voice, and DFO is in the room and present at those meetings as well.

I really think that we have that opportunity right now to do something different, and I think this strategy will allow us to do that. We are keen to work in partnership in that direction, to do things and look at things more proactively and differently.

Chris Lewis: Thank you, Ms. McCoy.

Staying with that theme, I'll go back to the same witness.

DFO recently provided $200,000 to your foundation to host Atlantic salmon symposiums, yet at the very same time, DFO is cutting operational funding for essential biodiversity facilities like Coldbrook. In your view, is the department prioritizing administration of talk shops over funding the physical infrastructure required to keep wild salmon alive?

Charline McCoy: I do believe that the priority is to be directed to conservation actions and also to science that is going to do studies to get the data that is necessary to find what actions are needed on the ground. That is the priority. The symposiums were to find a governance structure and to have those conversations of exactly where to focus those funds. You have to have the conversation, and you have to have that science. You have to transfer that knowledge and have that dialogue in order to make those right decisions.

I believe the next step is to have those priority lists and to put those funds directly on the ground at the grassroots to do that conservation.

Chris Lewis: Thank you so much, Ms. McCoy. I appreciate both of those thoughtful answers.

To Mr. Snyder, thank you for your testimony, sir, and thanks for coming all the way from the Pacific. I really think it's important that you're here, because the answers to a lot of these problems will come from the successes of other places, so thank you very much for being here today.

I have two questions for you, and I'm probably going to have enough time for only one, so I'll go to the last one.

Mr. Snyder, I'm wondering if you could speak to the loss of local expertise that is happening with closures of salmon recovery facilities. I'm a special adviser to the Great Lakes. We lost our native Atlantic salmon in the 19th century, because intervention came too late. If we're looking only 10 or 20 years ahead, what will the loss of local expertise be in your area, and how would that affect salmon populations in your area?

Dustin Snyder: This is something I can speak directly to because, when we finally reopened our facility, when we got the community involved, they came down, and we're talking about the general public on the Nechako and the upper part of the Fraser River in B.C., which has huge salmon populations, or where there should be huge salmon populations. The locals didn't know that there were salmon swimming by. We were educating 40-year-old grown-ups that there were fish swimming by here, and we needed to protect this, but the locals just didn't know.

A good friend of mine remembers when we could fish Chinook in the upper Fraser, and a term that he used a time or two that I like to repeat is, “Our tears have long time dried,” because that fishing, that opportunity, is gone, and people lost that connection. What we're doing now is trying to bring it back.

It's the same sort of thing with this scenario here. If you get to a point where you're too low and people stop seeing them, people stop connecting with them, and people stop going out fishing. You lose not only that expertise but also that passion and that care that you need for people to get involved in the first place.

● (1645)

Chris Lewis: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mel Arnold: Thank you. You were right; you had time for only one question.

We'll next go back to Mr. Cormier for five minutes, please.

Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lacroix, I'll turn to you.

Welcome to the committee.

I believe I saw that you're from Rimouski. About 30 years ago, when I was 17, it was the first time I had ever left home. I went there to attend CEGEP. Let's just say my grades may not have been all that impressive, but I had a great time in the Rimouski area. I was just reminded that I even bought a beautiful fishing rod, which I still have, at Atelier du moucheur, a wonderful fishing shop in your neck of the woods.

I have just a few questions about what we've been discussing from the outset.

Almost every witness who has appeared before the committee so far, prior to your appearance, has identified striped bass, particularly in the Miramichi region, as one of the causes of the decline we've been seeing over the past few years. However, I often fish Quebec rivers such as the Bonaventure, the Grand Cascapedia and the Petite Cascapedia rivers, and we're seeing more and more striped bass in those rivers as well.

Would you agree that this is one of the contributing factors? Do you believe it's the most pressing factor, the one on which we should act most quickly?

