House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

ENVI • NUMBER 053 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, October 6, 2005

Chair

Mr. Alan Tonks

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Thursday, October 6, 2005

● (1535)

[*English*]

Mr. Joshua Laughren (Director, Marine Conservation, World Wildlife Fund Canada): Thank you, and my apologies for being a few minutes later than I expected. I'm new enough to the Ottawa process that I still have to learn to leave enough time for signing in, so I apologize for that.

Thank you for the opportunity to present today. I'm Josh Laughren, the director of marine conservation for the World Wildlife Fund Canada. I also serve as the marine protected area lead for the WWF global network. I'm joined by my colleague Lorne Johnson, who is the director of our newly established Ottawa office.

Of course we're here to discuss the conclusions and recommendations of chapter 1 of the commissioner's report, which addresses the progress to date on meeting our oceans commitments.

In particular, and in keeping with the commissioner's recommendations, we will focus on Canada's track record on MPAs, marine protected areas, and on integrated management. We will discuss what we see as the top three recurrent themes emerging from the commissioner's report, which are leadership, accountability, and funding. Finally, we will propose some immediate actions on marine protected areas that we believe can help deliver on these commitments, address urgent conservation needs, and also begin to rebuild Canada's leadership position on oceans.

While we will focus on marine protected areas, we recognize, and strongly advocate, that there is a lot more to the oceans agenda than simply marine protected areas. In particular, I think of Bill C-15, the bill to reduce bilge dumping, which this committee was so instrumental in and which we also played a part in, as a good example of some of the other issues that are up there. But in this case, we think marine protect areas can help solve urgent conservation problems and are a strategic way to make the oceans agenda of this government matter to all Canadians.

Furthermore, there are a number of marine protected areas, long identified by different government departments as priorities, that provide the opportunity for some quick successes to help build momentum. We also know from some history and experience that these same sites, which we feel are close to establishment, can also languish, not just for months but also for years—and in some cases, even decades, it's not too strong to say—unless there is some push to get them done. This delay can lead to continued degradation of those particular sites, loss of opportunity, and also further loss of Canada's credibility on the oceans agenda.

I think that at least some of you are familiar with who we are as the WWF. I'll say a few words on it.

We were established in 1961 and are the largest independent conservation organization in the world. In Canada we were established in 1967 by Senator Alan Macnaughton. Our board of directors is drawn up from the business community in large part, as well as from the academic community and from community leaders. We have people on our board from across Canada, people like Dr. Arthur May, a former Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and president of Memorial University; Donald Sobey, a global business leader based in Atlantic Canada; Dr. Daniel Pauley, a world renowned expert on fisheries, and of course, the former Prime Minister, the Honourable John Turner,

We are regionally based and led. We have offices in Toronto, of course, but also in the Northwest Territories, Vancouver, Prince Rupert, Montreal, Halifax, and now Ottawa. We serve more than 60,000 members from across Canada.

On marine protected areas, we're not new. It's an issue we've been working on at WWF Canada for over 20 years, and I have been working on it for over eight years now.

We are pragmatic, science based, and fiercely non-partisan. We set ambitious but realistic goals, we hope, and we try to do a few things well. We are cooperative in our approach and have learned the value of forming unlikely alliances with industry and other partners. For example, Mr. Johnson, my colleague, served for over a year on secondment to Tembec, in the forest industry, to help them work out how to meet some of their sustainability criteria.

We work primarily with departmental officials in the regions and at all levels in Ottawa to advance conservation. We're appearing before the committee today because of a genuine sense, a deeply felt sense, of urgency and frustration over the inability of the government to make progress quickly enough on the oceans and marine conservation agenda, particularly marine protected areas. We recognize what we see as really an essential role of this committee in highlighting the urgency of the oceans agenda to Canadians and to this government and to hold the government accountable for commitments that we have made.

● (1540)

It's worth noting why we're here to speak on oceans. We're a global conservation organization. There are eight chapters in the commissioner's report, each of them highlighting important issues and deficiencies that need action. So why are we focusing on oceans? There are four main reasons.

