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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1305)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 46 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022, Standing Order 81(5) and the motion adopted by the committee on November 18, 2022.

The committee is studying the supplementary estimates (B), 2022-23, votes 1(b), 5(b) and 10(b) under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I am informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection test in advance of the meeting.

First, I would like to welcome back to the committee the Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, who is with us for the first hour of today's meeting.

The honourable minister is joined by the following officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, who will stay with us during the second hour: Annette Gibbons, deputy minister; Alexandra Dostal, assistant deputy minister; Arran McPherson, assistant deputy minister, ecosystems and oceans science, by video conference; Niall O'Dea, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic policy; Richard Goodyear, chief financial officer and assistant deputy minister; Adam Burns, acting assistant deputy minister, fisheries and harbour management; Chris Henderson, deputy commissioner, operations; Rebecca Reid, regional director general, Pacific region, by video conference; and Doug Wentzell, regional director general, maritimes region, by video conference.

Thank you all for taking the time to appear today. Some of you were here a couple of days ago in the committee for an earlier session.

I'll now give the floor to Minister Murray for opening remarks.

You have five minutes or less.

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much.

[Translation]

It's a real pleasure to be joining you today, here on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I'm pleased to be here with my department's senior management team, including my deputy minister, Annette Gibbons, and other senior officials from Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

[English]

I want to begin by providing members with a brief financial overview of my department's 2022-23 supplementary estimates (B).

In total, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard are seeking \$453.3 million over and above what was approved in the main estimates. This is composed of \$443.4 million in voted appropriations and \$9.8 million in statutory appropriations.

There are four main business lines that will receive the bulk of this funding. This includes \$194.7 million in re-profiled funding to focus on priorities related to indigenous rights and fisheries. By recognizing the tremendous social, cultural, spiritual and economic importance that fisheries and oceans have for indigenous peoples, and by respecting both inherent and treaty rights, we can help transform Canada's relationship with first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Funding from these supplementary estimates will help advance this work and propel us along the path of reconciliation.

Also included in these supplementary estimates is \$95.3 million in new funding for phase 2 of the oceans protection plan. This money will be used to expand existing initiatives in new locations and develop new strategies that combat emerging threats to Canada's marine safety system and maritime supply chain. Under OPP renewal, we'll better protect the marine environment, reduce the negative impacts that marine traffic has on aquatic ecosystems, increase indigenous involvement in this work and make our supply chains more resilient, all while supporting Canada's economic growth.

Before I close, you will also note, in your package of material, \$70.1 million in re-profiled funding for accommodation measures that will help address concerns raised by indigenous groups potentially impacted by the Trans Mountain expansion project.

I also want to note that these estimates contain \$15.3 million to help advance a circular economy for plastics in Canada. Each year, millions of tons of plastic enter the ocean, where it poses a serious threat to marine life, ecosystems and human health. One way to address ocean plastics is through a closed-loop circular economy. This involves retrieving, reusing and recycling plastics already in the ocean, as well as working to prevent more plastic from entering the marine environment in the first place.

[Translation]

For my department, this involves addressing abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear, which is one of the most harmful sources of marine plastic litter. In the wake of post-tropical storm Fiona, the work being carried out under the ghost gear program is needed more than ever.

[English]

Before closing, I want to mention the Seal Summit that took place in St. John's earlier this month.

During this two-day gathering, I heard from science and fisheries management experts, indigenous people, industry experts and members of the Atlantic seal science task team, as well as members of Parliament. Together we gained a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges related to seals, explored opportunities to expand Canadian seal products into export markets, discussed the importance of the seal harvest to indigenous and coastal communities and shared ideas on how to address data gaps related to seal populations.

[Translation]

Moving forward, I'm committed to working with indigenous partners and industry to maintain existing markets for Canadian seal products, while also supporting the development of innovative new products and expanding access to export markets.

Thank you again for your time, and I look forward to your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Before I go to Mr. Small, I know you're only here for an hour. I'll leave it up to you to watch the clock for when it's time for you to exit. I won't point out that the hour is up. Whether you stay over or you go right on the mark is up to you.

We'll now go to Mr. Small for the first round of questioning, for six minutes or less, please.

• (1310)

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and officials for gracing us today at this committee.

I'd like to ask the minister this question. A response to a House of Commons Order Paper question in June of this year indicated that from 2019 until now, DFO hired 4,300 new full-time equivalent employees. That's quite an increase. It's 44% in three years. Fish harvesters have not seen a 44% increase in improved service.

We've not seen 44% more stock rebuilding plans with all this money being spent. Why?

Hon. Joyce Murray: First, there was a great necessity to increase the capacity of DFO and DFO science after some very draconian cuts under a previous government. The Fisheries Act, another very important tool for ensuring conservation and the access to fish that our fish harvesters need and deserve, was also gutted.

Re-creating a fisheries act that has a precautionary principle baked in but also enables us to manage fisheries properly took a couple of years. That's a very important project that's serving us well now.

Mr. Clifford Small: Of the 4,300 net new jobs in DFO in three years, 1,000 have been in administration, such as finance and HR. That's almost 1,000 on the ocean side of the department, but only 10% of the new jobs were in the actual fisheries management side. I guess this explains why only 21% of stocks in critical classifications have a rebuilding plan, according to the oceans audit in 2021.

Minister, what do you think?

Hon. Joyce Murray: One of the key changes is the importance we place on indigenous reconciliation and adhering to UNDRIP principles. That's meant a great deal of attention in everything we do. Fisheries management is very important, but there are many other things that are the responsibility of this department.

Organizing ourselves to put forward the partnerships with indigenous people, undertaking the consultations and finding ways to incorporate indigenous knowledge will serve us well in our results. It will take time and administrative focus to put that foundation in place.

Mr. Clifford Small: In 2021, the last year for which data was available, DFO met 40% of its 70 business targets. That's only a 57% success rate.

Should officials receive bonuses for a D-minus score?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Clearly, any organization always strives to do better. DFO is no exception, so I'm pleased that we have a framework for being accountable. We hold ourselves accountable and we'll always aim to do better.

If there are any additional responses that any of the officials would like to make, I welcome them.

Mr. Clifford Small: That's okay. Thank you, Minister. We have some time with the officials in the second half.

Getting on to the Auditor General's report that recently came out with regard to national shipbuilding and our Arctic sovereignty, 29 vessels were promised to be delivered through the Canadian Coast Guard. How many of the new vessels have been delivered to date?

Hon. Joyce Murray: We have three icebreakers acquired already and eight still to come. A number of the smaller vessels, some 16, have been made available.

I'll turn it over to Chris Henderson to add to that.

• (1315)

Mr. Chris Henderson (Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Minister.

Yes, we have three of the new large OFSVs—ocean fishery science vessels—and 16 of the new “bay” class search and rescue lifeboats. We have received three medium icebreakers that were not built in Canada—they're what we call interim measures—and a fourth light icebreaker, so we have four interim measures. Those are three OFSVs and 16 SAR lifeboats, so that's 19.

The Arctic offshore patrol ships are also going to begin construction shortly, and the offshore oceanographic science vessel is currently under construction in Vancouver. We recently had the keel-laying ceremony there two weeks ago.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, when the minister was questioned earlier this year about vessels that conduct trawl surveys, I can't remember, but, Minister, did you say they'd be ready for this fall to conduct surveys or not?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Sorry; could you repeat the question? I didn't understand it.

Mr. Clifford Small: When you were questioned earlier this year about whether or not the new vessels to complete trawl surveys for northern cod would be ready to conduct surveys this fall, did you advise us that they would be ready on time or not?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I think the key thing is that it's very important to have vessels to do the comparative trawling, and we are working to make sure that happens by doing life extensions of the older vessels that we need to do that parallel trawling.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small. We've gone a little bit over.

We'll now go to Mr. Morrissey for six minutes or less, please, as long as his voice lasts.