Raymond Lacroix: There's no question that any predator of Atlantic salmon has an impact. Before striped bass returned to our waters, seals were also a source of predation. Right now, in certain rivers, striped bass are undoubtedly a significant predation factor. We're seeing schools of striped bass congregating at river mouths, much like seals do, during the downstream migration of smolts.

We're also seeing striped bass moving upstream into rivers. For example, on the Matapedia River, on a certain date in June, more striped bass than Atlantic salmon were caught in the Glen Emma sector.

So these are contributing factors.

At the same time, there are still unknowns. As the saying goes, too much of a good thing can be as bad as not enough. Are there too many striped bass in certain locations? What form of management should be implemented? To what extent, at what population levels, in what manner and by whom should it be carried out? I think those are the questions we need to answer as quickly as possible. If the question is whether striped bass is a predator, the answer is yes. The next question is, how should we address the problem? To do so, we need to rely on analysis and science. In any event, it's important that action be taken.

Serge Cormier: I'm glad to hear you say that. Just a few years ago, around 2022, scientists from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans appeared before our committee and told us that striped bass did not feed on young salmon. However, I think the evidence we've seen over the past few years has shown otherwise.

I assume you're a salmon angler as well. In my view, the best way to assess the state of the salmon population is to be on the river, talking to guides who have been there for many years and to the anglers you meet. Earlier, you spoke about the wake-up call in 2022, and my colleague Mr. Earle raised that issue with you as well. This year, I visited your region, including the Grand Cascapedia River and Bonaventure River. In particular on the Grand Cascapedia, we saw an improvement in salmon returns.

This year, there was considerably more rainfall and temperatures were much cooler than in previous years. In your opinion, could that also have had an impact on salmon returns? Even setting temperature aside, we already know predation is occurring, as you've just said. Do you think temperature may have contributed to the improved returns this year, or is it simply a matter of chance that more smolts migrated to sea, survived and returned? I'm referring to previous years, such as 2021. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

● (1650)

Raymond Lacroix: Climate change and higher temperatures certainly have an effect on salmon.

With respect to your specific question as to whether this year's temperatures may have had an impact, it's important to remember that the returns in any given year are determined by the smolt runs of previous years. Returns are therefore influenced by what migrated downstream in earlier years and by conditions at sea. In my opinion, the temperatures during the year in which the salmon return upstream would have little to no influence, because returns are really shaped by what happens at sea after the salmon migrate downstream. This year, we saw strong returns compared with recent years and with what occurred in 2022, but that's mainly because conditions must have been more favourable in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Serge Cormier: Exactly.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Mel Arnold: Thank you. That's five minutes.

We now move to Mr. Champoux for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Thank you very much.

I'd very much like to continue on that point, Mr. Lacroix. I'm also pleased to hear you say that you fish for salmon. I didn't realize we were allowed to admit that. I used to fish for salmon myself, although it's been quite a few years. The last few years were much less bountiful, but that's consistent with the circumstances you described earlier.

I'd like to return to the issue of science not being sufficiently funded or supported, and the lack of scientific research. Are we not responding quickly enough to address predation issues? For a very long time, after recognizing that seals were causing problems for various fish populations, our response was extremely slow. Now we're seeing the same situation with striped bass. Do we take too long to react once a problem has been identified? Do we wait too long for studies? Is the process too cumbersome?

Raymond Lacroix: From the foundation's perspective, we fund studies, analyses and river restoration work. I think we need to proceed with caution. To answer your question, I would say that we shouldn't wait too long, but we must nevertheless be cautious because the conditions are complex.

There was seal predation several years ago, and yet the salmon were not wiped out. There are still striped bass today, and yet salmon returned to the rivers this year. The salmon returns this year clearly demonstrate that what happened in the summer of 2022 was not caused solely by predation.

That said, efforts must still be made on all fronts. Focusing on one factor to the exclusion of others is not necessarily the solution. Efforts must be directed at all of the contributing factors, and predation is one of them.

