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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



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• (1630)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)): Welcome back, members.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on February 8, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of plans to prevent violence during the 2024 elver fishing season.

On our first panel today, we have a number of witnesses on Zoom and others here in person.

On Zoom, from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we have Darren Campbell, chief superintendent, criminal operations officer, New Brunswick; and Sue Black, chief superintendent, criminal operations officer, Nova Scotia.

From the Canada Border Services Agency, we have, in our committee room today, Dominic Mallette, regional director general, Atlantic region; and Cathy Toxopeus, director general, commercial programs.

I apologize for butchering anybody's name, but I'm from Newfoundland and I'm not well versed in a lot of these names, so please be patient.

From the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, we have Kevin Urbanic, director general, Ontario operations; and Parthi Muthukumarasamy, executive director, international programs directorate.

We'll now go to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for an opening statement of five minutes or less.

Dr. Parthi Muthukumarasamy (Executive Director, International Programs Directorate, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the committee members today on this important topic.

My name is Dr. Parthi Muthukumarasamy, and I work as executive director for international programs at the CFIA. I am accompanied by Kevin Urbanic, director general for Ontario operations.

Today, I will provide an overview of the CFIA's role in the export and import of juvenile American eels, also known as baby eels or elvers.

Elvers are generally not exported for direct human consumption as food. Instead, elvers are exported to be grown on aquaculture farms in the importing country until they develop into adults and are then harvested to be used as food.

The CFIA regulates the export and import of live animals, including aquatic animals, under the Health of Animals Act and regulations. The export and import requirements for the trade of live animals, including aquatic animals, are primarily in place to prevent the introduction of animal diseases and diseases that could be transmitted from animals to humans.

In general, in order to provide assurances that the exported live animals, or animal products, meet an importing country's requirements related to animal and human health, an official export certificate endorsed by the CFIA is required for clearing the shipment in the importing country. These export certificates are issued by the CFIA only when required by the importing country, and when the conditions for exports included in the certificate are established between the CFIA and the importing country.

Most countries do not require an export certification from the CFIA for the export of American elvers intended for aquaculture. Thus, the CFIA does not have an oversight for elvers exported to these countries that do not require an export certificate.

We note from earlier meetings of this committee that some members are interested in elver exports to China. Currently, China requires an export certificate from Canada for the export of elvers for aquaculture purposes. This certificate for the export of elvers was last issued in 2017 and has not been issued since then.

In the case of Hong Kong, it does not require an export certificate for the export of elvers from Canada unless the elvers are intended for re-export from Hong Kong to China. The last time CFIA issued an export certificate for the export of elvers to Hong Kong was June 2019.

From the import perspective, and the import of American eels or elvers into Canada, the CFIA currently does not require an aquatic animal health import permit or export certificate, as American eels are not known to be susceptible to any of the CFIA-regulated diseases.

The CFIA continues to work with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on the export and import of elvers as it relates to animal and public health.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. We are pleased to respond to any questions pertaining to the CFIA's role in elver exports and imports.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Mr. Mallette from the Canada Border Services Agency for an opening statement of five minute or less, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Dominic Mallette (Regional Director General, Atlantic Region, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you.

[English]

I first want to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I would like to underscore that the illegal fishing of American eel elvers is of great concern to the CBSA, and I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the committee's study on this topic.

• (1635)

[Translation]

I will share with the committee the roles and responsibilities of the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, as they relate to preventing the illegal elver fishery and the export of illegally caught elvers.

The CBSA plays a supporting role by verifying that other departmental requirements are met for fish and seafood imported into and exported from Canada, and by administering the Customs Act.

[English]

The CBSA works closely with departments and agencies, such as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, to ensure, among other things, that fish, seafood and seafood products being imported to and exported from Canada are compliant with program legislation.

[Translation]

Upon identification of a specific shipment or commodity of concern by DFO, the CBSA works jointly with DFO to identify and intercept shipments to ensure compliance with all government regulations.

[English]

The CBSA is actively working to prevent the export of illegally caught elvers. There are currently no licences, permits or certificates prescribed in any OGD legislation that must be presented or verified at the border in order to export fish, including elvers, from Canada. The only exceptions are the endangered species controlled under the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act, which includes the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

In this respect, the CBSA assists Environment and Climate Change Canada with the administration and enforcement of these acts by ensuring that any shipments are accompanied by the required permits. Suspected non-compliant shipments are detained and referred to ECCC wildlife enforcement officers. The CBSA

may also notify ECCC of wildlife taken in contravention of provincial laws, which is an offence under the act.

Currently, American eel elvers are not protected by CITES.

[Translation]

The CBSA collects statistical information on the export of certain fish and certain fishing catches through its electronic reporting requirements. This information is transmitted daily to Statistics Canada by way of electronic file transfers.

[English]

The CBSA works with ECCC wildlife enforcement and DFO officers on criminal investigations with a border nexus, such as smuggling activities.

The CBSA is also a member of the recently formed interdepartmental fish and seafood traceability task force, led by the DFO, which addresses, in part, illegal, unregulated and unreported fisheries.

Additionally, the DFO is currently developing regulations to impose the requirement of a licence to allow the export of elvers. This will provide the CBSA with enhanced authorities to intercept eels at the border.

We will continue to work with the DFO as it develops these regulations, and we will make sure that our border officers are trained and prepared to stop and seize illegal elver exports once these regulations come into force. The CBSA regularly updates directions to frontline officers to manage the handling, interdiction or release of high-risk goods.

[Translation]

As a final point, the CBSA is continuously working to improve not only our relationships with our partners, but also our collective intelligence and enforcement capabilities, our operations, our lessons learned and our successes.

That concludes my opening remarks. I'm happy to answer your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Sue Black for an opening statement of five minutes or less, please.

Chief Superintendent Sue Black (Criminal Operations Officer, H Division, Core Criminal Operations, Nova Scotia, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak to plans and strategies towards preventing incidents of violence subsequent to the cancellation of the 2024 elver fishing season.

My name is Chief Superintendent Sue Black, and I am the criminal operations officer for the Nova Scotia RCMP or what we refer to as H division. The criminal operations officer is responsible for uniform and plainclothes investigative personnel with a mandate of core provincial policing services. I have been with the RCMP for 35 years in a number of roles, including core policing and, under the federal policing umbrella, border integrity, war crimes and international policing.

I am joined today by Chief Superintendent Darren Campbell, who is the criminal operations officer—my counterpart—for the RCMP in New Brunswick, also known as the J division.

The RCMP takes its primary role of upholding public safety very seriously.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

The RCMP is mandated with protecting the public and enforcing applicable laws, including the Criminal Code, independently of political direction or influence. The RCMP will continue to take steps to ensure that those who unlawfully interfere with or threaten the safety of any person or property will be held accountable in accordance with the laws of Canada.

The RCMP's approach is impartial, respectful and balanced. It engages proactively with the community and stakeholders and develops communication and mitigation strategies aimed at preventing conflict. Our continued goal is to maintain the peace and facilitate peaceful resolutions to public order events.

[*English*]

The RCMP's role within the context of elver fishing, where it is the police of jurisdiction, is to respond to any Criminal Code infractions arising from conflict between parties involved in related disputes, to take proactive steps to reduce the risk of public safety incidents and to seek peaceful outcomes in the event of public order events.

RCMP division liaison team—or DLT—resources engage with all fishery stakeholders to facilitate conversations and understanding between parties with a goal of peaceful outcomes. The DLT has a long-standing and positive relationship with key stakeholders, including in the industry. This team is positioned to participate in dialogue to minimize risks to all persons and assist the RCMP in ensuring public safety.

The Nova Scotia RCMP has a well-established plan and command structure that covers operational, tactical and strategic-level responses for planned and unplanned major incidents.

[*Translation*]

Should civil unrest occur, uniformed personnel can be supplemented by additional strategic tactical operations resources from surrounding jurisdictions. Operational contingency plans are in place to respond if required. Should an event materialize outside of the RCMP's jurisdiction, the RCMP is prepared to support and bolster the lead agency's law enforcement posture and activities.

In the event of civil unrest, such as a public order event, the emergency coordination centre, led by the Department of Fisheries

and Oceans, or DFO, and supported by the Nova Scotia RCMP and the Canadian Coast Guard, will ensure a unified approach that maximizes the Government of Canada's response. The Nova Scotia RCMP continues to support DFO through participation in emergency coordination centre activities.

[*English*]

The RCMP is committed to reconciliation and renewed, enhanced relationships with indigenous communities based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership. As such, any possible actions taken by the RCMP will be in the spirit of the culturally respectful efforts made to date to build meaningful, trustworthy and lasting relationships with indigenous communities and their peoples.

All of our work continues to include co-operation and partnership with the communities we serve.