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

Minister, this spring when you made the decision to close down the mackerel fishery for conservation purposes, which we agree with, there was concern from Canadian fishers that if the Americans do not follow suit, what Canada does not catch the Americans will catch. Could you give us your opinion on how Canada and the U.S. can better manage this mackerel stock, which is one stock between the two countries?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that question, because it is very important that we coordinate the management of a stock.

We don't support the fact that we had closures because of the stock being in critical condition and that the United States was fishing essentially that same stock.

I had a chance to talk to the head of the NOAA administration—my counterpart, Dr. Spinrad—about this very matter and expressed my concern about it.

This is a relatively new person in the position, because it's someone who's come in under the Biden administration, and he personally wants to take a more scientific approach to protecting and rebuilding this stock. He wants to invoke the precautionary principle, which, in my view, wasn't happening adequately, so we agreed to share our approach to this issue. In two months, there will be meetings between NOAA and DFO to discuss our assessments and build a better approach to rebuilding mackerel.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Minister.

Chair, I'll turn my time over to Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): I think that was Bobby's Marilyn Monroe impression there. I hope you feel better, Bobby.

Minister, with the supplementary funding that's being asked for, what does that bring your ministry's total budget to?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll go to Richard on that.

Mr. Richard Goodyear (Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Chair, that will bring our budget to a total of \$4.7 billion.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Now, looking at the whole amount and the plans for it, what percentage of that amount will be dedicated to building foundational capacity in the department versus actually out on the water doing oceanography and stock assessments and all the other street-level things, if you like, that DFO is accountable for?

• (1320)

Mr. Richard Goodyear: The majority of the funding as outlined in supplementary estimates (B) is related to new funding of \$125 million in new funding for oceans protection, as the minister mentioned, and a circular economy for plastics. Then we have transfers or re-profiles from previous years for indigenous reconciliation.

The majority of the funding is dedicated to programs, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ken Hardie: What's the total complement, not including Coast Guard, at DFO? How many people, including consultants, work just at DFO?

Mr. Richard Goodyear: I apologize. I didn't catch that. Can you repeat your question?

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'm looking for the total number of people who work for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Mr. Richard Goodyear: Inclusive of the Coast Guard?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Exclusive of the Coast Guard.

Ms. Annette Gibbons (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We were in the range of 14,370 in 2021. It would be a little bit different from that now, but that's the rough amount, including the Coast Guard.

Mr. Ken Hardie: What percentage of that total complement would work here in Ottawa versus out toward the coasts?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: It's about 80% in the regions. That would be across the country, including the Arctic, the Prairies and Ontario.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

Minister, we're waiting for the fourth pillar in the Pacific salmon strategic initiative. This is on an integrated management and collaboration MOU. Can you tell us where we are on that?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks.

As I know the committee knows, the Pacific salmon initiative is a foundational strategy of \$647 million to advance the protection and rebuilding of wild salmon. One of the key challenges has been that this has been held in a number of different jurisdictions, in a way. Indigenous communities have some parts of that, as do the province and the federal government, so we're working to create a tripartite approach.

Already there has been a lot of real action on the ground. For example, BCSRIF is the restoration program that we co-fund that with the provincial government, which has just recently announced an additional \$43 million to put into the SRIF funding.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie. You have only 10 seconds left, so there's hardly time to get in a question, let alone an answer.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for six minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank the witnesses here today. Madam Minister, it's always a pleasure to see you. I would also like to thank the new speakers and those we know well for being here.

Madam Minister, I would like you to tell us what your plan is to help the fishers who were penalized last March because of the closure of the mackerel and herring fishery. We've heard disturbing testimony from people who have told us that their lives, their families' lives and their communities' lives have been completely disrupted. It was a domino effect that was caused by this last-minute decision.

Do you plan to offer substantial assistance to the fishers who were so suddenly penalized, such as financial assistance or compensation in the form of quotas?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that question.

Our government's goal is to grow Canada's fish and seafood sector. The science clearly shows that mackerel stocks are in the critical zone and have been for over 10 years. It's difficult to reduce the catch rate like that, but I had to do it to take into account the long-term situation.

It's not my department that provides compensation for conservation decisions. It's another department—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Have you provided for financial compensation or compensation in the form of quotas?

These families would like to fish; it's their life, but they have no other fishing options. A minister in your government suggested—to put it mildly—that these fishers find other work. Do you share her position?

• (1325)

Hon. Joyce Murray: My position is that it's important to take to heart the situations of families, and small and medium-sized fishing enterprises. At the same time, if the future of the fisheries is to be built on a solid foundation, the catch rates of stocks in the critical zone need to be reduced.

These decisions are always difficult to make, but I did it for the well-being of our children and grandchildren.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I fully agree with you, but what are we doing to help these families who no longer have work, who can only fish for mackerel and herring, but who aren't being given the opportunity to do so? Do you have a plan?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: The government has a plan for that, and it's employment insurance.

[*Translation*]

Like all other Canadians, the fishers contribute to the employment insurance fund so they can access it when they need it.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: But the EI rules have changed. Since these fishers haven't worked, they aren't eligible.

What do we tell them? I'm heartbroken, and I have no words.

Hon. Joyce Murray: We have a retraining program to help people who find themselves in that kind of situation, not just in fisheries, but in other industries with declining numbers of workers. That is why our department has created a wide range of programs to help them.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

Do you think it's normal to accept all the side effects of these decisions, knowing that the United States has no restrictions on mackerel and herring fishing? As a minimum psychological compensation for Canadian fishers, do you foresee a better co-management of these stocks with the United States?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I fully agree with the need to coordinate our programs with those of the United States. That's why I recently met with my U.S. counterpart to ask him to work closely with my department to align our approaches to our shared fishing grounds. He was in full agreement.

This is a new administration, compared to that of the previous president. This is a pretty conservative administration when it comes to fisheries, and it's going to apply a precautionary principle, as we do in the department. I'm looking forward to the work we're going to do together to avoid this type of problem, where American fishers are fishing a species that is under a ban on our side.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: We all agree that it is very hard psychologically for the fishers who have been penalized.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Desbiens.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the minister and officials for being here today.

During the summer that just passed, I had an opportunity to visit beautiful Nunavut. I know, Minister, that you were also there this summer. I had the incredible opportunity to visit Pangnirtung Fisheries and to take a tour of their facilities. While I was there, fishers and workers at the plant showed me the many ways in which this plant is core to the community in processing local seafood catches, including Arctic char, shrimp and turbot.

Despite having the capacity to catch and process fish and provide food security in their own community and for export, their plant is in dire need of improvements, including renovations and expansions to ensure this vital work can continue. Can you clarify, Minister, what you're doing to ensure that key investments in communities in Nunavut, including in Pangnirtung Fisheries, are being made and delivered?

• (1330)

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

The Arctic region is a very important part of our thinking and our work. At DFO, indigenous reconciliation is inherent in our work, especially in the Arctic region. That's why Canada created a distinct Arctic region.

As the member mentioned, I was up there for a week to meet with fish harvesters and others in the different communities.

We're in the process of moving staff into the Arctic and really setting up so that we have more of a presence there. We're very much involved in consulting with the different Inuit communities to understand what their needs are. We have a strong program in the Canadian Coast Guard to bring indigenous and Inuit people into the Coast Guard with auxiliary wharves. We'll continue to work to understand and respond to the needs of Inuit people in the Arctic region.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Can we expect Pangnirtung Fisheries to be receiving any funding in the near future to help with their plant specifically?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I can take that question back—unless someone here has the answer—and we can provide you an update on the Pangnirtung plant.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We do have funding programs, including an Arctic fisheries funding program. As for the specific eligibility, obviously we always have to assess that case by case.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much. I look forward to getting more information so I can pass that on to them.