Martin Champoux: Earlier, I asked you about your relationship with the various stakeholders. I was thinking in particular of indigenous communities, which likely have different, traditional approaches that can be extremely valuable but may not always align neatly with scientific approaches. I'm not saying that they do not. In fact, that is really my question. How is first nations knowledge integrated? How is it received and taken into account by the scientists conducting analyses and implementing measures?

Raymond Lacroix: We receive applications for project funding from indigenous communities, conservation groups and other organizations alike. Each project is assessed on its own merits, and we provide funding to all those that meet the grant criteria. The work being carried out, such as that of our colleagues on Petitcodiac River and elsewhere, consists of projects to which we contribute as a foundation and which are producing excellent results.

Martin Champoux: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you. That is your time.

I'm going to take a round now for our side, if I may.

Mr. Snyder, are you familiar with the smolt-rearing programs that have been done on the south coast of Vancouver Island, where they actually raise salmon smolts at sea in pens to a larger size before they're released?

If you are, can you provide a little of what you know about that?

Dustin Snyder: Yes. I'm not directly involved in that, but I am familiar with that program. This is where they have raised juveniles in a hatchery environment, and then they'll bring them into a net pen at sea. They raise them to a larger size out there, to try to get them past that stage where they're very vulnerable to predators at a super small stage. They're trying to get them a bit larger. Once they hit a certain size, they pull the plug on that net, and away those fish go.

● (1655)

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Has that been successful for seeing better returns? I understand stocks from the same strains are sometimes released from the hatchery, but they're reared for that extra time.

Dustin Snyder: The knowledge I have on that is, yes, it was very successful, almost to the point that they were actually concerned in some areas. The department expressed some concern that there was too much success.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): That's interesting. Who ever heard of too much success in salmon restoration?

Also, with your experience with hatcheries, are you familiar with hatchery hazing of fry and so on before their release, to condition those fry to predator situations?

Dustin Snyder: I have heard of it, but it's not anything that I'm overly familiar with. I've caught wind of it, but it's not something that we've practised at our facility.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): The next question would be around the genetics policies and so on.

I've followed the British Columbia situation with steelhead, which are very close to Atlantic salmon in how...they are born as a rainbow trout, spend some time in the rivers, migrate out to sea when they're a certain size, spend some time at sea and return.

The Fraser and, I believe, the Nechako steelhead are now at a point of serious concern, yet there's been a reluctance to set up any hatcheries, even though I know there were organizations that had identified locations, water sources and potential funding for hatcheries.

Do you think we're getting close to the same situation on both coasts, whether it's Atlantic salmon or steelhead, where sometimes we get too wrapped up in genetic purity to actually rescue the stocks when they should be rescued?

Dustin Snyder: I would 100% agree. When I was doing a bit of reading on the Atlantic salmon situation before I came here, that's the exact thing that came to mind—the steelhead situation in B.C. I think somebody needs to make the choice as to whether we would rather have what somebody considers genetically inferior fish or have no fish at all.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Would that be somewhat of a recommendation? Would you say that a decision needs to be made sooner?

I don't want to put words in your mouth about when action should be taken on enhancement, whether it be hatchery, hatchery augmentation or other features.

Dustin Snyder: Yes, 100%. That's a decision that probably should have been made a while ago. If I were to give my direct input on that, I would say that we need to save the fish and worry about the genetics later on. Once we get them to a sustainable wild population, the genetics will sort themselves out.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you. I see we have one minute left.

Mr. Robinson or Ms. Epworth, would you have anything to comment along those lines?

Wendy Epworth: I agree with what's been said in that regard.

It defies logic to wait until a river is so depleted that any enhancement action can constitute a major genetic threat. You try to keep those rivers and keep those populations at a reasonable level, so that activity is normal with fishing, food and things of that nature.

If the information of the people on the ground had been considered sooner, I think there would have been action taken sooner.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you. That's the end of my time.

We move now to Mr. Earle, please, for five minutes.

Philip Earle: Thank you, Chair.