Ultimately, while efforts to find a peaceful, long-term resolution rooted in the recognition of legitimate indigenous treaty rights continue, the RCMP will remain focused on upholding public safety, maintaining peaceful conditions for all involved and thoroughly investigating Criminal Code offences.

Thank you, Chair, for inviting me to appear before you today.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to our rounds of questions.

We'll start with Mr. Perkins for six minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for coming.

I'd like to begin with the CBSA, if I could. I'll name the organizations and you guys can choose who's most appropriate to answer. It'll make it easier and I won't destroy your names, either.

CBSA, are you aware of a company in Toronto owned by Zheng Chao and Mark Mao, which exported somewhere in the neighbourhood of 100 tonnes of elvers out of the Toronto airport last year?

• (1645)

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I personally am not aware of that company, to be honest. I would question the quantities exported, but I can't do that at this time, so—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, it was verified—those approximate numbers were verified—in the Chronicle Herald a couple of weeks ago. They got the export numbers from Hong Kong. They were going through Hong Kong. They were confirmed.

My follow-up question is for the CFIA. A number of those exports had CFIA certification tags on them, going through Hong Kong. They go through Hong Kong, go through Korea and then move to China.

You testified, I think, that you don't have any record of that. I find it hard to believe that when that kind of volume of live seafood was going through on plane manifests, out of a terminal in Toronto, you wouldn't know that.

Dr. Parthi Muthukumarasamy: As I mentioned in the opening remarks, Hong Kong does not require export certification for export to Hong Kong from Canada, unless the product will be re-exported to China. We have not issued any export certification to Hong Kong, or to China, since—

Mr. Rick Perkins: One, are you aware that all those exports are going to China? That's where the aquaculture is to grow them. Two, are you aware that in Hong Kong they're forging CFIA documents for the export to China?

Dr. Parthi Muthukumarasamy: When we are aware of forged certificates, we take action. We have a mechanism in place for enforcement and investigation activities. We were not notified in Hong Kong or by Hong Kong authorities of any forged certificates that have been used. Unfortunately, we don't have jurisdiction in Hong Kong. It's for the Hong Kong authorities to investigate.

Mr. Rick Perkins: If you don't have jurisdiction there, how do you know they're not forging?

Dr. Parthi Muthukumarasamy: We are not aware of any forged certificates being used.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

To the CBSA, are you aware that large amounts of illegal elver exports go out in live lobster crates to China?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: Yes, I am fully aware.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Do you inspect all lobster crates of live lobster going out of Halifax or any other border in Canada?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: The short answer to that, Mr. Chair, is no. The CBSA does not inspect 100% of lobster shipments going out, either at Halifax or at Toronto. Doing that would likely lead to significant complications in the entire lobster industry.

Mr. Rick Perkins: What percentage do you do?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I could not give you a percentage, to be honest. We do random examinations, in fact.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Could you tell us the percentage in a written statement to the committee, please?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I could come back and give you a percentage, perhaps.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

To the RCMP, you're the Nova Scotia provincial police force. Is that correct?

C/Supt Sue Black: Yes, we are the provincial police in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Rick Perkins: As part of that responsibility, you have a responsibility for enforcing trespassing law and the illegal possession and use of firearms in the province, do you not?

C/Supt Sue Black: Yes, we do.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Last year, during the illegal elver season, very few, if any, trespassing charges were laid. Maybe you can enlighten us on that.

I can tell you that I know from my constituents, two minutes from my house, that the RCMP were called nightly at the Tantallon detachment and were asked to make arrests. There were nightly poachers on their land, over four months, defecating and destroying their land. Eventually, the detachment said to please stop calling them or they would arrest them. They would arrest the property owner.

Why would the RCMP refuse to enforce the trespassing law on the south shore of Nova Scotia in the Halifax regional municipality, where there is jurisdiction, but instead threaten the victims of the crime being committed?

C/Supt Sue Black: Thank you for the question, Chair.

I am aware of the member's assertions. I want to assure the committee that I was quite concerned when I heard about them. I did some research, and this is what I found. We searched our databases for trespassing occurrences related to elver fishing. Since January 2023, we found six complaints. We followed up on all of them. In four out of the six instances, we attended personally to the call.

It's important to note that trespassing at night, under section 177 in the Criminal Code, is a summary conviction offence. For any enforcement action to be taken, that would mean that we would have to find them committing it.

• (1650)

Mr. Rick Perkins: I would suggest that your record-keeping is weak. I do know that a third of the jobs in your call centre aren't filled. The issue is that these folks were phoning every night, unless you're saying that they are misleading the media and me as to what's going on.

I would ask that you enforce the trespassing law. These rivers are full of people with illegal firearms, and no one has been charged with having illegal firearms. I would suggest that the RCMP has to do a better job of enforcing those basic laws.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

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

[Translation]

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

My first question is for Mr. Mallette.

Several weeks or maybe months ago, the industry discussed certain tools that could be available to you for such things as traceability. Other jurisdictions, including Maine, have adopted an approach that allows for eel tracing. Can you tell us if this is being done elsewhere and explain to us how we could implement the same traceability process here for the elver fishery?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: Mr. Chair, the traceability of elvers isn't the responsibility of the Canada Border Services Agency. The only tools I'm aware of were used by the CBSA to identify

[English]

elvers in boxes of lobster or other boxes at the airport, so that cannot speak to traceability for elver in the industry.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: I want to make sure that we fully understand the scope of what's going on at the moment. Right now, fishing is illegal. If someone tried to export elvers, how would you stop that from happening?

You said earlier that it's impossible to monitor all shipments, but how are you going to make sure that doesn't happen?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: Mr. Chair, if we find undeclared elvers, whether at the Halifax airport or the Toronto airport, we have the authority to seize them. If they are declared under the Export and Import Permits Act, all we can do is

[English]

a referral, I guess, to CFIA to see what authorities they may have to seize those or otherwise.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay.

Ms. Black, in recent weeks, has the RCMP made any arrests or seizures on rivers or waterways in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick or elsewhere?

C/Supt Sue Black: Thank you for the question.

The RCMP's primary mandate is public safety and conducting investigations into Criminal Code offences.

[English]

Anything to do with violations of the Fisheries Act falls to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Were arrests made anyway?

[English]

C/Supt Sue Black: With regard to any arrests that were made in relation to infractions of the Fisheries Act, I can't speak to that, but from an RCMP perspective, whenever there's a nexus to the elver situation or issue, if we are asked for assistance and if we investigate Criminal Code offences that are related, then we would make

the arrests. The most recent arrests would have occurred on March 16, subsequent to a request for assistance from DFO for our help in managing Criminal Code offences that were related to their enforcement action with regard to the Fisheries Act.

• (1655)

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: That doesn't really answer my question, but I understand what your responsibilities are.

Mr. Mallette, let's talk more about the tools you have to trace elvers. What tools would you need right now to do your job properly? Do you already have them or do you need other tools so we don't end up in the same situation as in recent years?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: Thank you for your question.

We do have the tools to trace elvers. We can use X-ray machines to scan boxes of lobsters or elvers to see if there are actually elvers inside. We have the equipment to do that.

That said, we still have to deal with the issue of traceability, which is not our responsibility. Our responsibility is to identify elvers at the time of export, if necessary.

[English]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Ms. Black, I'm going back to you. I'm not sure if you can answer this.

The RCMP still knows what's going on, on the ground. With what you saw happening last year, do you think we could have had a safe season this year, if there had been an open season of elver fishing?

C/Supt Sue Black: I don't think I can project the future state. Our agency doesn't have a direct mandate with the Fisheries Act. We're focused on Criminal Code offences.

I assume the question could be answered by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in terms of their risk assessments surrounding this decision.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

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

[Translation]

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

Thank you to our witnesses for being here. It's always valuable to have people with their expertise here. We gain a better understanding of the critical situation that hits honest fishers hardest because they're the ones who end up without a job. That's extremely troubling. I have met with fishers who have worked so hard to develop this market for over 20 years, and now they've been left high and dry, so to speak.

How can we save honest fishers—let's call them that—and quickly solve a number of problems and reopen this fishery next year, say? Do you have a timeline in mind?

I'm not sure who this question should go to. I might not be asking the right person. Maybe one or two of the witnesses can answer.

I know these people are listening to us today. They can stop fishing for a year; their financial situation allows them to wait until next year. However, without a short or medium-term solution in sight, this lucrative industry will be in quite a bind.

These people are making sacrifices now to eliminate the illegal elver fishery. Do you think they can look forward to resuming their activities soon?

I don't see anyone jumping in here.

Mr. Dominic Mallette: Maybe that question is better put to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans than to CBSA.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: At this point in time, are the tools at your disposal sufficient to do assessments, impose constraints, conduct investigations and even arrest offenders? Do you have enough financial, technical and human resources on the ground?