First, oceans are probably the most neglected environmental and conservation issue in Canada, and probably in the world, even. It's out of sight, out of mind. Unless you happen to live on the coast and make your business from it, the closest many of us get to it is sitting on the beach. Few of us ever get underneath the surface of the ocean, for example.

A healthy ocean and an unhealthy ocean, one that's fished out or completely polluted, look exactly the same from the surface. You can't tell the health of the ocean sitting on the surface, unlike with a forest, where, walking in, you get a sense or a feeling of what the state is like. That leads us to being unaware of the changes that are happening.

Second, it's probably the most mismanaged natural resource we have in Canada, and in the world as well. Every scientific study is pointing to this. The FAO—the UN body, the Food and Agricultural Organization—estimates that 70% of all commercial fisheries are either over-exploited or fished to the maximum—and “fished to the maximum” is often synonymous with “just about to collapse”, as we've learned in Canada a few times. We've lost over 90% of the large fish, the predators, in the Atlantic, for example. With the tuna, the swordfish, the cod, even Atlantic halibut, we're down to 10% of what was there even 50 or 60 years ago.

The third reason is that oceans, we often hear, cover 70% of the earth's surface. Most of us learn that in school. But if you consider that the oceans go down to an average depth of about four kilometres and that there are species and fauna and flora living throughout those four kilometres, then when you actually take it by volume, oceans make up 99.9% of the entire liveable space on the planet. So drop the decimal point; everything is marine. So as a conservation organization, I would say, being a marine person, what else would we be working on?

Last, Canada has lost its global leadership on oceans. The commissioner's report compares oceans governance progress in Canada and Australia, and we would continue that analogy with one example. With the University of British Columbia's fishery centre and with the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, which is a body of the United Nations Environment Programme, we developed the first global mapping of all of the marine protected areas in the world. Australia has protected about 8% of its oceans, out to the exclusive economic zone, as marine protected areas. By comparison, in Canada we are at about 0.05%—one-half of 1% of our oceans are protected. Even since the Oceans Act was passed in 1996, we have gone from 0.43% to 0.51%. During that same period of time Australia went from 4.5% to 7.5%. However good our legislation is and our policy is, there's no question we are no longer leaders in the world on protecting our oceans—not close.

So why are marine protected areas part of the answer? Aldo Leopold once said back in the 1960s that the clever tinkerer keeps all the parts. I like that quote. When it comes to natural resource management, including fisheries and our forests, for example, Canada has recognized and made the commitments on paper that we are just tinkering, we're experimenting. We don't know what's going to become of it. Setting up a national system of marine and terrestrial protected areas that is representative, that covers off all the different portions, is the first part of the job in keeping all the parts, just in case something goes wrong, something like overfishing our fish stocks in different parts of the country. So on land or in water, protecting representative networks of areas, of habitat, is a fundamental tenet of sustainability and of conservation.

In terms of progress to date, the commissioner's report mentioned that Canada has developed world-leading legislation and policy instruments, including the Oceans Act, the Oceans strategy and the oceans action plan. We agree that the Oceans Act is a good piece of legislation, and the oceans action plan is ambitious and really has the right components within it, but despite these words, progress on the water really has been slow, both on marine protected areas and on the land use planning, the integrated management that is supposed to be the way in which these systems are done. As the commissioner's report noted, we've had only two marine protected areas over the last eight years.

● (1545)

I will note that over the period between 1990 and 2000, Canada and the provinces put in place over 1,000 terrestrial and forest protected areas. Over roughly the same period of time, if you go back to 1990, we've had, I think, three marine protected areas, if you include Saguenay. The pace of change is truly glacial compared to land.

We have no integrated management plan—essentially land use planning—for the water completed. We've been involved directly and quite deeply for over seven years in the most advanced integrated management planning process we have for Nova Scotia. It is in draft right now. There are some good parts to it. We will still be at that table on part of it. But it's worth noting that there are no candidate protected areas identified so far out of that process, and it's not clear when or how, or I would say even if, that will come to bear.