Earlier in the testimony, I heard three points that were very meaningful: Support the strategy, have clear priorities and measure or observe the outcomes. I think that was you, Mr. Lacroix, who said that.

Could you talk to the committee about what those three points mean to you? Then I'll go to Mr. Snyder, who has access to a lot more funding than you claim to have access to, notwithstanding the money that our government recently put into the Atlantic salmon strategy.

I will add that this is your opportunity to tell us as a committee how you would like to see that federal government money spent for the protection, care and stock rehabilitation of Atlantic salmon.

What do those three points that you made mean? Could you expand upon them? Then we'll go over to Mr. Snyder.

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

Raymond Lacroix: For the first part of that question, I will ask Ms. McCoy to address the three points.

[*English*]

Charline McCoy: The first point, I believe, was to invest in science and long-term monitoring, because we need to understand where mortality is occurring, fill critical knowledge gaps and ensure that management decisions are based on available science and evidence.

The second is sustained investment in habitat restoration and community-based conservation. The organizations that are working on the rivers are essential partners in salmon recovery, and they need predictable support that allows them to undertake long-term work. That is basically our foundation's model, that we're there to help them sustain that and support them.

The third point was to improve coordination and accountability through the national strategy for Atlantic salmon, establish common priorities, improve data sharing, coordinate investments and agree on measurable outcomes so that we can determine whether our collective outcomes are actually improving conditions for Atlantic salmon. One person or one government cannot be the solution. Together, we have to combine all of it.

Philip Earle: Thank you.

Go ahead, Monsieur Lacroix.

[*Translation*]

Raymond Lacroix: As for how funding should be spent to achieve those three objectives, priority must be given to scientific research. As soon as results become available, concrete solutions must be implemented, and we should try to avoid applying magic-bullet solutions to all Atlantic salmon. The situation on the Miramichi River is very different from that of Quebec's rivers or the circumstances in Cape Breton. As a result, specific measures are needed for each river based on its particular needs.

We must also ensure that medium and long-term funding is available. Right now, local communities provide most of the support for protection and conservation initiatives. Volunteer groups working within their communities need support and stable, long-term funding. Without these volunteers on the ground, we will not succeed. They are playing a crucial role in securing the future of Atlantic salmon. We should be extremely grateful to these community members for their commitment to protecting and preserving our rivers.

I would reiterate that the challenges can vary from one river to another. The Miramichi is perhaps the best example, as it's currently facing a predation issue. Other rivers face different challenges. We need concrete, river-specific measures developed with the assistance of the local groups already working on these issues. That would be our recommendation for how any available funding should be allocated or invested.

[*English*]

Philip Earle: Thank you.

I think I have one minute left and, notwithstanding, as I said earlier, Atlantic salmon or Pacific salmon, Mr. Snyder, you listened to the witness talk about how he and his colleague see the spending of funding or at least the priorities. Does that align with your thinking and how you've been successful on the Pacific coast?

Dustin Snyder: I would completely agree. Science has to be a huge part of it. If you don't know the life history of the fish, if you don't know the problems that the fish are having and that sort of thing, and you just move to a hatchery model where you're just producing fish, you're not producing something that is going to be a long-term solution.

I would just add that something that's really important is long-term funding. Fish don't survive on five-year funding; they need more than that. We need to monitor more than that. Again, with the life history of these fish, you need that long-term, dedicated funding pot, because, for example, in B.C. we'll have a funding announcement, and then the money disappears, and everybody panics. Then we get another funding announcement, and everybody's happy, and then it disappears, and everybody panics. That panic isn't a good feeling.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you, Mr. Earle.

We'll now move to Mr. Small for five minutes, please.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Snyder, when you look at the coastal area of Atlantic Canada, from the northern tip of Labrador to all of the Labrador coast, down to the island of Newfoundland, the north shore and lower north shore of Quebec, Gaspésie, all of the coast of New Brunswick, the coast of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and right down to the border of the Gulf of Maine, it's quite a massive area for the Atlantic salmon population.