• (1700)

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I can answer that.

If regulations allowed us to enforce the act, that would help. If permits were required for either importing or exporting, that would help us combat the problem. Export permits aren't required at this point. That's something that would really help us.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That's one thing you'd like to see. That would enable traceability. That's actually the key to traceability. When there is an export or import permit, people can trace the origin and destination of the products. I understand. There should be regulations for issuing permits.

It looks like offenders have the upper hand. Could the regulations be stricter and the fines stiffer?

That's what I've always recommended because I think it's a good idea. That's what we do for some of these things in Quebec.

Could the committee recommend imposing stiffer fines and returning that revenue to the security system to pay for better tools and equipment? Would that be helpful? Is that wishful thinking?

[English]

Dr. Parthi Muthukumarasamy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That question is more appropriate for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

However, we are working closely with DFO in their development of regulations. They're working through that. I believe DFO has plans to regulate the possession and export of elvers, in terms of permitting and controlling any illegal fisheries.

From an agency perspective, we have a number of tools when we see non-compliance, including cancelling licences to operate—for example, in food establishments—administrative monetary penalties, prosecution, etc., and we take action when our regulations and legislation are not complied with.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dominic Mallette: Similarly, the regulations that we believe may come into force sometime in the future will certainly help the CBSA.

In the meantime, we do have access to regulatory options of enforcement comprising fines under the Customs Act or criminal prosecution when the act is contravened, but we haven't come across that in recent times.

We're looking, and we are ready to fully exercise our authorities when the time comes.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

There are only three seconds left on your clock, so we'll move on to the next questioner.

We have Ms. Barron for six minutes or less.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for Mr. Mallette from CBSA.

We had the deputy minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Ms. Annette Gibbons, recently at the committee. She was speaking to the committee about how not opening the elver fishery in 2024 would make it impossible to launder or mix legally and illegally caught elvers.

I'm wondering if, in your role, you can provide your thoughts about whether this closure that's happening will make it easier for the Canada Border Services Agency to prevent the export of illegally caught elvers. Could you speak to this comment that was made?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: Thank you for the question.

It's difficult to answer. I haven't read that statement by the deputy minister. I'm not sure whether, even if the fishery is closed, legally and illegally caught elvers won't get mixed. I think the problem remains.

I'm not sure if I answered your question.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I was as confused by it as you were, so thank you for confirming that. Perhaps I'll dig a little deeper into that.

I'm wondering if you can share what you feel is needed. What is the most effective tool that could be put into place to help CBSA identify illegal elvers crossing the border?

• (1705)

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I'll go back to my previous answer to this.

If we had a proper regulatory regime in place and a permit requirement, it would help us tremendously in identifying illegal shipments and give us the authority to actively pursue non-compliance.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Mr. Mallette, I'll continue with you.

You spoke about the licences. Now you're speaking about regulatory practices and so on. I'm wondering if you could share a bit more about how CBSA would enforce these licences and what would be needed by CBSA to operationalize a system of licences in order to ensure unlicensed elvers are not crossing the border.

Mr. Dominic Mallette: Presumably, as with any other commodity, if permits were required by law, they would have to be submitted to the CBSA upon export. We would presumably have a copy of that permit available to us for verification and could react accordingly, should there not be a permit included in the export transaction or submission.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: To clarify, Mr. Mallette, is there something specific the committee should be aware of—a resource, a tool, funding, supports or training? Is there something specific you can share that CBSA may require through this change, if this is implemented?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I'll answer that by saying that if permits were, in fact, required and the law provided for them to be submitted to the CBSA, I suspect system enhancement on the CBSA side could help validate the presence of the permit in the system in order to expedite the validation process.

Therefore, perhaps system enhancements...once the permit is legally required to be submitted.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

My next question is for Chief Superintendent Black.

Ms. Black, I would like to just read for you a portion of an email that was sent to me by an elver harvester. Perhaps you can provide some comment on it because it particularly touched me to hear these words. It says:

In the past, our safety procedures simply involved wearing a lifejacket, wearing the proper wet gear, carrying a flashlight, fishing in pairs etc.

Now our safety is jeopardized every night—

They go on to say this:

—because of the complete lack of enforcement of IUU elver fishing

Last season we called both C&P and RCMP when [we] were confronted by poachers and no response, from either. I cannot over state the...frustration (and bewilderment) when we had NO response from law enforcement!

This lawlessness and lack of enforcement has undermined my sense of safety in my workplace.

The last thing she says is this:

Just imagine if someone entered your office, stole your laptop, destroyed it, yelled at you, left their garbage all over your office—and you called the police and they refused to come. AND then you lose your job and your income is given to the perpetrator.

I thought this was a really important example of the impacts.

I'm wondering if you can provide some thoughts around this email that I received, please.

C/Supt Sue Black: Thank you for your question.

It's important to note, as I stated in my opening remarks, that it's about mandate. The RCMP's mandate is focused on public safety and the enforcement of Criminal Code offences. With regard to harvesting, conservation and protection of Canada's freshwater and green fisheries, that falls to the mandate of DFO. It also falls to the DFO for enforcement of alleged or actual violations of the Fisheries Act.

Where we get reports of Criminal Code activity, we will respond. We do respond and investigate appropriately.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming out today and taking part in this study.

Mr. Mallette, I heard you say that there's no proper regulatory regime in place.

DFO has known about the catastrophe in the elver fishery for the last 10 years. Wouldn't you think that this would be enough time for a regime to be put in place that could straighten all this out?

● (1710)

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I don't think I said there's no proper regulatory regime. I think enhancing the current regime would help.

Second, I think this question would be much better answered by DFO.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you think DFO has failed the elver fishery?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I can't comment on that.

Mr. Clifford Small: You have no comment.

Twenty times more elvers were exported last year than there was a quota for. Was the quota amount flagged to you?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I've heard that statement made before. I have not verified it, to be honest. I hear a lot of statistics being shared.

One challenge that does exist for us is that elvers and eels are both identified using the same code, which is called an HS code in the system, so I'm cautious about trying to discuss statistics, because we're not counting the same things.

I think one enhancement that could be made—and I believe DFO is currently working on this—is to create a specific HS code to differentiate between eels and elvers, which will fix some of the data.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Mallette, is the export of elvers currently banned? Is there an export ban right now?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: There is no export ban on elvers that are imported from outside of Canada. There is a ban on elvers that are fished within Canadian territory.

Mr. Clifford Small: How good is your math inside your organization on calculating how many elvers are coming in from other countries to be transshipped versus what's going out?

Obviously, last year there must have been some kind of a mismatch.

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I can't comment on that without looking the numbers, to be honest, and analyzing the numbers.

Mr. Clifford Small: Would you be able to provide the committee with some written testimony on that?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: We can certainly look at the data and provide you what's available to us that would be reasonable to answer the question, yes.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you very much.

My next question is for Chief Superintendent Black.

I have some ATIP information here. I would say there are about 50 reports of illegal elver fishing. I opened the page and I was very surprised to see this report of seven or eight people setting up nets and fishing for elvers near Yarmouth. They stated there are vehicles, but did not have descriptions. There were no descriptions of the vehicles, including licence plates or who owned them. They also stated some are indigenous and some are not, but there's no fishing allowed in the area.

The thing that got me is that some were indigenous and some were not. What does that have to do...? Why would that language be in an email that's coming from an official in your department?

C/Supt Sue Black: I'm not aware of the documents you're sharing with us today.

Mr. Clifford Small: These are from an ATIP. They were provided by the RCMP.

C/Supt Sue Black: Was that in Nova Scotia?

Mr. Clifford Small: Yes.

C/Supt Sue Black: I have no background on it, so I can't answer why the comments were made in that email.

Mr. Clifford Small: If we have to distinguish between indigenous and non-indigenous people, it makes me think that there's some kind of directive coming down from the minister.

Was there, in fact, a directive delivered to the RCMP on how to enforce the law, depending on the ethnicity of the poachers?

C/Supt Sue Black: No, there was not such a directive.

Mr. Clifford Small: Why would that be laid out—

The Chair: Your time has expired, Mr. Small.

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

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it.

I want to thank everyone here today for their service—and those who are online, of course.

I think it's important to come back to the facts and what people are feeling. The facts are that last year, we had an unprecedented onslaught, particularly in the South Shore, but also in different parts of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. We heard a lot of testimony here, but we also heard a lot in phone calls and emails from people who were concerned or worried. People are fearful.

What I've seen this year... Again, these are my observations, but they're from some information in relation to what's going on with C and P and the RCMP, even since we last chatted. Between March 6 and 18, I believe, there were about 33 arrests, six vehicles seized, 63 nets seized and one firearm seized. We had a C and P officer who was rammed by an alleged criminal.