My next question is about the B.C. shellfish and seaweed growers, who are aligned in their request for critically needed dedicated staff and DFO resources, as well as for improved timelines for licence renewals or for receiving new licences. These are important opportunities for a transition away from polluting open-net fish farms through the lateral movement of workers, and it is an important sector of the blue economy for decarbonization.

When can B.C. shellfish and seaweed growers expect the support they need?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I appreciate that question.

The member's thinking and my own are very much aligned with respect to the importance of the shellfish industry. It's also a carbon mitigation program, as is growing seaweed and various sea plants. This is something we're working on.

I'll turn it over to my staff for any further specifics. I'm certainly committed to that on the west coast and east coast alike.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister. With all respect, perhaps I can link back to the second half of that question, and I look forward to a response on that from you.

Minister, we were talking earlier about a very spiritual experience and the honour we felt to be participating in a salmon dance recently in the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation and Wild First salmon alliance gathering, where we heard from chiefs across British Columbia who spoke to both of us about their desire to get open-net fish farms out of the water and to remove them from the critical migration routes. They want to see a shift to land-based closed containment and a transition plan for impacted communities.

We've heard testimony from Dr. Andrew Bateman, who clearly testified that the CSAS process, the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat process, is far from objective and is industry-influenced. The vast majority of science around the fish industry states very contrary outcomes to what we're seeing around CSAS.

We also have the precautionary principle, which is meant for scenarios exactly like the one we're seeing with the fish farms today.

Minister, are you going to err on the side of caution and respond and act on the vast majority of B.C. first nation food security concerns, or will you and your department continue to support multinational companies that continue to profit from damaging Canada's environment and wild salmon stocks?

• (1335)

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

For the member, we have committed to a transition away from open net-pen salmon aquaculture on the west coast. I have committed to have a plan in place by this coming June 2023, and we are consulting widely as we develop that plan with indigenous communities that are on the coast, as well as indigenous communities in the interior, which is where salmon originate and return to spawn. That's why I think their voices are very important also.

We have three rounds of consultations, and very shortly we'll be presenting our way forward.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister.

I just want to—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. You're dead-on for the six-minute mark.

We'll now go to Mr. Arnold for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the minister for being here today.

Minister, because you're here for only one hour and the officials are here for two, I wish to hear from you in the limited time we have. If you're not able to directly answer questions, can you just say so and provide the committee with the answers in writing in a timely manner? Can we agree to this approach?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Please proceed with your questions.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

In regard to aquatic invasive species, do you think it's fair that B.C. waters receive significantly less funding than other regions?

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I don't want to cut off my colleague and I'm sure it's not on purpose, but Mr. Arnold doesn't have his camera on. Maybe it's just a problem of—

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, could you please turn on your camera when you're speaking?

Mr. Mel Arnold: I'm trying here, and it seems to be blocked, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure if the clerk can change that.

The Chair: She's checking you now.

It's still not working, Mr. Arnold, so perhaps I'll just jump ahead to Mr. Kelloway and come back to you and see if that can be corrected. We'll start off at your five-minute mark again. Otherwise, Mr. Perkins can jump in and do your spot and you can take his. How's that?

Mr. Mel Arnold: I would rather pass it on to the Liberal member and come back with my questions.

The Chair: Okay. I don't blame you. I'm not a real fan of Mr. Perkins either.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Kelloway for five minutes or less.

Hopefully, we'll get you connected, Mr. Arnold, and we'll go back to you.

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): You'll get a Christmas card from me, Mr. Perkins.

Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

Minister, it's great to see you and it's great to see the officials here.

Minister, the supplementary estimates (B) contain funding for the circular economy and, more specifically, the ghost gear program. We've actually heard a fair bit over the past month about Canada's efforts to remove ghost gear from our waters, especially as it relates to the safety of the North Atlantic right whale.

We've also heard a bit of testimony about how strong our provisions are, but there was also a lot of concern, Minister, about the red listing of Canadian seafood by Seafood Watch. I wonder if you could speak to the work the government is doing to protect the North Atlantic right whale and to this unfounded red listing.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that question.

I couldn't agree more that this listing is unfounded. Canada is leading in the extent and type of protections that we're putting in place, from dynamic closures to satellite tracking of whales so we know where they are to ropeless gear that we're piloting and that is working very well. There have been no known deaths of North Atlantic right whales in Canadian waters in the last two years. This is a huge priority for us, and we are doing the work.

When I spoke with Dr. Spinrad, who is my counterpart in the United States, about our dismay around this red listing, which is costing our harvesters, who have some of the toughest jobs in the country out there on those waters, he was in agreement with that. He shared with me that he will be discussing that with his department and with the Monterey Bay Aquarium to make sure that they do understand all the things that have been put in place in Canada, and that we continue to put in place.

• (1340)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thanks, Minister. It's great to hear those conversations are happening with the Americans. I couldn't agree more that the greatest of environmental stewards are fish harvesters, so I appreciate that comment.

Supplementary estimates (B) also contain about \$194 million of reprofile funding to advance reconciliation on indigenous rights and fisheries issues. Can you speak a bit, in the time we have, about the important work we're doing with indigenous communities, how it relates to moderate livelihood, and the important role that funding like this plays in that?

Hon. Joyce Murray: First nations have a treaty right to fish, affirmed by the Supreme Court. Our government has never stopped working to implement that right.

Our approach is based on respect for conservation, reconciliation, and transparent and predictable management. We were able to sign a number of agreements last year with indigenous communities on the east coast. We have also been working with the indigenous communities to ensure compliance and enforcement on the waters.

I really appreciate in particular your work to help make sure that the lines of communication were open between the department and the indigenous communities. I want to credit you for the peace on the waters that we experienced this last season. We can always continue to do more, and we'll do just that.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Can you share, as much as you can, any other interesting items that may emerge from your conversation with NOAA? Can you dive a bit deeper on how it relates to supplementary estimates (B)?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I already talked about the conversation around Atlantic mackerel. We coordinate our approach so that we don't have the reality or perception that the U.S. harvesters are harvesting Canadian or shared stocks while we're tied up at harbours because of conservation concerns.

The North Atlantic right whales and the Seafood Watch red listing were a high priority. I also spoke with Mr. Spinrad about some of the issues on the west coast, namely the Alaskan salmon and steelhead trout interception by the pollock fishery in Alaska, as well as the Pacific Salmon Commission and the Fraser River panel.

I know our B.C. members will be interested in hearing that we are also agreeing to have closer coordination. Dr. Spinrad has agreed to speak with the commissioners of the Pacific Salmon Commission on how we can avoid the disconnection between our precautionary approach and what we perceive to be the U.S.'s less precautionary approach in fishing salmon on the west coast this year.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

We'll now go back to your best friend, Mr. Arnold, for five minutes or less.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for agreeing to answer directly and to provide a written response if it's not possible to answer at this time.

• (1345)

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'm happy to give you some numbers.

Expansion of the aquatic invasive species program is \$37 million over five years starting in 2022-23. This is a hugely important initiative. We haven't got a breakdown here in terms of east and west. We'll provide that to you in writing.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Do you feel that it's fair that B.C. receives far less of the share of the total funding, yes or no?

Hon. Joyce Murray: There should be equal allocation among DFO regions, and there is just that today.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you for that.

In regard to the Pacific salmon strategic initiative, how many projects have been initiated under the conservation and stewardship pillar of PSSI since it was launched last year, and what is the total amount spent on those projects?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Well, it's in the dozens of projects. We have already utilized most of the first \$140-million allocation for—

Mr. Mel Arnold: I look forward to that answer in writing, if you could. Thank you.

What is the status of the habitat restoration centre? Do you have a date for when it's going to be fully operational?

Hon. Joyce Murray: We'll provide that in writing.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

How much of the \$35 million in PSSI funds budgeted last year and \$176.7 million budgeted for this year have now been spent or allocated?