In British Columbia, you have a $1.3-billion sports fishing industry. When you look at the size of the industry that you've fostered with your hatcheries, basically, and you look at what's happening on the Atlantic coast, do you ever think about why the Atlantic salmon is such a disaster and Pacific salmon, basically, have proliferated?

● (1705)

Dustin Snyder: Yes, I do wonder about that, for sure.

Again, reading up on some of this stuff before I came, I will admit that I was oblivious that there was such a large difference between how Pacific salmon and Atlantic salmon are treated and the industry that has spawned from that.

Clifford Small: In Newfoundland and Labrador alone, the rivers support 75% of the current Atlantic salmon population of Canada. That's in Newfoundland and Labrador alone. How many hatcheries do you think we have? How many salmon enhancement programs do you think we have in that province?

Dustin Snyder: Something tells me not very many.

Clifford Small: How about that? We have zero.

We keep hearing the genetics argument again and again and again. It's basically coming from ENGOs that are funded stateside, so foreign interference, basically, in the recovery of Atlantic salmon. What do you make of that?

Dustin Snyder: I think that is ridiculous.

Again, it's the genetic argument. If we have to pick genetics or extinction, I think that we should avoid extinction at all costs. Those fish need to be preserved, and we can worry about the genetics down the road.

The folks who are fighting that, if they are foreign, need to not have a seat at the table.

That's my two cents.

Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Snyder.

Right now, Mr. Chair, I want to shift gears, and I want to talk about another issue that we have. It's DFO-related.

Once upon a time, the DFO used to run fisheries. We see that DFO is now more concerned with a “department of oceans”. What happened to fisheries, Mr. Chair?

Given that DFO has become more concerned with the ocean side of their department, we're having concerns expressed to us from stakeholders that it's all about oceans and not about fisheries anymore. Given the fact that we've had these concerns brought to us by industry stakeholders, I'm going to move this motion, Mr. Chair:

> That, given the recent appointment of Canada’s ocean envoy and chair of the 12th Our Ocean Conference, and the Government of Canada’s recently announced $1.2-billion investment in ocean protection, the committee invite Canada’s ocean envoy to appear for no fewer than two hours, at the earliest opportunity, but no later than Friday, November 27, 2026, to discuss the envoy’s mandate, priorities and plans to advance Canada’s ocean conservation and fisheries interests, including preparations for the 2027 Our Ocean Conference, the government’s financial commitments, and the anticipated costs associated with hosting the conference; and that the ocean envoy be requested to provide the committee with a copy of the formal mandate, any associated terms of reference and a breakdown of the anticipated costs of hosting the conference prior to the appearance.

Mr. Chair, this is very serious stuff. To me, this is all about the influence of foreign-funded ENGOs, and we'd like to know how that $1.2 billion is going to work to either support the fishing industry or to destroy livelihoods within the industry.

Is the government putting $1.2 billion into a fund that the Prime Minister's wife is going to administer, to shut down fisheries, create more marine protected areas and create more regulations in an ocean that's governed by more than a dozen acts of Parliament to keep it safe and protected?

Mr. Chair, thank you.

● (1710)

Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Small.

The motion has been moved, and the clerk has circulated it to everyone to make sure everyone has a copy of it. In an email, the notice of motion was served appropriately a few days ago.

I have seen hands going up for Mr. Brassard, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, Mr. Connors and Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Brassard.

John Brassard (Barrie South—Innisfil, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Small for moving what I believe to be a very important motion, a motion that speaks to the issue of accountability, transparency and oversight, the very things that a parliamentary democracy and a democracy, in general, should be concerned about.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to bring you back to this position and when it was created. It was created on September 16, 2026. It was announced that the Prime Minister's wife, Diana Fox Carney, was going to be Canada's ocean envoy and the chair of the 2027 Our Ocean Conference. It's an unpaid and voluntary position.