These men and women are putting their lives on the line for their fellow brothers and sisters. It is complicated. I'm fearful for these individuals who are laying their lives on the line for us, but they're doing it, and for the last couple of weeks, they have seemingly been doing a much better job. I commend C and P and the RCMP for what they do when they go into those situations, because they don't know what's going to happen. I appreciate it so much.

I want to stick with the South Shore for a bit, which is in Mr. Perkins' riding. There's been a lot of activity there, in particular.

This is to the RCMP. We hear time and time again about organized crime. Can you give us any type of information on organized crime? To what degree is it being investigated? What's the follow-up?

● (1715)

C/Supt Sue Black: One of the RCMP's national priorities is organized crime, but unfortunately, I can't speak to specific ongoing investigations. Organized crime entities are involved in many commodities. I'll leave it at that.

We take complaints seriously and follow up on any that fall within our mandate. Our members across the province work very hard to build trust with communities and encourage Nova Scotians to come forward to report crimes that may be affecting their safety. Through direct contact with police and through the crime stoppers program, when we get complaints that are linked to organized crime, we investigate them.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I appreciate that.

How closely are the RCMP and C and P working together? I keep hearing that they are. How close are they?

I would appreciate it if you could keep it brief. Thank you.

C/Supt Sue Black: We meet regularly with DFO enforcement officials—C and P—on the elver issue to share information that's related to our mandates, if we hear of any information that might assist them or vice versa. We share regularly and try to stay on top of things as they evolve, if that answers your question.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

I'll just stay with the RCMP for one more question, and then I want to go to CBSA.

Has the ministry of fisheries ever directed the RCMP to do anything, ordered you or told you what to do?

C/Supt Sue Black: No, they have not.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the ministry and the RCMP. There's a reason why they are separate. Isn't that right?

C/Supt Sue Black: I'm sorry. The first part of your question dropped.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I said that there's a reason for the separation between the ministry and the police officers, the RCMP provincially. You would never hear from a minister ordering you what to do, where to go or what to investigate.

C/Supt Sue Black: Exactly. We operate independently of any political interests.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

I have 30 seconds.

In terms of CBSA, one of the witnesses talked about hand-held devices that can really dive into what's in a crate or a box. Do we use them now? Are we looking at using new technological tools that lend themselves to better traceability and better observation? Clearly, elvers are going to Halifax port, Montreal port, Montreal airport and Toronto airport. Are we investigating any new tools to uncover elvers?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: We're not investigating the use of new tools. I believe that we have the tools that are necessary to identify the commodity in question—again, outside of traceability, for examination purposes. That's how I'm responding to the question.

• (1720)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

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

[*Translation*]

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

There are two things I want to dig into.

First of all, money is the sinews of war. Because of fines, 99% of people wear their seat belt. Even if you're not the one putting that kind of thing in place, do you think that increasing fines give you more leverage? My husband was a police officer, so that's one of the terms we use. It's easier to deter offenders when there's a way to punish them. The problem is that rule-followers are being punished. They're losing their income.

So, first, can substantially higher fines deter offenders?

Second—you may tell me this is a question for the government—could we look at reinvesting the money that police recover from the black market to help people dealing with drug problems or revenue from traffic fines to maintain roads? That's what we do in Quebec. That money goes back into the system, so it ends up costing the government nothing.

Do you think that makes sense, or do you think it would have no impact on these crimes?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I'll answer the first question.

In my experience, yes, in some situations increasing fines helps correct bad behaviour. We've seen that in the past.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: They're rich people, right?

So, you think it would have an impact.

Mr. Dominic Mallette: Yes, but I don't know if it would have the same impact there. It might, but I can't really give you a guarantee.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: You'd have to try it. That could be a recommendation.

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I really can't comment on the second question.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That's another issue, yes.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just trying to remember if the question was already asked and I missed it. Chief Superintendent Black, did somebody already ask how many people were arrested in 2023 in relation to complaints that may have been called in relating to the elver fishery? Do we have any numbers or a sense of how many arrests have been made?

C/Supt Sue Black: There was a question asked about assertions made around the RCMP response to trespassing complaints. There wasn't a question about the number of arrests.

However, I can say, as I mentioned earlier, that we researched our database. We've had six complaints of trespassing related to the elver fishery since January 2023. We followed up on all the cases and physically attended in four of those six cases. As I was explaining in my last answer, "Trespassing at night" is section 177 of the Criminal Code. It's at night. It's a summary conviction offence. In order for us to enforce it, we have to physically see the person in the act of trespassing. In four of the six cases, we located persons at the site of the trespassing. It also usually has to go with another criminal intent. There was a conversation where the persons were asked to leave, and those who were approached did leave.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Just to clarify, you said that you followed up. What do you mean by "followed up"? Is there a time frame in which a follow-up...?

C/Supt Sue Black: "Follow up" could mean anything from taking the call, getting all the information possible from the person who is making the complaint and determining... For instance, in the case of trespassing—I'm just going to give an example—if the persons are gone, then we're not going to attend, because they're gone. That would be the end of our follow-up. We would do the paperwork, fill out the report, etc. and close the file. If the complainant makes another call, then we would deal with it again, appropriately, depending on what the case is.

It's all about what the information is that we have on hand and how we appropriately approach it, because everything—

• (1725)

The Chair: Okay, your time is up, Ms. Barron.

Thank you for that.

We have three or four minutes left, so I'll go to Mr. Arnold for three minutes, to get in a couple of questions if he can.

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

I want to thank all of those attending today as witnesses for their services through public safety, food safety, border safety and criminal activity. Your service is greatly appreciated.

First of all, Superintendent Black, are officers provided training on how to decide whom to arrest and, more so, whom not to arrest?

C/Supt Sue Black: We get extensive training on the enforcement of Criminal Code offences and other statutes that we have mandate over. I'll try to go fairly quickly, with the committee's indulgence. It starts in depot, in our training academy. We get six months initially, followed by six months of field training, and then followed by in-service training throughout our careers. Depending on the area of our work and expertise, we will take job-related training that supports our ability to enforce various legislation.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I take it that officers are trained in whom to arrest, or when to make an arrest and when not to make an arrest. I'll take a yes-or-no answer: yes, they're trained, or no, they're not.

C/Supt Sue Black: Yes, they are.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Mallette, you stated today that we need a proper regulatory regime in place in order for your department to act properly. I made

a note of that when you stated it. If that regime was in place, how would you differentiate between elvers imported into Canada versus elvers harvested in Canada? That seemed to be the situation last year from the anecdotal information we have—they were being mixed together, and there was no way of knowing what was being exported from Canada.

Mr. Dominic Mallette: The proposed regulations from our partners at DFO would specifically address the co-mingling of legally fished elvers in Canada and those that are imported. It would ensure they remain separate. It would provide us with a great deal of clarity about which one is which and how we can enforce accordingly.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Is this regulatory regime really what is needed to solve this ongoing problem? From everything we're seeing, it's been happening since at least 2017, because you quoted—I believe it was you or CBSA—that there have been no shipments to some countries since 2017, or no permits issued to some countries since 2017.

This is a seven-year-old problem that has yet to be solved, so what are the solutions?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I'm not sure how to answer your question, because it went to different places. You mentioned 2017. I didn't reference 2017 myself. Perhaps we're talking about shipments to China versus Hong Kong. I don't know.

Can you rephrase the question, and I'll attempt to answer it?

Mr. Mel Arnold: What is needed for a safe, legal harvest, shipment, and export of elvers, aside from people abiding by the laws already in place?

Mr. Dominic Mallette: I would suggest that if we had enhanced regulations, they would tremendously assist with the interdiction, yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

I want to thank our witnesses for our first hour's panel on this study today. Thank you for sharing your time and your knowledge with us to help us write a report on this very important matter.

I'll let the people on Zoom sign off. We'll change our witnesses here in the room and move on to the next group.

We'll suspend for a few minutes.

• (1725)

(Pause)

• (1730)

The Chair: Welcome back.

On our second panel today, from the Canadian Committee for a Sustainable Eel Fishery Inc., we have Genna Carey, president; and Stanley King, spokesperson. From the Shelburne Elver co-operative, we have Zachary Townsend, fisherman.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today.

I now invite Genna Carey to make her opening statement for five minutes or less, please.

● (1735)

Ms. Genna Carey (President, Canadian Committee for a Sustainable Eel Fishery Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to inform this committee on the status of the Canadian elver industry and the management—or mismanagement, I should say—that has caused it to spiral into the troubled industry you see today.

I'm here representing the Canadian Committee for a Sustainable Eel Fishery, which represents the majority of the commercial industry. With me today is Stanley King, CCSEF spokesperson, and Zachary Townsend, an elver fisherman with the Shelburne Elver co-operative.