Hon. Joyce Murray: The monies that are in supplementary estimates (B) are just getting that approval now, so they haven't been spent. Total expenditures for PSSI in year one was \$15.4 million.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

Could you please provide to the committee in writing a summary of the projects initiated in 2022 by DFO or funded partners for wild Pacific salmon?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes, I can do that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay, thank you.

Minister, in May you stated that DFO was “conducting a study of beneficial ownership” of commercial licences in B.C. Will you provide the committee with this study?

Hon. Joyce Murray: When the study's concluded, I will provide it to the committee.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Will that be in a timely manner or after it's been developed further within the department?

Hon. Joyce Murray: When it's ready for public release, we'll provide it to the committee.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

In B.C., will DFO proceed with allowing the unstacking or unmarrying of licences and loosening of licence length restrictions without first establishing an owner-operator policy, yes or no?

Hon. Joyce Murray: We'll respond in writing to that question.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

In May, you stated that Canada's fisheries are a "public property resource". When asked who should be the beneficiaries of Canada's fisheries, you did not answer that question.

Who should be the beneficiaries of Canada's public fishery resources? Should it be Canadians and the communities they support?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Subject to conservation measures and concerns, yes, Canadians and their communities should be the beneficiaries of our resource.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

What actions have you or your department taken to ensure that independent Canadian harvesters and coastal communities have fair benefits from Canada's fisheries?

Hon. Joyce Murray: That study of beneficial ownership is under way right now. I'm looking forward to seeing the conclusions and sharing them with the member.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Can you tell us what resources you have allocated to that? From what we've heard, it may only be one full-time equivalent. Is it any further than that?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll have to give you that in writing.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I would appreciate that. Thank you very much.

When it comes to first nations agreements and reconciliation, we all support reconciliation with indigenous peoples as a duty for all of Canada.

Much of the cost so far is landing on established fisheries systems and networks. How long does the department intend to continue to exclusively use fisheries to satisfy treaty rights?

Hon. Joyce Murray: There are many ways that our government is satisfying treaty rights. They include on-land access, funding for clean drinking water, support for children in care and treaty funds. There are many ways that we are advancing our reconciliation agenda.

For first nations that have fisheries as a traditional practice, we're restoring to them the opportunity to be part of fisheries, as is their right.

• (1350)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm very concerned about small craft harbours, particularly those in the St. Lawrence River and the Gulf. With climate change, increasing storms and rising sea levels, I wonder if there will be any new funding for those harbours that are in poor condition.

On another issue, the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary is being called upon more and more. Most of the people who are part of it are volunteers. They have to pay up to \$6,000 to equip themselves. That concerns me as well.

However, Madam Minister, I would like to come back to the mackerel and herring fishers. You told us that there were programs

to support these people. Could you provide me with a list of them? These fishers haven't heard of such programs.

Hon. Joyce Murray: What I was saying is that there is EI—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: It doesn't work.

Hon. Joyce Murray: —and that the department is creating a new program to provide training and education for those who are no longer employed.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: If I understand correctly, the solution they are being offered is to change jobs and abandon the one they've always done.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Fishers and their communities are a priority, but respecting conservation is essential. If we don't, the children and grandchildren of fishers will no longer have the opportunity to fish. It's up to us to make sure that the fishery will last for generations to come.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Is predictability a concept—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

There are only about 11 seconds left. There's hardly time to get an answer. I'm trying to get this full round in while the minister is here.

Ms. Barron, you have two and a half minutes or less.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair. I'm going to try to talk quickly so that I can get it all in.

Thank you, Minister. I want to follow up on the last question I was asking you about the precautionary principle.

I've heard some rationale that some of the reason we're not getting fish farms out of the water is inconclusive science. That's exactly what the precautionary principle is intended for. When there's inconclusive science, you err on the side of caution. You don't do nothing, which is what we're seeing, but quite the opposite: You remove the potential damage.

Why aren't we seeing the precautionary principle put into place when it comes to open-net fish farms?

Hon. Joyce Murray: The precautionary principle is exactly why we are committed to a transition away from open-net pen salmon farming. It's the open-net pen aspect that allows the intermingling of the waste from the fish farms to be in the open ocean, where it can affect wild fish. It's that interaction between the farms and wild fish that is the concern. While we don't need perfect science, we need to be precautionary. I agree.

However, we are asking the industry to advance the speed and effectiveness of its innovation to greatly...to progressively minimize or eliminate that interaction between the farms and the wild salmon—

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Minister. I will move on to my next question.

I will say I'm concerned that we've been allowing industry to control what has been happening in our waters and to damage our waters for far too long. It's time for us to start protecting wild salmon, and our communities as well.

I want to move to the west coast commercial fishers. Unfortunately, we're seeing on the west coast licences being treated like a private stock market. We've seen quite a different approach being taken on the east coast, however.

There were recommendations that were brought forward, right from this committee, to reform the west coast fishery. Unfortunately, to my knowledge, none have been implemented. One of those recommendations was around a transparent beneficial owner registry, so that Canadians can see which corporations own licences in the west coast fishery, instead of having all these numbered companies that can't be attached to whomever it is.

Why is this government okay with corporations controlling so much of the vital fishery? Shouldn't Canadians at least know who owns them?

• (1355)

Hon. Joyce Murray: As I mentioned earlier to a previous question, we are working on identifying the beneficial ownership of the fishery. As I know the member is aware, the histories of the east coast and the west coast are quite different. I'm not going to pre-judge the outcome of that study and our reflection on inshore and offshore fishery allocations on the west coast.

I want to say that the fisheries on the west coast have been an important source of employment and economic opportunities. Whether they're large ships or smaller ones, they've been an important part of our economy on the west coast. I hope that fisheries will continue to be an important part of our economy.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

We'll now go to Mr. Perkins for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

DFO small craft harbours run the abandoned and wrecked vessels removal program. Is that correct?

Could you answer yes or no?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes, it does.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It works in conjunction with the Ship-source Oil Pollution Fund to remove abandoned vessels and cover the costs. Is that correct?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Can you repeat that, please?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It works with the Ship-source Oil Pollution Fund to recover vessels and implement that program as well, right?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I believe that's part of the oceans protection plan. We have some elements of that, and Transport Canada has some elements.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Your predecessor used the two programs to remove the HMCS *Cormorant* from the port of Bridgewater in my

riding. There presumably was a ministerial or departmental order directing that seizure to happen, which happened on November 8.

Will you be willing to table that order with this committee?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll have to get back to you on that, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay.

Along the same lines, there would have been a departmental decision and the reasons for the breakup and destruction of the HMCS *Cormorant* and the sale and disposal of the assets on that. Will you also table that order, as well, please, with the committee?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll get back to you on that.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay.

If you could table, as well, the cleanup costs through the two cleanups and the costs of the disposal, I'd appreciate it.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

I'd like to acknowledge my predecessors for the legislation requiring the abandoned and wrecked vessel cleanups.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's okay. I have limited time.

In response to an Order Paper question of mine when I recently asked the details of the number of southern resident killer whales in the transit zone through the Pender Island bluffs no-transit fishing zone, the department said that it had no information. It seems odd to me that the department would have no information when it closes an entire area to recreational and commercial fishery.

Hon. Joyce Murray: And the question is?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Is there any information besides the department's telling Parliament that it doesn't have any?

Hon. Joyce Murray: The department may have some evidence that this is an important foraging area at certain times of the year. I think we need to be precautionary when it comes to this very challenged species that's just not doing so well.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I hear you, but actually closing an area and not having any evidence that whales are there at any period in time is not an effective policy.

I'll turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Epp.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

Thank you, Minister.

As of March 24, at that FOPO meeting in response to a question by Mr. Perkins, you stated and you confirmed that Canada had not paid the full amount of our government's bill to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission over the past seven years. Is that correct?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Canada had been paying the amount it agreed to, and it was less than the percentage that Canada originally paid in, because the U.S. had increased its money.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you, Minister.