This, in and of itself, creates a lot of questions, Mr. Chair. One of those is, is she, in fact, a designated public office holder who subscribes to the same regime as the Conflict of Interest Act, Lobbying Act and other things? It's important to understand that, especially on this committee, a committee that's charged with the responsibility for Fisheries and Oceans. It also means that she's not going to receive a personal salary. We love the benevolence and we love the fact that an employee, or a designated employee, a volunteer in this case, is not accepting a salary, but what does it mean in terms of all of these oversight regimes that are already in place?

There's not, also, an itemized budget that has been put forward in terms of operational expenses, travel expenses, office and support staff. I think it's incumbent upon this committee to find that out. This is a $1.2-billion announcement, Mr. Chair. It was announced by the federal government to strengthen marine safety, coast guard monitoring, whale protection, indigenous partnerships and enforcement tools, all the details of which are not available. These are many of the things that are currently being done by a cross-section of various departments.

What does this actually mean? What does this ocean envoy actually mean to the taxpayers of this country? There's $82 million that's been funded over five years, pledged for global observation and monitoring initiatives such as OceanEye. This committee is charged with this responsibility, and I think at a minimum, the new ocean envoy should come in, given the fact that there's $1.2 billion and several other millions of dollars for the Our Ocean Conference that she has been given access to. From a responsibility standpoint, it should come to this committee.

There are other concerns as well, that the committee can certainly question as this motion is adopted. It is an unpaid position, as I mentioned earlier, but how does that align, Mr. Chair, with government organizations, NGOs, investors, stakeholders, and the potential that there is an alignment of public policy intersecting with personal interests, for example? That would be a concern that could be brought up.

Ms. Fox Carney is also a recognized climate policy adviser. She's worked with investment and sustainability organizations, so how does this position allow informal influence over those policy discussions? I think that's something, particularly as it relates to stakeholder engagement. There are some questions that need to be asked with respect to this. How will the meetings, travel, and stakeholder consultations be disclosed? What safeguards exist regarding organizations with which she previously had been affiliated? The challenge is less about direct financial benefit and more about influence, access and network advantages.

There is a case where you might blur public and private roles in this case as well, Mr. Chair. How is the ocean envoy going to participate in international engagement and represent Canadian priorities on the global stage? When the Prime Minister's spouse is granted an official, diplomatic-style role, it becomes difficult at that point to distinguish between personal influence and institutional authority, so this committee can, if it's desired, determine how that distinction is going to be made.

There are other concerns as well. There's a lack of traditional accountability mechanisms. Volunteer appointees, as I mentioned earlier, frequently operate outside some of the accountability structures that govern ministers, public servants and Governor in Council appointments. This was a ministerial appointment, so is she subject to the same regime from a conflict of interest standpoint and lobbying standpoint, which is critical as well?

● (1715)

There may be some other questions that arise as well, like reporting requirements, mandate letters—which Mr. Small has already referred to—performance evaluation, disclosure obligations and parliamentary oversight.

What does this mean?

This is where the committee can get to the bottom of this, in terms of that appointment, in addition to all of the other roles that, as I said earlier, various departments play.

This mandate specifically links ocean conservation to climate action and economic resilience. This integrates into the envoy...active public.... This puts her into active public policy debates that have major implications for, as examples, fisheries, marine transportation, energy development, offshore resource projects, carbon markets—carbon markets, I repeat that again—and sustainable finance initiatives.

Because both Mark Carney and Diana Fox Carney are closely associated with international climate finance initiatives, opponents may raise concerns. We may raise these concerns, if she is to appear, that the policy advice that she gives could be shaped by a particular ideological or policy perspective, rather than by stakeholder consultation.

Those are very serious questions that need to be asked of this new oceans envoy, in addition to what her overall role is. Taxpayer dollars are being initiated—in this case, $1.2 billion—and millions more for an ocean conference. The least this new ocean envoy can do is to appear before a committee that's responsible for fisheries and oceans. She should tell us what her role, mandate, goals and observations are; what she's going to do in this role; and how that money is going to be accounted for to Canadian taxpayers as well, given the fact that this cross-section of support is already there among various department officials.