Mr. Chair, as you know, this past week, the minister pre-emptively cancelled the 2024 elver fishery, putting more than 1,100 legal elver fishers out of work. This marks the third shutdown in five years, which only serves to highlight the incompetence of the department and the bad advice they continue to give successive ministers—six in eight years, if we're counting.

I want to be clear that the fishery today is identical to what it was 12 months ago. Nothing has changed. In fact, the problems that the minister cites have existed since 2020 without any meaningful action by DFO to improve the fishery, despite repeated pleas from stakeholders. DFO's solution to these problems has always been the same: Shut down the legal fishery, turn a blind eye to the poaching and hope the problem magically goes away.

The blatant mismanagement of this fishery is obvious to everyone, including the governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and even the minister's own Atlantic caucus colleagues. They've all voiced opposition to cancelling the fishery and requested that the minister meet with stakeholders before making any final decision, something she ultimately refused to do, despite the gravity of her choice.

Perhaps this is because the department, the deputy and the minister's office in general have made a concerted effort to paint the elver industry as greedy eel barons rather than 1,100 hard-working women and men, mostly indigenous, who make up this industry under commercial or communal licences. This disrespectful characterization forms part of a disinformation campaign of DFO talking points that are demonstrably false and designed to cover up mismanagement. The species is not at risk. Traceability projects don't take years to implement, and enforcement isn't impossible. These are just convenient excuses.

Cancelling the elver fishery has cost our rural economies more than \$100 million since 2020. Not opening the fishery in 2024 to await long-overdue regulations that will ultimately be ignored by unlicensed fishers is nothing short of dereliction of duty by the minister. We have no confidence that the government will adequately address the industry's problems before next season, and history supports our skepticism.

I'd like to give Zach the opportunity to speak to the committee so that the members can learn how DFO's mismanagement is directly impacting their constituents.

Mr. Zachary Townsend (Fisherman, Shelburne Elver Co-operative): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am really honoured to testify today as one of almost 1,100 elver harvesters who have been impacted by the decision of the minister to surrender the fishery to unlicensed, illegal harvesters. My sole purpose today is to provide a human face to the frustrations and panic among the 1,100 Maritimers who have suddenly found themselves without employment due to DFO mismanagement of the elver fishery.

For the last 10 years, I have managed the eel holding facility for Shelburne Elver Limited. My grandfather was an elver fisher. My father is an elver fisher, and my brother is an elver fisher. This fishery is my family's livelihood.

As Genna said, there seems to be a perception in Ottawa that the eight enterprise elver licence holders are the only folks who can earn a living in this industry. I am here to tell you that this simply isn't true. My employer, Shelburne Elver, is a co-operative of 17 original shareholders who surrendered their adult eel licences over 25 years ago to remove fishing effort at the adult stage. This ensures that, in the entire area where my employer fishes, there is no overlapping adult eel fishery.

When the minister doesn't cancel the fishery, Shelburne Elver employs up to 50 people. This injects money into rural communities in an economically depressed area.

Committee members must fully understand the tremendous human cost of Minister LeBouthillier's decision.

I lost my partner to cancer a few months ago. It's been hard—unbearable at times—but to now be unemployed and facing an uncertain financial future is simply a challenge I didn't need. I don't share such sad news to evoke your pity, but instead to remind you that each of us 1,100 Maritimers has a story and a unique set of circumstances now made worse by the minister. Then, to read her tweets from Boston this past week, talking excitedly about how she's protecting Canadian fishing jobs, was just too much for me. To tweet that, just hours before 1,100 of us found out that we no longer had jobs, was just so hurtful. Her lack of awareness and empathy cuts deep, and I wanted you all to see that today.

Thank you.

● (1740)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to questions from the members, beginning with Mr. Perkins for six minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

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

Thank you, witnesses. Thank you, in particular, Zachary, for sharing your story and representing 1,100 families that have been thrown out of work for abiding by the law.

How does it feel for you to see people who are breaking the law, who are currently already on the rivers, while you have no way to make a living?

Mr. Zachary Townsend: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To put it frankly, it makes my blood boil. I know that a lot of my colleagues, my brother and all the people I work with are very confused about how this is happening year after year.

That's really all I have to say. It makes my blood boil.

Thank you.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

Ms. Carey, you mentioned that this has been going on for a decade. Liberal fisheries minister number four, in 2020, shut down the elver fishery, as Liberal fisheries minister number six has just done.

Did that reduce the poaching and illegal activity?

Ms. Genna Carey: It did not.

Each time a shutdown has happened, legal fishers have been removed from the rivers. Unlicensed and unregulated fishing has continued for months afterwards.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Have you been proposing solutions, such as traceability? I've read in some of your letters and submissions that you've even offered to pay for it, so that taxpayers don't have to pay for it, and to help the previous witness from CBSA, as well as RCMP and others, understand which are legal and which are not.

What has the department's reaction been over the years on that?

Ms. Genna Carey: Certainly, we've been asking for a traceability system in this industry for well over 10 years. Each year we've been told, "Well, next year we'll get that sorted out." This past year, it became obvious that nothing would be coming in the next year unless we took matters into our own hands, so I personally sourced two companies that were available and ready to implement a traceability system for this season.

As you said, the industry was willing to pay and comply with this, but when we brought it to DFO, we were told that we could do it for ourselves but it really couldn't be used because it goes against procurement procedures. We would, again, just have to continue to wait for something that we've been holding our breath on for years.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Ms. Carey or Mr. King, Maine has that system. How long did it take them to put it in place?

Mr. Stanley King (Spokesperson, Canadian Committee for a Sustainable Eel Fishery Inc.): Thanks for the question.

You won't hear this from DFO. DFO likes to make out that creating a traceability system would be a long, drawn-out process. I've heard five, six or seven years from the minister's department.

Maine did it in less than a year. They requested it in 2012, and by 2013 it was in place. Now, maybe there have been other interactions that have been slightly improved over the years, but this is not

rocket science. It can be implemented rather quickly. There is just an unwillingness to do so.

Mr. Rick Perkins: DFO has had more than a decade to copy a successful system and has refused to do so.

Mr. Stanley King: The only thing I can say about that is that some people like to learn from their own mistakes; they don't like to learn from the mistakes of others. Canada would like to learn from its own mistakes.

You're right that we had a traceability system right in front of us. The same company would do it for us at a pretty reasonable rate.

What's more frustrating is that, since 2020, we've written 35 times to the department, from the minister all the way down to this committee, all the way down to our local regional director and our middle managers. We've written 35 times since 2020 to ask for a traceability system, and obviously they are just unwilling.

• (1745)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. King, last year we really had exponential growth in the crime, and it's transboundary crime. It's money from Asia. It's criminal organizations from the U.S. and across Canada that are now operating freely and lawlessly on our rivers in the Maritimes. I believe you were actually emailing the minister and the director general in Nova Scotia daily with videos and pictures and identification of what was going on, river by river, because the legal licence-holders have motion-activated cameras on the rivers.

All through that, and even when the minister closed the fishery after 18 days, you were still persisting, because I think poaching went on into July. Did you ever get a response from C and P, director general Doug Wenzel, the minister's office or any police organization on that information?

Mr. Stanley King: We were upset that the season closed after 18 days and there was no effort to curb poaching. For the first 31 days after the closure, when nobody should have been on the river, I emailed 30 times over 31 days to report poaching every night on six rivers concurrently. I received no emails back.

I think this email chain had about 20 people on it. It was going to a lot of C and P local, a lot of C and P national and the minister's office. Nobody got back to me. Nobody came to the river to do anything about the poaching.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Your cameras never picked up any DFO, RCMP or any other law enforcement officers trying to pursue it and see what was going on in the rivers, in the day or at night.

Mr. Stanley King: We caught them in the day one time. It was the day of the closure. They went and put signs on the trees. That was the only time we saw them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

We'll go to Mr. Cormier for six minutes or less, please.

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

With regard to all the email communication, would you be able to table that for the committee, please?

Mr. Stanley King: I would be very happy to table it for the committee. I've tabled it for many politicians already. I usually just give the last one, because I always number them and so forth: This is the 30th report in 31 days.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you.

Ms. Carey, you said that the minister got bad advice during the last decision, and maybe some previous ministers did also. You were in contact with DFO officials on a regular basis regarding the situation that was going on last year, but also previous years. Is that right?

Ms. Genna Carey: That's correct.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Do you think there's still time to open a season for commercial licence-holders, a season that will be safe for everyone on those rivers?

Ms. Genna Carey: I do think there's still time to open this season. We know that this problem won't be solved overnight. We know that there must be multiple incremental steps taken to get to the finish line, where we need to be.

As far as safety on the river is concerned, I can tell you that any incidents requiring police assistance or reports of altercations were not between licensed and unlicensed fishers. They were mostly between unlicensed fishers. In my opinion, in terms of my safety on the river, although there are a lot of people there, when I phone the RCMP for assistance and they tell me they don't respond to elver calls, I certainly don't feel safe.