For all the words we have and the good strong legislation and policy we have, clearly it has not yet been enough to translate to action on the water.

We want to point to three out of many good examples of how we think we can make good progress in a short period of time, especially on the marine protected areas agenda. We could have others, but these three are especially important. These are all areas in which WWF Canada has had a long period of engagement—in one case it has been over 20 years—right at the community level. They have a strong level of public support. They're all ecologically outstanding and are really tremendous examples of the kind of diversity and beauty that we have out there on our oceans. They are also already identified departmental priorities, either in Parks Canada, in the Canadian Wildlife Service, or in Fisheries and Oceans.

The first one is on the west coast of Canada in Bowie Seamount. If you're not familiar with a seamount, it's essentially an underwater mountain, and Bowie Seamount, which is about 160 kilometres off the coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands, Haida Gwaii, goes from about three kilometres deep up to 25 metres from the surface. It's one of the very few seamounts in the world—it's the only one I can think of, actually—that you can dive on. I haven't done that, but there was a diving expedition that went out there about three or four years ago, and the divers who were on it came back and referred to it as the land that time forgot. The fish they saw, the size of the fish, and the number of fish there were things we simply don't have in our coastal waters anymore.

As highlighted in the commissioner's report, Bowie was identified as a pilot marine protected area in 1998, and seven years later, while we understand there's been movement within the department, externally we don't seem to be any closer to getting the site protected than we were then. We raise this often in discussions with DFO officials in Ottawa and in the region, and the line on it is that it is a priority for the department, things are progressing well, it is this close to establishment. At the same time, there is an unregulated experimental sablefish fishery that continues to this date, as the commissioner's report notes as well.

Western Lake Superior is the other site we'd like to point out. This is under Parks Canada. A national marine conservation area is proposed. It's located in the northwestern part of Superior. It starts just east of Thunder Bay. It's really a spectacular wilderness area—I'm sure many of you have been across the north of Superior. It's been a candidate area for about 10 years, and if designated, this would become the largest freshwater reserve in the world. It also adjoins Isle Royale Park on the American side of the border, which provides a great example of cross-border protection on the Great Lakes, which I would say we sorely need at this time.

In 2001, after three years of extensive public consultation, the Parks Canada advisory committee recommended that Parks Canada proceed with the marine conservation area. It's worth noting that the provincial government is a strong supporter of proceeding with this. Concerns raised by local first nations communities related to co-management of the conservation area have kept the government from proceeding with what they call the agreement in principle, which is the next step—to sign with the Government of Ontario—and as such, the status as far as we can tell remains in limbo. We meet often with the department on this site, and the line from Parks Canada officials is that the site is a priority, it's progressing well, and it is close to being finalized.

The last one is Igaliqtuuq, which is a national wildlife area under the Canadian Wildlife Service. This is a place known as Isabella Bay on the eastern shores of Baffin Island. This is an amazing spot. During the summer months every single year, about 80 to 90 bowhead whales congregate, and have for generations and generations, and 80 or 90 of these represent about one-third of the entire population of this endangered bowhead whale. It's the most critical spot for the species.

● (1550)

Since the 1980s, the Inuit of Clyde River and the WWF have been pushing and calling for this site to be protected. We've funded all sorts of research on the bowheads, including capacity-building in the local communities so they themselves could do the research and contribute to the scientific body of knowledge.

A number of factors over the years have slowed down the designation of this site, including the development of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, the birth of Nunavut in 1999, and the negotiations around what they call the Inuit impact and benefits agreement that need to be done. We hear that there's a Treasury Board submission in the works that will help to solve the impact and benefits agreement, but in the meantime, when we talk to government officials, we're told that this is a departmental priority, it's progressing well, and it is close to designation.

Perhaps I will digress for a moment here. I started at WWF more than eight years ago now. One of my first jobs was to get on top of this site, on Igaliqtuuq, and find out how it was progressing. I came back from Ottawa and reported to Monte Hummel, our president and my boss at the time. I said, “Monte, good news. I met with them, things are going great, there's no problem at all, nothing is needed on our part, and we should be done within six months”.