In the spring 2022 budget, the Minister of Finance allocated an additional \$44.9 million to fully fund the Canadian commitment to the 1954 convention treaty so that the U.S. wouldn't have to pay our share. Is that correct?

• (1400)

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes, we did add \$45 million over five years and \$9 million ongoing. I was pleased that my request to the Minister of Finance was successful.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

And you stated such. In the House on May 30, 2022, you stated, “Mr. Chair, I am very proud that we are [now] providing some \$45 million [to] the Great Lakes Commission over the next five years.” Is that correct?

Hon. Joyce Murray: If it's on the record, it's likely correct.

Mr. Dave Epp: In meetings this past week of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, the U.S. walked out in frustration after Canada disclosed that \$14 million over the next five years and \$18 million over the next six years are being withheld by the DFO from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. Is that correct?

Hon. Joyce Murray: There's been no change in the structure of how the funding flows since the beginning of the binational program in 1956.

Mr. Dave Epp: Minister, you're responsible for living up to our treaty obligations. You've stated so in public, that you were going to maintain our full public commitment to fully uphold the treaty. Now, once again, Canada has underfunded the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. Is that correct?

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's not correct. We are fully funding our portion of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's work. Funding to the GLFC has flowed this year in the same way that it has since its inception, and it's in compliance with article VIII of the convention.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Epp. Your time is up.

I know we're getting close to the time when the minister may be leaving. I don't know if she can stay for one more round of questioning from a member or if we are done.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'm sorry, but I have other obligations.

The Chair: Okay.

We're not going to suspend. We'll continue on, but we'll allow the minister and anyone leaving with her to do so as quietly as possible.

Again, Minister, thank you for taking the time to be here with us today.

Thank you to the witnesses who are still with us. We will continue with our rounds of questioning from members.

We have Mr. Small for six minutes or less.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the deputy minister.

We've had announcements that the vessels to be used for cod and capelin surveys this fall and winter won't be ready, even though it was promised they'd be ready.

In setting the upcoming northern cod quotas, will you put more emphasis on logbook data from harvesters, which shows tremendous catch rates over the past three years? Actually, they're accelerating. Will you place more emphasis on the data you have from harvesters to make up for the data missing from the trawl surveys?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: That's a very specific question. I do not have the answer to that. I know we are doing our best to prioritize the different fisheries and the collection of data, based on the reality we're in with the vessels. In terms of other sources we will use, I will turn to Adam.

Mr. Adam Burns (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Harbour Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thanks for the question.

In making fisheries management decisions, we use the best available information at our disposal: the most up-to-date science advice, other logbook reporting—as you mentioned—socio-economic considerations and indigenous knowledge. All of those things, as is always the case, will be part of what is taken into account as the minister makes her decision in this fishery.

• (1405)

Mr. Clifford Small: I'll go back to mackerel. Mr. Morrissey mentioned mackerel earlier.

The U.S. set a quota of 4,000 tons this past year. Typically, the Canadian quota is set to match the American. The Americans would make an allowance in expectation that Canadians would take in an equal quota. Midway through the season, the Americans increased their quota by 20%.

Based on that, do you think this shows the Americans have faith that the mackerel stock is healthier than they originally thought? Would they increase their quota if they thought the stock was in jeopardy?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I can't comment on the detailed rationale they had. We certainly try to co-operate with the U.S. on a range of different fisheries.

My understanding is that they significantly reduced the catch for 2022 because of conservation concerns.

Mr. Clifford Small: I know Mr. Goodyear, a fellow Newfoundlander and Labradorian. It's great to see you here at the committee.

Mr. Goodyear, what reports on mackerel did you hear from around your home area out there in Notre Dame Bay last summer? Have you heard that mackerel was scarce?

Mr. Richard Goodyear: Mr. Chair, I have not. To be frank, I'm probably not as well connected to my hometown as I should be. Otherwise, I'd have a better answer.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clifford Small: I guess I'll go back to some shipbuilding concerns here.

In the 2014 report, the Auditor General recommended that the Canadian Coast Guard assess risks associated with changing traffic patterns and update its requirements for icebreaking services.

Has this happened yet?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I can certainly start.

We would be constantly updating where the needs are and trying to ensure that we have the equipment and the vessels in the right places to do what needs to be done to keep shipping channels open.

Mr. Clifford Small: According to the Auditor General's report, it says the answer's no, that this hasn't happened. The 2022 audit revealed that action required to identify the need for safety and surveillance in the 2021 report had not been taken.

Can you guarantee that we won't be back here next year at this exact same time with yet another Auditor General report's identifying these same shortcomings?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: The government has indicated that it agrees with the recommendations and will take action to address them.

Mr. Clifford Small: The standard life of icebreakers is 25 to 30 years. What's the age range of the icebreakers that we have in service right now?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I'll turn to Chris for the details.

They're getting on in age. I'll say that.

Mr. Chris Henderson: Thank you, Deputy.

We have quite a wide range of ages. The newest are within 10 years. Those are the interim icebreakers that we purchased that were Swedish.

The pre-existing Canadian fleet dates back to the 1980s, so they're coming up on 40 years of service.

Mr. Clifford Small: Are some of them as old as 53 years?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small. Your time is up.

We'll now go to Mr. Cormier, who's online, for six minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

After the cod fishery was closed in the 1990s, where did the funding come from to compensate the fishers affected by the closure? Was it from Fisheries and Oceans Canada or other departments?

Earlier, we talked about the closure of the mackerel and herring fishery. Has compensation been paid for any fisheries other than the cod fishery?

If you can't answer my questions immediately, I would like you to provide the answers in writing to the committee.

• (1410)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I'll answer your questions, but I think we're still going to send you the information in writing.

Several measures were taken to respond to the closure of the cod fishery. There is no doubt that new funding from the fiscal framework will be allocated to that.

Furthermore, we have indeed offered compensation for other fisheries in the past, but that is not the current policy.

Mr. Serge Cormier: We would appreciate it if you could send the information to the committee.

Mr. Chair, I'll give the rest of my time to my colleague Ken Hardie.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie: We had the incident with the *Zim Kingston*, and I think we got lucky that there happened to be towing assets and firefighting assets available to us that weren't ours. They belonged to somebody else, and they just happened to be there.

What are we doing on the west coast to make sure we have the capacity to deal with towing and firefighting?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We have a lot of different programs and measures in place and a lot of vessels on the water.

I'll ask Chris to provide more details.

Mr. Chris Henderson: Thank you for the question.

We have two emergency towing vessels, the *Atlantic Raven* and the *Atlantic Eagle*. Those are leased vessels that are on the water 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They are providing that emergency towing standby capacity.

Through OPP 1, we purchased tow kits that were distributed to the existing Coast Guard fleet. We have a program to train our Coast Guard sailors on the use of those tow kits.

In addition, the national strategy on emergency towing is an in-depth study on the risks for towing nationally that will then inform future decisions about it.

The last thing is with respect to firefighting at sea. Of course, a fire at sea is a sailor's worst enemy. Specifically with respect to the recommendation in the study, we are taking a look at how we can extend firefighting capability in the new ships that we'll be building. We'll probably not be able to put firefighting capability into all of them, but certainly in a good number of them.

Just to be very clear, we won't see Coast Guard sailors going on to other ships to fight fire on those ships. This is external support to the ship's crew.

If I may take a moment here, I would like to make a correction to an earlier answer I provided to the committee with respect to the number of ships that have been delivered so far. I mentioned 16 "bay" class search and rescue lifeboats. The number is actually 14. We have 12 and we're getting two more in the next two weeks. My apologies for getting the number wrong.

Thank you.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Chair, do I have time left?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Oh, lovely.

An hon. member: I'll take them.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ken Hardie: Like heck you will.