Mr. Chair, I would encourage this committee to have Ms. Fox Carney come before it to explain and answer questions about her new role. Canadians deserve transparency, accountability and oversight. What better committee to do that on—other than the committee that I chair, which is ethics—than this committee, which is responsible for oceans, marine waterways and conservation as well?

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

Next, we have Mr. Deschênes-Thériault on the speaking list.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There's no question that ocean conservation and Canada's fisheries interests are important matters. However, today we're also discussing an important issue, namely Atlantic salmon populations. We have before us witnesses from different regions of the country. In their questions, my opposition colleagues have noted that some witnesses travelled a considerable distance to appear before us today. I'm interested in hearing what they have to say about the matter currently before the committee.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, I move that the debate now be adjourned.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): It's not debatable, so we'll go to a vote. I'll ask the clerk to conduct the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Order.

We'll return to our witness list now. We have five minutes remaining.

● (1720)

Mr. Cormier, you have five minutes with the witnesses.

Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's unfortunate that we have to go through this with our witnesses, especially since the Conservative member said, just a moment ago, that you guys travel far and that we welcome you on this important topic. Let's get back at it.

Ms. Epworth, I want to go back to the program, the hatchery and the science you're doing. You're saying that, in your area, you're taking them small, growing them up and putting them back in the river. Is that right?

Wendy Epworth: Yes, that's correct. We take wild juveniles from the project rivers and collect them. We transport them to our dedicated marine grow-out site, raise them to maturity and then bring them back to the project rivers to spawn.

Serge Cormier: Just so people around the table understand, what is the difference between this and the CAST program, if you are familiar with that program, in the Miramichi area a couple of years ago?

Wendy Epworth: The only difference that I'm aware of is that the juveniles were going to be raised to maturity in a freshwater environment.

Serge Cormier: That being said, because I think you're a director of science or you have a background in science, do you think that the way CAST wanted to do the restocking, taking some of those small salmon, growing them in a freshwater tank, as you just said, and putting them back in the river will have an impact on the genetics of salmon?

Wendy Epworth: I can't speak to the epigenetic effects of the different environments. I do think that what is important here is to get adults on the spawning grounds, because releasing adults not only maintains that connection with the community but also improves the productivity of the habitat as opposed to just releasing juveniles. I think there are some advantages to those adult releases. Whether those adults are raised in a marine environment or a freshwater environment, provided they're a high-quality adult, I think it's ultimately important to get the adults back on the spawning grounds.

Serge Cormier: If you were a DFO science director of the program, would you have said yes to putting those salmon back in the river?

Wendy Epworth: Yes, I would have.

Serge Cormier: As I said, I missed your opening statement. In terms of the numbers that are returning.... I'm sorry again. What's the name of the river?

Wendy Epworth: We are working in the Petitcodiac River, the two rivers in Fundy National Park—the Upper Salmon and Point Wolfe—and now the Big Salmon River.

● (1725)

Serge Cormier: Are there some numbers you would be able to provide at a later date in terms of salmon returning in some of those rivers? Is that something that would be possible?

Wendy Epworth: Yes. The best data that's been collected for the program comes out of the Upper Salmon River, and there are papers published on those return numbers.

Serge Cormier: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lacroix, I'll come back to you.

Earlier, we discussed striped bass. If I'm not mistaken, there's a difference between Quebec and the Atlantic provinces with respect to who manages striped bass. I believe I saw that the Government of Quebec, or the former Quebec government, I should say, put some sort of measure in place to reduce the striped bass population. Is that the case? Has anything been introduced recently?

Raymond Lacroix: I couldn't tell you.

Serge Cormier: I thought I had recently seen a proposal concerning striped bass.

Earlier, you spoke about marine mortality. If I recall correctly, you said that your foundation supports habitat restoration projects, among other initiatives. Have you funded any projects dealing with marine mortality in the past, similar to those undertaken by the Atlantic Salmon Federation?