I don't think it will be any worse than previous years, let me say that. To cost that many folks their job, I certainly think it's well worth considering how to get that job done.

Mr. Serge Cormier: You probably listened to the testimony of other witnesses earlier. The one from CBSA talked about the traceability program or tool that you proposed to DFO. What did you think of their answer? Was there anything that made you think that they weren't on the right track or that they don't want to do anything?

• (1750)

Ms. Genna Carey: Well, I certainly don't disagree with CBSA's answer that regulations will make it easier for them to do their job.

I will point out that those regulations are currently not in place, and not having legal fishers on the river doesn't change that. They still have to find a way to do their job in the next few months, because eels will move through their airport without this fishery happening. I think those regulations are important. They do need to happen. There's no question there.

The question is, do you need to put everybody out of work while we wait—and, while we wait, how long will that actually take?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay.

Regarding the question I asked the RCMP, I understand their responsibility also, but are you aware of any arrests made on the rivers lately? Was anybody caught?

Ms. Genna Carey: I can only speak to my personal experience on that. I can tell you that I personally have phoned the RCMP for assistance on the river when I've been threatened. I have been told that they don't respond to elver calls. Nobody has shown up. At that point, the response for me, for safety in my workplace, is that I have to leave.

As a landowner who reports trespassing, I can also assure you that there's no response there either. I find it very hard to believe that there were only six reports for the year. I know landowners on rivers that we fish, and I can speak to their calling more than six times.

Mr. Serge Cormier: This is for Ms. Carey or Mr. King.

You said there was bad advice given by a DFO official. Let's put you in the position of the deputy minister of DFO right now. You are the deputy minister. What advice would you give the minister?

Ms. Genna Carey: I would start by advising her to speak with the industry.

We know this industry better than anyone. I grew up in it. My dad started our company when I was 11. This has been what I've done my whole life. We pioneered this industry and built it from the ground up. Obviously, it's coming to a change. There needs to be a change happening. There is nobody better to give advice to the minister than us.

Mr. Serge Cormier: What kind of advice would you give the minister, Mr. King? Would you say, "We are ready to open the fishery, and here's the reason why"?

Mr. Stanley King: If I were the deputy minister today, I would say, "Minister, you need to meet with industry. They've put forward a concrete plan to improve the safety, traceability and overall conditions of the fishery. You need to do that within the next two weeks, because the fishery can still be saved. We can still save 1,100 jobs."

We have legal opinions. We have concrete ways DFO can use their rules and their set of already existing regulations to save this fishery. They don't need new regulations. They just need to enforce the regulations they already have.

Anything else from the minister's office is misdirection. She's refused to meet with us. The deputy met with us in January before this decision to close. We got half an hour of her time. She showed up 10 minutes late and cut us off at the stroke of the hour. First nations have not been consulted. Industry has not been consulted. She just has to listen.

I would like to be the deputy minister for a day, if I could.

Mr. Serge Cormier: My time is up, I think.

The Chair: You have 28 seconds.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I ran out of questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I could have let Mr. Cormier continue as well, but my questions will be along the same lines as his comments.

Mr. King, I know you came to see us very recently. The situations you exposed and the facts you presented were absolutely shocking.

You're saying that you now have a plan for security, traceability and fishing conditions, that the regulations are in place and that they just need to be enforced.

Why are these regulations not being enforced?

Mr. Stanley King: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

It's not being considered, because nobody will listen to our plan. The minister will not listen to our plan. We forwarded it. We don't think there was a genuine consultation period. We've repeatedly asked to meet with the minister. We think it's easier for the government to wash its hands of this industry for this year and just get by it and hope for next year. That's sort of always their answer. They've had two previous closures. They could have worked on this. They know their two previous closures didn't work. We're at the same crossroads now.

To put the legal fishermen aside is callous. I think it's a cowardly act. They've bent to the criminals and said, "Listen, you can have the fishery this year. We are going to stand on the sideline."

I would like to tell you that our plan also included a lot of activity with the CBSA to designate airports so that only one airport could be an export point. That was a suggestion by the CBSA.

Deputy Minister Gibbons said, when she testified in front of you, that there were a lot of illegal eels mixing with legal eels. Well, that may be the case for a second-party buyer. If you are an exporter and you buy from fishermen, you can buy from legal fishermen and illegal fishermen, and then put them together. We said we would ship our eels directly out of the country so they wouldn't have the opportunity to do that.

We've come up with serious, concrete solutions, and nobody will listen.

Thank you again for your question.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Earlier, the Canada Border Services Agency representatives talked to us about issuing export permits to facilitate traceability.

Do you see that as an improvement?

[*English*]

Mr. Stanley King: I think that solution will help CBSA. We found that last year, CBSA seized zero kilograms of elvers, despite DFO telling us that they were working very closely with CBSA. We saw testimony at this committee that refuted that fact. We contacted the CBSA ourselves—the director general. He was happy to meet with us and he more or less told us that they don't really hear from DFO. He said that they're not working with them.

We had to educate CBSA and they were happy to do that. They set up multiple meetings. They were very happy to get the information. I believe that we'll see increased enforcement and seizure of shipments this year, but it will not be because of the efforts of DFO. It will be because of the efforts of industry to educate CBSA.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: If that's the case, would closing the fishery, even to legal, honest fishers, make any movement of elvers illegal and easier to identify? Is that really the best choice, or could people continue to fish? Would greater security allow you to continue fishing and gradually eliminate oppression, if I can call it that?

[*English*]

Mr. Stanley King: I think you're absolutely right. We are willing to fish and take care of our own security. We're willing to adopt any suggestions from CBSA or DFO to ensure that poached and black market eels are not leaving the country.

I think it's cruel to take 1,100 jobs from 1,100 families in one of the worst economies we've seen in decades. These are rural communities. We need these jobs. The minister has put us in a tough position. I would just like to point out that she refuses to even meet with us. She will not look us in the face.

We all had to talk to our employees—50 employees, 25 employees—and tell them. There were a lot of tears. There was a lot of "What am I going to do? I'll have to sell my house. I'll have to sell my car."

We had to look at them. I want the minister to look at me. That's what I would request from this committee.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: The same thing is happening to shrimpers and mackerel fishers in Quebec, though that's a different story.

The fishery economy is collapsing even though it's a flourishing economy that helps feed the regions and develop regional economies. For the fishing community, losing 1,100 jobs is not trivial.

What can we add to our recommendations? What would you like to see in there? Answer briefly, please.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Stanley King: That's a very good question. What could we tell you that you could bring to the minister?

This has been a 10-year problem. I can tell you that over and over again. The mismanagement of this fishery is nothing short of criminal.

What I would like to tell this minister, the past minister and the minister before that is that they cannot blindly take the advice of the regional bureaucrats and take it as an honest assessment of the situation. They need to listen to the stakeholders. We are subject matter experts. Nobody knows this fishery better than us—certainly not somebody who has never held an elver in their hand. They are quick to shoot down our ideas at the regional level and not bring them up to the minister. That's been one of our complaints for a long time.

I would like to tell you that we have been working very diligently with first nation fishers, the new entrants and the other entrants who would like to get into it. We can all agree that this fishery is mismanaged. We're trying to solve it on our own. Even for that, DFO does not like us communicating. They would like to put a roadblock in between the two parties. Ultimately, they create the rules, they hold the quota and they will not let us save our own fishery.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

I will now go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I'm glad it's come to me. My list of questions is getting longer.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Maybe I'll just pick up where you left off, Mr. King.

If you can, please expand on and share a little bit more about your point around—I don't want to misquote you here—a roadblock that you feel is being placed between indigenous and non-indigenous elver fishers. Can you expand on that a little bit and share what your experience has been?

Mr. Stanley King: Sure. Thank you for the question.

We've been requesting for a long time, and we've always been proponents of, greater indigenous access in the fishery—for many, many years. We realized the easiest way to implement something like this, which may actually help the fishery as a whole, is to be in the same room as first nations leaders, especially the ones who would like to co-operate with DFO. We can really work this out.

The last time I appeared here, Mr. Cormier suggested just that. I don't know why DFO hasn't brought the two groups together. It was an excellent idea, and this is how it should be. DFO, despite our many requests, is unwilling to do that. It likes to work in silos. It doesn't want the left hand to know what the right hand is doing.

We have tried to circumvent DFO by contacting the Assembly of First Nations chiefs ourselves. We've met with them and we've had really great discussions, but ultimately, we can't do anything without DFO's approval. DFO is the governing body, so although we've tried—the first nations are willing to try and the licence-holders are willing to try—DFO is not willing to put us in a room together because it might just reveal too much of what it's been doing, or what it hasn't been doing.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I'm not sure if you'll be able to answer this or not, but what's your sense on this disconnect between indigenous and non-indigenous harvesters? Do you have anything you can share around the implications or impacts of these fishers being separated and not having the opportunity to have these really important discussions?