I want to look at hatcheries. We've heard a lot about them. Some people say they're a wonderful idea. Others have great reservations. Does the DFO have a strategy for hatcheries, either oceanside or interior, in British Columbia?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I will ask Rebecca Reid, our regional director general, to provide you with more detail on this.

As you say, and as I understand as well from my time so far in the department, there are different views. Certainly we have different strategies to deal with particularly salmon stocks on the west coast. The question of where hatcheries fit in, of course, is very relevant. Our PSSSI, our Pacific salmon initiative—

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'm aware of that, Ms. Gibbons. Perhaps an answer in writing would be useful for this.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Sure. I'd be happy to do that.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you. We'll be back to that subject in due course.

What can the DFO do to close the gap over decisions to close a fishery? We've heard, particularly with the hatchery fish from Washington state, the chinook, that our waters are teeming with them, and yet we don't allow a fishery. We've heard it in mackerel. We've heard in capelin. We've heard it throughout every species. What are we doing to come to an appropriate landing on the decisions that are made to close a fishery?

● (1415)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I will mention a couple of things. First of all, in those cross-border fisheries, we have, as you know, various commissions and various bodies that allow us to work out the state of the stocks and what the quotas should be. We work very hard in those bodies to advocate for Canada's interests, of course.

In terms of fishery decisions in general, and notices on the state of stocks and when a closure might be imminent, we certainly try to signal that. We do a lot of consultations before fishery management decisions are made. We have peer-reviewed science. We publish the science ahead of time for those consultations. We signal ahead of

time where things are, which gives a sense of... It's not in all cases, of course. It's a very grey zone. If there's a decision to make on whether or not there is a fishery, it's not always clear-cut. We are signalling ahead of time that the stocks are low through those consultations and through the publication of the science assessments.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for six minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Gibbons, thank you for being here. I'd like to take this opportunity to raise the issue of climate change. Climate change is a serious issue, but everybody can see that it's going to give you a lot more work to do. In fact, it's been going on for some time. I sympathize with you, because it can't be easy.

When we talk about climate change, we have to look at who is affected and how we can help them. Predictability and financial compensation are two things that will really have to be addressed in the very near future, because climate change is no longer a problem for five or ten years from now; we're knee-deep in it.

Even though it was determined that mackerel stocks had been declining for 10 years, I know of a fisher who allowed his son to buy a boat and gear for the pelagic fishery in 2020. If he had any doubt that the fishery would be closed, he wouldn't have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in a mackerel licence.

Is predictability really on your radar right now? Will it be soon?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Yes, we're always looking to improve this aspect.

As you know, there is Canada's national adaptation strategy. Our department is doing more and more work on climate change and its impact on the fishery.

In this context, we want to provide more guidance on the major changes that we're seeing in fishing grounds. For example, some cold-water adapted species are starting to move further north, where the water is cooler.

● (1420)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: There are agricultural assistance programs, such as AgriStability and AgriRecovery. These programs aren't perfect, but as we've seen during the pandemic, they've still helped keep farmers afloat when droughts and floods caused by climate change occurred.

Is a program like this for the fisheries sector, a sort of "fishery solidarity", possible or probable?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We're discussing this with the provinces, who have raised this issue in the context of our federal-provincial-territorial forum on fisheries. Such programs are cost-shared with the provinces, as well as with producers in some cases. We need to do more work on this.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: This makes me feel a little better, and I hope the fishers will find out about it.

Several files are on your desk right now, including the North Atlantic right whale file. The file has a scientific component, but it also reflects a strong desire to preserve the North Atlantic right whale. Everyone agrees and no one doubts that.

However, should we focus more on a more dynamic management of the species rather than always making fishers pay? There has to be a balance between the product of fishing, the exercise of fishing, and the protection of endangered species. Do you think more money should be invested in a more dynamic management of the North Atlantic right whale?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We're always looking to manage more dynamically, and to be more responsive to what's happening in specific areas. A portion of the funding requested in these supplementary estimates will be used to expand the national oceans protection plan, including scientific and other research on North Atlantic right whales.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: In terms of the socio-economic aspect, do you think that dealing with social science experts could improve the balance between protecting fishers and protecting the whale? Is that something that could be beneficial?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We certainly always take that into consideration in our fisheries management decisions. We consult with communities and groups that represent fishers. It's always very high on our list of considerations.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We will now go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

It's nice to see you again, Ms. Gibbons.

My first question is this: We've seen over the years a continued increase in closures of the B.C. salmon fisheries. I know that funding and support have been promised and supposedly allocated through the PSSI. That's already in there.

I'm hearing from fishers that no one is seeing anything and that they're not getting any solid information around when it will start. Meanwhile, we're seeing impacts on families as well as crew, vessels and expenses. This impacts every aspect of their lives. I heard, for example, from James Lawson, the president of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, from the Heiltsuk nation, that the lack of information about the program is itself causing anxiety.

I'm wondering if you could clarify when B.C. salmon fishers will finally receive clarity with respect to a plan and have the funding in place to be able to move ahead with this.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I think we've had a slower start on certain elements of the PSSI for sure, but we're happy to provide you with more details on the various elements and the rollout in the written response that we'll be providing the committee.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Okay. Thank you.

Is there anything that I could pass on to the fishers and all those who are contacting me around this, aside from the information that you'll be sending? Is there any sort of hope for the people who are waiting for more information?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We certainly do understand and realize that it's difficult. We're working as quickly as we can to be able to provide more specificity.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Okay. Thank you.

The federal government has also committed to zero plastic waste by 2030, but currently we're not seeing a clear, viable plan on how to get there. We're seeing plastic use continuing to increase. We are hearing about the impacts of increased microplastics in our oceans and how those end up in our seafood, in our bodies and recently even in our blood. I'm sure you've read about that.

What is the department doing to address this crisis of plastics in our oceans and in our food chains?

• (1425)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: There are a number of things in DFO. Certainly our science would touch on looking at the impacts of plastics on fish populations and on the marine environment more generally. We are very heavily involved in ghost gear detection and removal through the ghost gear program. There is a fund that is a really important piece of that. There has been an increase to that fund following Fiona in order to deal with the particular impacts of ghost gear from the storm. Those are some of the particular pieces in our department.

Of course, a lot of the work on this is being done with Environment and Climate Change Canada and other departments around town as well.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: It's a huge issue. It's going to take all the departments for sure. I hope we can put a plan in place to get some things moving more quickly so that we'll actually meet the targets and also, hopefully, even meet the targets sooner than 2030. I think our environment needs it.

I have some time and I have other questions I want to get to, but I really want to reiterate this, Ms. Gibbons. You were with me at the recent event in the Tsawout nation along with Minister Murray. I'm feeling very heavy-hearted being here today and hearing the same responses over and over about how there is no action being taken to get fish farms out of the water and to have a clear plan in place for communities, despite having heard from the majority of first nations very, very clearly over and over. For hours we sat there listening to first nation communities talking about the impacts of fish farms on their communities, on them, on the wild salmon, talking about salmon that are being caught and showing up on their shores through rivers and through the oceans, salmon that are glowing, covered in sores, full of sea lice as has never been seen before, and yet I'm hearing responses like "we will be minimizing the impacts and interactions between fish farms and wild salmon".

Quite frankly, that's not good enough. That's what I'm hearing over and over and over again from community members, from first nations chiefs.

What action is going to be taken to ensure that we are reducing or eliminating the pollutants from these toxic fish farms and finally getting them out of the water with a plan in place for communities?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I will refer back to the minister's remarks about having a plan that she will be discussing in the spring.

As we undertake big changes that have economic and social impacts for communities, we always try to consult. That is the stage of the process that we are in now, and once we complete that, the minister, as she's noted, will be bringing forward her plan.

The Chair: You have only about 17 seconds left, so you're not going to get much out of that.

We'll now go to Mr. Arnold for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the department staff for being here today.

I want to start off with Mr. Henderson, please.