Raymond Lacroix: The foundation provides funding to organizations involved in restoration and research. The foundation does not carry out that work itself. It distributes funds to the organizations that do.

Serge Cormier: However, to your knowledge, have any of those organizations conducted research on that issue?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Your time is up, Mr. Cormier. I'm sorry.

[*Translation*]

Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, could you at least allow the witness to answer?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Your five minutes are up.

We have just a couple of minutes left, which is enough time to give Mr. Champoux his two and a half minutes, and then we'll wrap up.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to come back to what happened a short time ago. Mr. Cormier apologized to the witnesses for having had to sit through the motion proposed by the Conservatives.

Sometimes motions are outlandish and one can legitimately object to them and say they're a waste of time. However, I think it's the opposition parties' job to raise questions. I don't think there's any need to apologize. This is simply democracy at work. It was entirely appropriate to have that discussion. What I do find regrettable is that when a reasonable motion is put forward, the Liberals on the other side will often use their majority to adjourn debate and prevent discussion. There was nothing outlandish about that motion. There was absolutely nothing inappropriate about discussing it. It was relevant. I am sure you understand that very well.

Mr. Snyder—

Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): There is a point of order.

Stop the clock.

[*Translation*]

Serge Cormier: I just want to clarify one thing. We may partly agree with what Mr. Champoux is saying, but—

Martin Champoux: That is debate.

[*English*]

John Brassard: That's not a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, I haven't even finished yet.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Mr. Cormier, I'm sorry, but I have to turn my mic off to get the translation. Go ahead with your point of order.

[*Translation*]

Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, I think my colleague Mr. Champoux may have a valid point. However, the opposition parties could have introduced that motion during a committee business meeting so that we could discuss it without taking up so much of the witnesses' time.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): You're entering into a new debate now, Mr. Cormier.

I'd like to go back to Mr. Champoux for the remainder of his time of just over one minute.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Thank you.

Mr. Snyder, I'd like to speak with you briefly.

I know you've criticized the staffing cuts at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. How did you see that disengagement by the department? To my knowledge, the situation facing salmon on the west coast is no more reassuring than it is on the Atlantic coast. When you see the Department of Fisheries and Oceans implementing staffing cuts of that nature, what message does that send to people like you who are working on the ground, often with limited resources, even though we recognize that organizations such as yours do receive some funding?

How did you perceive that decision?

[*English*]

Dustin Snyder: Yes, we didn't take that decision lightly, for sure. Again, the province of B.C. is a huge province. In the northern interior, where I'm located, up in Prince George, we had two habitat staff. With the department cutbacks recently, our closest habitat staff, we're now told, is based out of Kamloops. When I talked to that person not too long ago, they told me they weren't sure about their future either. Currently, our closest habitat person is about a 550-kilometre drive away. That's just from Prince George: It's not from the top of the watershed. You can tack on an extra 300 kilometres to get there.

Again, we do have more funding. We do have more resources dedicated to the Pacific salmon, but in a lot of cases we've seen, as I mentioned, those funding pots come and go.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Mr. Chair, do I have enough time to put the same question to Ms. Epworth?

Ms. Epworth, I'd like to know how you view this disengagement when you see what—

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): I'm afraid not. That was a good try, though.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): I want to thank the witnesses for appearing today. It was very interesting testimony from all of you. I'm sure the members appreciate what you had to provide—

John Brassard: On a point of order, to Mr. Cormier's point, they could have voted for the motion instead of adjourning.

Serge Cormier: This is debate, Mr. Chair. You can call it debate also.

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): We're entering into debate again.

A voice: I'm sure we'd like to see the $1.2 billion—

The Vice-Chair (Mel Arnold): Order.

I just want to inform the committee members that, at the next meeting, we will hear from witnesses who were originally scheduled for October 19. That's this coming Thursday. We'll get back to the Atlantic salmon study with the witnesses who were originally scheduled for October 19.

With that, I'll adjourn the meeting.

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