Lorne started a few months ago with WWF. His first job was to find out what's new on Igaliqtuuq, to see where we are. I'm not making this up. He was on speaker phone with me, Monte, and a couple of others who had worked on this. Lorne said, “Good news, folks. Glad to report that Igaliqtuuq is just about there. It's progressing well, nothing is needed on our part, it should be done within six months”. And he was truly taken aback at the guffaws that went up in the room. I may have been on it for eight years, but Monte has been on it for about 23 now, I think.

These are not just three sites and three examples; they're more than that. These are three globally outstanding sites that, put together, cover off three of our four coasts—if you think of the Great Lakes as our fourth coast—and really, if done, would make up a globally outstanding contribution that would help us to get back on top of our leadership position. Also, we don't believe the window of opportunity remains open forever on these sites. Things can happen that can foreclose on those options, and we are truly worried about losing the opportunity.

What are the barriers to progress on these sites? Why is it that we can't proceed with what, to us...? With Igaliqtuuq, you have a critical site for an endangered species with strong local support and a clear scientific rationale. That's the Holy Grail of conservation, when there's no conflict with resource users. If we can't proceed on a site like that, it really makes you wonder what is wrong with the machinery for the designation of protected areas.

I wouldn't pretend to be able to address all of that. The commissioner did it better than we will. But the three issues we saw as continually emerging from that report were leadership, funding, and accountability.

With leadership, it's worth noting that this is not only a DFO file, this is also an Environment Canada file—with the Canadian Wildlife Service—and a Parks Canada file, but with DFO in a strong position of leadership. The leadership position needs to come on two fronts: across departments, with DFO in the lead, and within Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

While cross-departmental working groups and broad cooperation between many departments are fundamentally necessary if we're going to succeed with our oceans management, in and of themselves they don't provide the leadership that's needed to get through a complex issue like this. Without that leadership, it can be a recipe for paralysis.

DFO clearly has the mandate and the leadership on oceans, provided by the Oceans Act, but without this becoming a government-wide priority, it's difficult for us to see how we will actually succeed. Despite the commitments we have made and the supportive words in the Speech from the Throne, there's little evidence that this is actually the case, that oceans issues have become a government-wide priority, with the single exception, I would say, of the pressure brought to bear recently on the overfishing issues in the Grand Banks, including foreign overfishing.

Within the department, there still appears to be significant resistance, and I would say even opposition, to progress on marine protected areas and integrated management. From our view as outsiders of a sort, our best guess is that this is due to two main reasons.

First, there is a perceived, and I would say often real, trade-off in fisheries. Because of the lack of funding, any action on the oceans agenda, any commitment to it, has to come at the expense of existing programs within Fisheries and Oceans Canada. That can lead to mistrust and resentment in those other program areas if their areas are being cut to fund new programs.

● (1555)

Second, the fishing industry, which is still considered a client—really, *the* client—of DFO, remains deeply suspicious of marine protected areas, due to potential loss of economic opportunity, and integrated management as a process, due to the potential loss of access and influence that's traditionally been very strong within the fishing industry.

Funding: we can't avoid that. No new funding was provided for implementation of the Oceans Act. Without that, DFO reallocated over $100 million—that's the number in the commissioner's report—out of an already stretched departmental budget to fund these new activities. In February 2005, DFO received its first influx of funding for the oceans action plan to the tune of $14.2 million per year for two years. In comparison, that same budget granted $59 million to the national aquatic animal health program designed to protect our seafood exports. Not to cast aspersions on protecting our seafood exports, but that gives you an indication of the level of investment. And given that, it is really hard, as an outsider, to believe that's an indication of this being a government-wide priority for delivering on oceans.