Mr. Stanley King: DFO has essentially pitted our two camps against each other, when we're basically on the same side. We're all fishermen. We all want to make a living from this resource. We all want to pay tax. We all want to create jobs for our communities. Instead of bringing us together under one umbrella, DFO has separated us, and that causes animosity. That causes strife in the industry and a lack of understanding, because nobody knows what the other side is thinking.

There's a real bone to pick with DFO, and this is part of the mismanagement. I want to tell you that this is getting major news. We recently had a university professor contact our industry group, saying, "We would like to make a case study out of the DFO mismanagement in this fishery." When it gets to that point and when they're making political cartoons about it, something has gone awry and we need serious help, because the help we're getting from DFO is like a lead weight being thrown over a boat.

• (1805)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. King. I have many other questions, but thank you for your insight on that.

Mr. Townsend, first and foremost, I want to offer my condolences for the loss of your partner. Thank you for sharing with us the stress and hardship that the closure of this industry has created in your life. Those stories are very important in our work, so I want to thank you.

I'm wondering if you can share whether you had any consultation at all. Did anybody reach out to you? Were there any opportunities for you to be able to provide input or feedback through this process prior to the closure of the elver fishery?

Mr. Zachary Townsend: Thank you for your question and for your condolences. I really appreciate that.

Really, other than being able to write a letter to the minister, which I'm not even sure she read, I was able to talk to my local MP, who was very sympathetic. I heard from a lot of my co-workers that they've been reaching out to their MPs.

Many MPs in the Liberal caucus are very sympathetic to what is happening. I had my MP reach out by phone because he was so affected by what I read to him, so thank you.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Townsend.

Ms. Carey, you spoke about the traceability system that you felt should be implemented and how you looked for an outside organization that could implement this, but then you were told it could only be used for personal use and it couldn't be expanded beyond that. Please correct me if any of that is incorrect. Based on what you said, that's what I heard.

I'm wondering if you can share a bit more, because we did quite an in-depth study on the traceability of seafood, and I think this is a really important component of the work we're doing today.

Can you share a bit—because I only have a few seconds left—about what this traceability system might look like? What do you think are the key features of this traceability system?

Ms. Genna Carey: It would start where our paper system is leaving off, which is tracking each river, the estimated quota leaving each river, and then final tallies at our facilities once you've done a final weight. However, this would be put into real time, likely digitally through an app with time-stamps and specific to each individual harvester versus a team filling out a logbook. This then allows it to be traced to each person versus each team or each truck. Those numbers are then, obviously, tracked from the riverbank to the facility, and from the facility at each sale, following it, of course, straight out of the country.

Depending on the company I was chatting with, there were a few different avenues of getting there. The one Canadian company I spoke with.... Because time was short, things were going to be pilot projects, so probably not the exact system we're going to use forever, but something to get the job done for this season. It would use, say, batch numbers or a tracing number that would then follow each elver shipment out of the country.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

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

Thank you for being here. Your personal situation with this especially creates.... It's really something that all parliamentarians need to hear.

Ms. Carey, you were speaking about the traceability system. I'm glad to hear that you spoke about it being real-time and digital and so on. I don't want to diminish in any way the work you are doing,

but I'm familiar with the west coast, where it was required to have a printed sheet of paper to record the chinook salmon that one caught. There was a maximum of 10 per year, per fisherman, but all a fisherman needed to do was simply print another piece of paper. Therefore, I'm glad to hear that your system is going digital. They finally accepted a digital program that someone else had to basically develop for the DFO, but it took years for them to get that accepted and approved.

Earlier witnesses were talking about the need for a proper regulatory regime, and there was discussion about the difficulty in differentiating imported elvers that came into Canada from elvers that were actually caught here, that were domestically caught. Would the traceability system allow for the difference between imported and domestically caught elvers?

• (1810)

Ms. Genna Carey: I would just like to highlight to you that our original traceability system was developed by the industry. I sat at the table and developed that logbook in triplicate, so you can't just print a new piece of paper. Therefore, it only makes sense that I got to sit at the table to develop the digital system.

Yes, I do think that the digital system would help with that, because those eels would be traced. There would be five kilograms associated with this tag number, and its movements would be tracked throughout its range in our country and on export.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Mr. King, have you been sending in reports of elver poaching this year to various enforcement agencies?

Mr. Stanley King: Yes, sir. We put out our trail cameras two days ago, and instantly we got pictures of people poaching elvers. There are still more to come out. For the two days we've had them out, both days I've sent emails to a long list of people to report that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Has there been any response from enforcement agencies on that?

Mr. Stanley King: The first day I got a one-word email back that said "Received".

Mr. Mel Arnold: Is that all?

Mr. Stanley King: That's it so far, yes, but that's more than I got last year out of 30.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I'm going to take a little bit of my time here to move a motion that was put on notice last week. I apologize to the witnesses, because what we're hearing from you is very important, but you are commercial fishermen.

The motion reads:

That, given that the carbon tax is increasing the cost of inputs for commercial fish harvesters, and that the government has committed to hiking the carbon tax on April 1st, the committee report to the House its recommendation to spike the hike, and axe the tax.

I move that motion.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Chair, first of all, I have a brief comment on the motion. I respect my colleague and, quite frankly, will state on the record that this has come from the centre, from his leader's office. I don't think it has come from the member, because of the inaccuracy of the motion put forward regarding the inputs to commercial fishers. This is a propaganda piece the Conservative Party has been putting forward for a year now.

Let me repeat that diesel fuel used by commercial fishers is exempt from the carbon price, as is gasoline. How, then, do you justify the comment you made on the inputs?

I'm very close to the commercial fishery. In terms of the input costs, the highest one is wages, which is not subject to tax. Bait is not subject to tax. Fuel is not subject to tax. Interest on a loan is not subject to tax. Where, then, is carbon pricing impacting the inputs to commercial fisheries? The premise of your motion is totally erroneous, because it doesn't exist.

However, I'll tell you one thing that does exist and that I see. I live in Atlantic Canada. I don't know about the west coast. I see the real impact of climate change that is affecting an industry that has been very beneficial to Atlantic Canadians. Like my colleague, I am the son of fishers. We were the poorest people when I grew up in our community. That's not the case today, because of a very well-managed fishery.

However, something that should concern every Atlantic Canadian is the impact of climate change on these lucrative fisheries. This is something on which the Conservative Party chooses to stick its head in the sand and ignore, using motions like this that are totally erroneous. When I look at all the principal inputs to the commercial fishery, carbon pricing does not affect them.

Let's take your motion to a more global extent, on shipping, because, again, it's moving product. Shipping rates and trucking rates today are equal to two years ago.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, I'm speaking to the motion that was put forward.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I haven't even gotten to say what my point of order is.

• (1815)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's fair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: If MP Morrissey is going to speak for the next 10 or 15 minutes, I'm just wondering if we want to dismiss the witnesses. I would prefer we get back to questioning the witnesses.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, with all due respect to the point of order—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm just asking.

The Chair: Hold on.

On that point of order, there was a motion moved on the floor by Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: There's no regard for the time left for the witnesses, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Exactly.

Also, Mr. Morrissey asked to respond to that motion, and that's exactly what he's doing.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Why did your colleague move a motion that was frivolous at this point in time?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's only frivolous to those who don't care about the cost of fish and the business.

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey, you have the floor.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I would expect the Liberals to think that it's frivolous, because they are defensive and losing on the carbon tax.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, we could have a long debate, as in the House, but let's deal with the facts as they relate to the commercial fishery. I may have some questions on carbon pricing, but nobody has disputed the fact that carbon-emitting fuels are leading to global climate change and warming. We, on the east coast, are on the front lines of that.

If somebody has a pragmatic, realistic plan for slowing global climate change, which would affect every fishery here, including elvers, then let's look at that particular one. However, to table a motion at the last moment talking about the impact carbon pricing is having on the inputs to commercial fisheries.... Let's be honest about it. The fuel used in commercial fisheries, which is diesel and gasoline, is exempt—for the fourth time—and always was exempt. It's the same as it is for farmers.

However, Conservatives will continue to use that phrase in the House of Commons and before committees, which is erroneous.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, go ahead on your point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I would like to let you know that I just got a text from a fisherman who said he's not exempt from the carbon tax, so maybe you want to talk to fishermen.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Well, then somebody has poor accounting. There's no carbon tax on diesel fuel and gasoline used in commercial fisheries, which is the same as in farming. That is a fact.

Based on that, I would call for us to adjourn the debate on this motion at this time.