Earlier you appeared before the committee in a study that examined the *Zim Kingston* incident that left 105 cargo containers in B.C. waters. When you appeared, you stated that the Coast Guard, and I'll quote, "was well-positioned to respond quickly and effectively to this incident."

However, further correspondence to the committee from the Coast Guard revealed that the initial drift model for lost containers came from the U.S. Coast Guard, which informed the Canadian Coast Guard's earlier response on the *Zim Kingston*.

Why did you not provide these facts when you provided testimony to the committee?

Mr. Chris Henderson: What I'd like to underscore is just how important it is that the Canadian Coast Guard, the United States Coast Guard and both governments work very, very closely together in planning for and implementing responses. In the heat of the crisis, what's important is that we get the information. It's less important where it comes from.

As far as what, sir, I might or might not have said to the committee before, I don't recall what I said, so I can't address why I might not have said that particular thing, but I certainly would not have knowingly withheld information that I was asked about.

• (1430)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I'm also concerned that despite the one-and-a-half billion dollars invested in the oceans protection plan, Canada's Coast Guard was unable to respond to the *Zim Kingston* incident to prevent the cargo containers filled with plastics and other materials from ending up in B.C. waters.

In our study of that container spill, the committee was told that these plastics and polystyrene foam are "much more insidious and have much more long-term impact than even oil". British Columbians are very concerned about this.

To the deputy minister, the minister talks about fighting plastics pollution in the ocean protection plan, so what is being done to recover the 105 containers of plastics and polystyrene foam decomposing in B.C. waters?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I'm afraid, Mr. Chair, that I'm not in a position to answer that specific question. I'm not sure if Chris can add something.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay, thank you. We'll ask for that answer in writing if it can be provided.

Mr. Chris Henderson: I am able to provide some of the information, if you'd like.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay.

Mr. Chris Henderson: There is a number that is well advertised on the coast of Vancouver Island for people to call when they see debris. We have close connections with the first nations up and down the coast. We go and investigate. It is the responsibility of the shipping company, and that's within the polluter pay principle within Canada. That's the regime that we use, so it is the responsibility of the shipping company itself to take action, and we have been quite consistent with holding to that.

Then they are going up and doing those studies to see—

Mr. Mel Arnold: I have limited time, so if you can provide any further detail in writing, we would appreciate it.

Mr. Chris Henderson: Sure.

Mr. Mel Arnold: This question is for the deputy minister.

Earlier today, the minister stated that as of today, there's equal distribution of federal funding to fight aquatic invasive species. I welcome this announcement, but, as always, the devil is in the details.

Can you elaborate on how the equal distribution of AIS funds will be achieved? If you're not able to do that in a short answer today, please provide it in writing.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: The short answer is that we take the budget that we have and we allocate it evenly across our regions. That's what we do.

Mr. Mel Arnold: That has not been the case in the past. Why has the government waited until now to establish this fairness?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I'll ask Alex Dostal to answer that.

Ms. Alexandra Dostal (Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question from the member.

The numbers we mentioned and how they are equal across all DFO regions has been the case since the funding for the national core program for aquatic invasive species was put in place in 2017. At that time, there was \$15.5 million allocated over five years, with \$4 million ongoing. That was equally allocated across all of our DFO administrative regions.

I should also add, since your previous question to the minister was also related to British Columbia, that we also work closely with provincial counterparts, for example, on matters related to aquatic invasive species. What you'll see is funding we've used from some of our other programming, like our B.C. salmon restoration and innovation initiative. There's been funding from that program, for example, to fight European green crab, in collaboration with partners.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you for that, but why is it not—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. Your time has gone over.

We'll now go to Mr. Hanley for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you to all of the officials for attending today. It's always great to hear directly from you.

There will be a committee study in the near future that is going to be devoted to the critical state of Yukon salmon. This is one of the lenses I'm going to be using for my questions.

Going back to the PSSI, I see a supplementary \$1.9 million set aside for it. I'm keen to hear more details, if they're available, for the rationale for that money and where it's going to be allocated.

At the same time, maybe to revisit the PSSI and its applicability to the Yukon, can you review how the spending from the PSSI will be allocated or has been allocated to Yukon salmon projects?

Ms. Gibbons, you're free to triage the answer. Thanks.

• (1435)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Thank you.

It's a bit deeper than I've had the opportunity to go in my month on the job so far, so I'll ask Rebecca Reid if she can provide a bit more detail.

Ms. Rebecca Reid (Regional Director General, Pacific Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you.

We have met with the Yukon first nations and the Yukon government to talk about shared priorities and where we can work together through the Pacific salmon strategy initiative. We are looking at specific opportunities to work with them to lever that funding for activities up in that area.

We can provide you with additional details on that as they're available.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you. I would certainly appreciate any written details and information as they come.

I'm also interested in the overall allocation and how that's figured out with Yukon versus B.C. Is it proportionate to the population? Are there regional considerations?

Could you explain that a bit?

Ms. Rebecca Reid: In the Pacific salmon strategy initiative, there are four pillars that are divided into different categories of activities, such as conservation and enhancement and those types of things. We look at priority projects.

For the specifics between B.C. and Yukon, there's no formal breakdown in between. It would be project-specific. I'd say, of course, that we're further advanced on the B.C. side, but we are working with Yukon to identify priorities for them as well.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Excellent.

I'm moving over to the funding of \$194 million and some change for the reconciliation allocation in this supplementary budget. It's in grants and contributions to advance reconciliation on indigenous rights and fisheries. Particularly for our indigenous communities in Yukon, it's back to the health of the salmon fishery as a key component of reconciliation.

I want to check in with any specific Yukon considerations around this, aside from the PSSI conversations, and around the reconciliation funding, the restoration of the fishery and related traditional and cultural practices. We know how important the salmon fishery is, not just for food security, but for learning—learning on the land, learning from elders—and the whole traditions and cultures around that.

Ms. Rebecca Reid: What I would say on that is we work with the Yukon government and the indigenous peoples in a couple of different ways. There is funding provided under regular programming. There's the aboriginal fisheries strategy. There's funding there. There's also funding provided under the Pacific salmon treaty allocation.

There are a couple of different ways that funding is provided, in addition to the funds that are flowed through the Yukon umbrella final agreement implementation pieces.

Those are the pieces I would highlight for you.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I would just add that this is funding across a number of different programs and initiatives that are being re-profiled. It's not as though there's a very clear Yukon piece, or a piece for any particular area.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Maybe this is a chance to highlight the upcoming study, which I hope will take place in the spring with some travel to Yukon. I'm looking forward to hearing in detail much more from Yukon-based witnesses, and also from the department about the critical state of Yukon chinook salmon, with a view to accelerating our pathway toward solutions.

I'm probably out of time, so I'll stop there.

The Chair: You are right on the mark. Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes or less, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I find that interesting because each of us often speaks on behalf of a number of fishers who have little or no access to people from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

I know the department is very large and it's complicated, but would it be possible to set up more systems that take into account the different types and areas of fisheries, and the movement of resources?

When a North Atlantic right whale is sighted, the entire fishery is shut down, even though we know very well that certain types of fishing take place in areas where the North Atlantic right whale never goes, because the water isn't deep enough.

The principle is the same for capelin, and I think everyone is now aware of the capelin history. A date is set for the opening of the fishery, and it's opened on that date, even though it's known that the small capelin fishery, which is barely commercial, has nothing to do with the big fishery off Newfoundland and Labrador.

These are examples to consider in making decisions. These decisions must take into account more situations, types of fishing or fishing areas that require more consideration than others. This would perhaps allow some fishermen to save their skin.

I just want to know if it's possible to do this, even though it's complicated.