The Chair: There is a motion to adjourn the debate.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: The motion is adopted.

We'll now vote on the motion from Mr. Arnold.

(Motion negated: nays 7; yeas 4)

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

• (1820)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you to the witnesses for coming.

I've had the pleasure of talking to Mr. King, Ms. Carey, and Mr. Townsend. My condolences to you on your loss. I lost my mom in January. Those significant losses have such an impact, and then you're put in a situation like the one you're facing with respect to elvers. I just want to acknowledge that, and thank you for coming to put a face to the elver situation we find ourselves in.

I want to stick to traceability for a second. We know that's an important piece in the tool box with respect to ensuring that we have a vibrant fishery. We talked with the last witnesses—and I don't know if you had a chance to hear their testimony—about the regulatory framework, and that it needed to be broad and deep.

I'm wondering about the traceability aspect of it. Mr. King, I think you mentioned in previous testimony that it's not a silver bullet, but it's important. I want to give you this opportunity, because what we need is not just to hear from industry, but to follow industry's lead on things.

This is for all three of you. When we look at traceability being key, can you highlight some of the other things that...? The minister's in front of you right now, and you have 30 minutes. What are the items that could help, hypothetically, this year and going forward? Can you draw upon the experiences of the Maine fishermen? My understanding of the Maine example is that they put a lot of work and effort into it, but they didn't necessarily get it right the first year. They refined it and learned from best practices, and things of that nature.

I'm wondering if you could take those two items and maybe splice them together. Could you also take this opportunity for some lasting statements that you want every parliamentarian to hear? It doesn't really matter if you're Conservative, New Democrat, Bloc, or Liberal. I put all of that stuff away. Those could be the talking points from the respective cloakrooms of the parties. It's about people. It's about the resource, and it's about an industry that we hold dear.

I want to give that to you.

Mr. Stanley King: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

What I would like to say to the minister and yourself, Mr. Kelloway, again, is that you can't take what the region tells you as fact. I've listened to many of your TV and radio interviews. To tell you that it was partly disinformation fed—through no fault of your own—by DFO would be a fact.

The species is not at risk. We have a lot of data. We have 30 years of data. The best dataset in North America says that, and we can support that. DFO's own scientists say that. Conservation is out of the question. The traceability system can be implemented in less than one year. Maine did it. Was it perfect the first year? It probably wasn't, but it would definitely be good enough to save 1,100 jobs. Enforcement isn't impossible. They say, "Oh, it's 200 or 300 rivers." No, it's about 100 rivers and it's three months long. You

could do one a night and get them all done. You would see illegal fishers quickly drop off. There's no question about that.

To point at Deputy Minister Gibbons' previous testimony, shutting the season down will provide no clarity. It didn't provide clarity during the last shutdown. It didn't provide the clarity in 2020. All it does is make life easier for DFO and harder for us.

To comment on the Maine system, we can do traceability. Ms. Carey said she could have done it in three months if DFO had allowed us to do it, but they won't. Maine also has a huge fine system. If you get caught poaching elvers once, it's \$25,000. If you get caught twice, it's mandatory jail time. In Canada, last year, there were 1,400 reports of poaching to DFO. They'll admit that people reported to them 1,400 times. They made 60 arrests. Those arrests won't even make it to 60 charges. Those charges, if they are successfully convicted, are \$500, and you can rack up five or 10 of them. It's the cost of doing business.

The last thing I would like to say is that DFO will not protect our long-term scientific study. We put our blood, sweat, tears and money into it. We all lost our jobs, and the first thing we said this year, after hearing this, was that we need the science to go forward. We're willing to pay the money. We're still willing to do the work, even unemployed. DFO will not help protect that study. We asked them over 30 times last year to protect the East River study from poaching so we could get the data. They wouldn't do it, but they're the first ones to point back at us and say, "Oh, the science study didn't run last year so, you know, we'd better be cautious, because we don't have the data to support that the industry is sustainable." They're playing both sides of the fence.

I apologize for taking up so much time, but that's what I would like to point out.

• (1825)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I don't know how much time I have left.

The Chair: You have none left.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

Before I go to Madame Desbiens, I'd like to welcome Mr. Généreux, who is here to fill in for Mr. Perkins. I will say that I hope he's on my shooting team again at Stittsville Shooting Ranges. I hope he brings his son along. We won first place last year because of those two gentlemen.

Madame Desbiens, you have two and a half minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

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

I'm very troubled by what you're saying about how little interest there is in saving this fishery. It's like they don't care. It's like a hot potato everyone is passing on. That's deplorable.

I wonder if we should invite you to testify in the presence of DFO representatives. I don't know if that can happen. I'm trying to think of a solution.

The department isn't listening to you or doesn't seem to be listening to you, so I'm looking for a way to get your message across. The committee can send that message. I think everyone heard it loud and clear, and Mr. Kelloway said it in a non-partisan way.

You speak for 1,100 fishers. How many of you have no income right now? I just want to get a sense. Employment insurance is one thing, but are all those people unemployed?

[*English*]

Ms. Genna Carey: Yes, I believe that, for those folks who are employed in this industry, as Zach can attest to, employment insurance has run out at this point. There's nothing to fall back on. They are looking to get new jobs. Some of my employees have scrambled and have found some—certainly not replacement employment, but something to allow them to feed their families. Others have not, and they're not sure what they're going to do.

As we said, it's such a tough economic time. The loss of any job is felt deeply in small communities.

Do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. Zachary Townsend: I would just add that, after last year, there were so many people hurting because the fishery was shut down after two weeks. I want to add to the point that many people were barely able to get through to this year because of that shut-down. They've shut this fishery down three times in five years, which, in my opinion, would be considered a catastrophe anywhere, a failure of government, would it not?

I want to communicate the rage that so many of my colleagues feel. They wonder why it is a prerequisite that they lose their jobs for DFO to do its job. Why do we need to lose our jobs in order for DFO to enforce the law?

Thank you. I'm sorry for getting emotional.

The Chair: That's no problem.

Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

Unfortunately, Ms. Barron, that chews up our three hours of committee business today. We're at the 6:30 point, and our witnesses have been here and have been generous with their time.

• (1830)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Mr. Chair, can I ask for unanimous consent to be able to take my two and a half minutes of questions? Is that an option?

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Clifford Small: I'm going to ask her a question before I give my consent.

Ms. Barron, is that an "I love oil and gas" badge that's over there on your bulletin board over your right shoulder?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

A voice: I think that's fake news, Cliff.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: It says, "I love my library".

The Chair: For that comment, he'll have to owe you another couple of minutes at the next meeting.

Go ahead, Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In case it wasn't heard, my button says, "I love my library", which is a very important differentiation to make there.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Thank you to the committee for allowing me to quickly ask my questions.

I want to ask Mr. King first if he can please clarify something.

You talked about shipping directly out of the country, and I believe that was related to the mixing of illegal and legal elvers. Can you clarify that? The point wasn't finished.

Mr. Stanley King: Sure, thank you. I'll go as quickly as I can.

Some seafood companies will buy our product in Canada, and then they will ship it to, say, Toronto and hold it there for a few days before ultimately shipping it to an Asian destination. In that intermediate time, they can mix our product—and I think they have—with black market elvers. If the industry as a whole agreed not to sell to anybody domestically and instead sell directly to overseas markets—if we ship them ourselves and put them on the plane—we would know that there was no black market mixing going on. It's a simple solution.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

The last question I'm going to ask before I get cut off is for Ms. Carey.

To clarify, when you made calls about violence as a result of the elver harvesting and everything that we've been talking about, you were told that the RCMP does not respond to elver calls. I believe those are the exact words you used. Has there been any follow-up information provided, any resources or any additional information that you might want to add to that point?

Ms. Genna Carey: Sure. I can say that, in chats with enforcement and Tim Kerr himself, I made known some issues in reporting. There's a 1-800 number you can call, which is another incident that I didn't even tell you about. You start at your local detachment, and nobody answers, so you phone the 1-800 number, and it rings and rings, and nobody answers. Then you phone back, and you're redirected to an RCMP switchboard, where they didn't know they were going to be receiving this call in the first place, and then they redirect you because they don't take fisheries or elver calls, and you're left with nothing.

I can say that, on more than one, two, three, even four occasions that I have phoned RCMP and DFO with no response to concerns, I have made it known in writing that the systems provided to us, those 1-800 numbers or the detachment numbers, are not working.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. You've gone a little bit over, but not bad.

I want to say a special thank you to Ms. Carey, Mr. King and Mr. Townsend for appearing before the committee today on this important study and for sharing their knowledge and experience with the committee as we look forward to writing a report to present in the House of Commons.

With that, I'll say thank you to our interpreters, our staff and the people who made this meeting possible.

I wish everybody a good evening.

The meeting is adjourned.

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