• (1440)

Ms. Annette Gibbons: That's what we're trying to do, yes. We do an overall scientific analysis for each species, but also for the different fishing areas we regulate. I'm speaking generally. As part of that scientific analysis, we obviously try to take into account other factors, such as the characteristics of each species and their movements. Our goal—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I only have 15 seconds left—

[English]

The Chair: Madame Desbiens, you have actually gone over. You've gone into the mines. You have to set your clock right next time.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate that there have been a few questions brought forward around the really important recommendations we brought forward as a committee around marine cargo spills.

As you know, this was a study that I had brought forward as a motion for us to look at in light of the MV *Zim Kingston* spill, with over 100 containers that got lost at sea. I believe only four were retrieved. Regardless, a very minimal number of them were actually retrieved, leaving the rest of them afloat out in the water.

One of the recommendations that was brought forward was around the Coast Guard working alongside....

One second, while I see if I can get the actual wording. I can't find it.

The point is that it was around the Coast Guard working alongside others to look at the integration of tracking devices on containers so that we can more adequately locate containers in light of a spill.

I recognize this is a reactionary piece to a bigger problem that needs a lot of the preventive mechanisms put into place. However, what has been done? Has any consultation or work been done to develop and implement a tracking device system on containers as they are being shipped?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I will ask Chris to comment on that.

Mr. Chris Henderson: Thank you very much for the question.

The short answer is that tracking devices and the placement of tracking devices in sea containers is a global challenge. It is a challenge that in the Canadian government context is actually negotiated through the International Maritime Organization, which falls under the purview of Transport Canada. The Coast Guard doesn't actually have a role to play in negotiating the tracking of sea containers.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

I'm looking at the recommendation and the actual wording in there. Of course, the Coast Guard would be involved in some capacity in it, but I can provide further clarification.

The overall theme within the report and the recommendations is to ensure that there is work being done to have “a joint spill response” in place, a “container spill response”, that ensures timely responses and coordinated responses using local knowledge, the Coast Guard and all the resources that are there.

I did hear a comment on the responsibility being on the shipping companies, which is a big part of the problem that we're seeing currently, for multiple reasons. I'm wondering what actions have been taken to move forward with having this joint response plan in place so that we don't have the same issues that we did with the *Zim Kingston* moving forward.

• (1445)

The Chair: I'd ask for that to come in writing, Ms. Barron, because you've gone way over your two and a half minutes in that question.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Perkins for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have just a quick request for a written response on the follow-up for Mr. Arnold.

Can the department provide a written response on the invasive species budget in terms of what “equal” means and, if you could, maybe the last five or six years of the data between the provinces that illustrates that it's equal? Thank you.

I was reviewing the performance measures that the department set out for the last year that's available. I think there were 70. I was surprised to learn that one of the measures of success on which the department claims success was the increasing levels of aquaculture production. An increase in that was actually seen as a positive, and you exceeded the thing. Obviously the department doesn't have a lot to do with what actually gets produced in the net, but I was surprised to see that in there, as opposed to, say, IFMPs with a rebuilding plan, which is not a target that DFO has.

Could you explain that?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Our indicators will be based on when we take new initiatives to cabinet—for example, for various new programs or increases to programs. We will develop indicators or update our departmental indicators to reflect that, so that would reflect government policy—

Mr. Rick Perkins: It is government policy, then, to increase the production in aquaculture, but it's not government policy to have a rebuilding plan for stocks that are in distress?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Well, under the act, we are of course mandated to protect stocks. Many parts of the department's work are built around doing that. I can't speak to the specific indicator related to that, but we have to—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, I've asked the department to take another look at why those things that are most crucial—rebuilding plans, rebuilding the stocks and issues around actually knowing what are the natural and the fishing mortality of stocks—are not targets for the department, but things like increasing aquaculture are.

I'd like to go on to enforcement.

In my riding, a couple of people in the lobster brokerage industry were charged by DFO and convicted of selling undersized lobster. A very small fine was issued by the court. They sold about a million dollars' worth of lobster and got a fine of about \$50,000. The next day after the charge, they started to sell illegal lobster again. DFO came in and again charged them. They've been charged again recently.

Part of the problem for the province is that the charges are to the individuals and not to the companies. Will DFO start looking at charging the companies where this is happening?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: We work within the laws that we're mandated under. I can't speak to that specific question.

I can ask Doug Wentzell from our regional office to—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Maybe you can provide a written response to that so I can turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Epp.

Ms. Annette Gibbons: Yes, sure.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to direct my questions to ADM and CFO Goodyear.

When the spring 2022 budget was released and passed, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission stated in a news release, and I quote: “With today's Canadian budget, the two nations are now funding the Commission at [an] agreed-to level with the goal of protecting and improving the \$7 billion Great Lakes fishery.”

Yet the U.S. officials walked out of the meeting, so my question is this: Has the Great Lakes Fishery Commission set their budget for 2023?

Mr. Richard Goodyear: Thank you for the question.

The budget for GLFC has been based on the negotiation between the two nations and is set, of course, with the inclusion of the commission. From what I'm aware of, yes, the budget has been set.

Mr. Dave Epp: I don't believe that to be the case.

Do you know why? Why is the U.S. State Department now involved?

Mr. Richard Goodyear: I can't answer that question at this point.

Mr. Dave Epp: The minister stated in her testimony that the money from DFO has flowed, as it always has, to the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission. The DFO was in a conflict of interest position with respect to the department's duties and its machinery of government function for the GLFC, as well as its role as the selected contractor for the sea lamprey control by that same commission.

Will the DFO support the transfer of the machinery of government function back to Global Affairs so as to eliminate this conflict?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: I will repeat what the minister said, which is that we are in full compliance with our obligations under the treaty in terms of funding for the commission—

• (1450)

Mr. Dave Epp: Why did the U.S. officials walk out?

Ms. Annette Gibbons: My understanding of this issue is—and this is a very simplified understanding of it—that DFO receives funding for actions related to the Great Lakes for the sea lamprey program, as we have for years. This is ongoing funding to the department. There may be different views by some individuals that this funding should go to the commission, and that is part of the dispute here.

Mr. Dave Epp: The dispute is that the U.S.—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Epp. You've gone over time.

We need a few minutes to do some voting very shortly. We're going to call it quits for the panel.

Thank you to the departmental officials for being here yet again today, and spending the full two hours with us. We greatly appreciate it. I apologize if you thought you were being harassed by any member with the strict line of questioning, but I don't think you were. I think today was an absolutely good day for both sides at this particular committee meeting.

We're going to allow our witnesses to leave. We're not going to suspend. It's just so that we can do the voting on the supplementary estimates.

It could be up to three votes. I don't know. We'll see how it goes. There is very little time left. We'll try, and get through it as quickly as we can.

In all, three votes were referred to the committee in supplementary estimates (B). Unless there's any objection, I will seek the unanimous consent of the committee to group the votes together for a decision.

Does everybody agree to group them all together?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Seeing no objection, we'll do that.

Shall all votes referred to the committee in supplementary estimates (B) carry on division?

DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures.....86,793,760

Vote 5b—Capital expenditures.....5,702,998

Vote 10b—Grants and contributions.....344,798,357

(Votes 1b, 5b and 10b agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the votes back to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Next Tuesday, we will start with drafting instructions for the letter on the impacts of the climate crisis. We will then begin consideration of the report on science at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Before I adjourn, I want to bring up one issue. When members want to talk to each other, please turn around, or do something. I'm listening to what the witnesses are saying, the clerk is saying, and what an analyst might say to me. When people are speaking close to me, it interferes with my concentration as I am trying to pay attention to what's actually going on.

Some men's voices are much louder than the ladies' voices. I don't hear Madame Desbiens and Ms. Barron interrupting like that, but there are some people who speak loudly. I know when Mr. Zimmer was here, I had to tell him, "You have a very loud voice, even though you're down at the end of the row, kinda." It distracts everybody here on this end, so I'd ask people to keep that in mind.

On that note, enjoy your weekend, everybody. We'll see you back here on Tuesday.

• (1455)

The meeting is adjourned.

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