On accountability, except at, for example, the broad level of international commitments, it's our estimation that the oceans agenda does lack the business-like targets and timelines we need to really make progress. For example, in terms of the eastern Scotian Shelf integrated management plan, seven years down the road there are no clear timelines or, I would say, clear outcomes. There are some objectives but not clear outcomes, even to this point. There are no standards associated with marine protected areas, no prohibited activities, no conservation bars set, such as aligning to IUCN categories. We have no definitions or targets for what a system or a network of MPAs might entail—for instance, representation, as I was laying out earlier. Because of this, in each and every candid MPA discussion, and we've been involved in some of these, there is really contentious discussion that revisits the same questions over and over again. What is an MPA? Why are we doing them? Do we need to do them? Do they work? It really is a barrier to progress and slows things down.

We don't pretend to have all the answers on this. It is a complex and difficult issue. We don't claim expertise on exactly how the resources of government should be deployed to make this happen. However, as informed outsiders and occasional partners and quasi insiders on this, we would offer three broad recommendations for discussion in support of the commissioner's findings, really.

One is really to make a priority the establishment of some of those long-standing candidate sites as the first tangible actions under the oceans action plan that can make this real to Canadians, make them something they can really buy into, make Canadian and international skeptics take note, and regain some of the leadership we have.

Two is inescapable, and it's providing multi-year funding for phase two and phase three. It's hard on a one-year basis to ramp up and deploy the resources needed on a file like this. Some security would be really important.

Last is the leadership direction and accountability that, in our estimation, really only comes by setting targets, timelines, and standards for protected areas and integrated management processes. It's not enough for that to be set within one department. That has to be endorsed and adopted across all of the 17 or 18 relevant departments to the oceans agenda, which then can become a key component of how we measure progress on this.

As long as we see the DFO agenda as being the purview of only, for example, the fisheries committee, or really being just a fisheries issue, we don't see how that will ever lead to government-wide delivery on the oceans agenda, on the sustainability agenda that's so integral now to the DFO and the government agenda on it.

● (1600)

We're feeling our way through, but we're asking the committee's support for making this a government priority and for speaking to the government and to Canadians, through the House of Commons, to help put these great words and the investment we've made in the legislation and the policy into action on the water. While we're giving recommendations on this, we actually are very open to hearing advice on how we can better help and be a partner and positive contributor to making that happen.

Thank you very much. I'd be very happy to take some questions or have some discussions on this.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC)): Thank you, Mr. Laughren, for your very thoughtful review, assessment, and comments on the commissioner's report, and also for the recommendations of the WWF to the committee for a way ahead.

We're going to start questioning with Mr. Mills, for 10 minutes.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure you'll keep me on the line here.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): I'm going to be vicious, you can be sure.

Mr. Bob Mills: Vicious, yes.

Anyway, I'd like to welcome our guest. I have a comment first, and then a couple of questions.

My first comment would be that I came here in 1993, and similar to what you were describing, I heard about the Sydney tar ponds and how they'd be cleaned up next year. I've heard that announcement every year that I've been here, and in fact this year the announcement was, “We're going to do a two-year study, and then we're going to clean them up”. They're extending it instead of actually doing something.

So I can understand your frustration, and I think I can understand the Commissioner of the Environment's frustration when she says—and she sums up in her last five reports—that there's a great deal of talk, but not very much action. She puts it in a more detailed way, I guess, by talking about the confetti—“before the confetti hits the ground”, to quote her.

So you say we have a good Oceans Act, but we don't have any follow-up. I can understand your frustration, and let me tell you we're just as frustrated when we look at some of these files.

I have a couple of questions.

In terms of the ecological reserves, and I don't know a lot about this, it seems to me that the big problem, which you did make reference to, is the suspicion around them—the suspicion of fishermen, the suspicion of the oil and gas industry on the west coast—that in fact the whole purpose of setting these things up is to shut down any development, any fishing, whatever. I wonder how we deal with that. I don't see them as that. I see our being able to work around them, that they won't be that commercially damaging.

But that suspicion is there, and all of us hear it. You obviously hear it. How do we deal with that problem?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: Coming from an organization that is not against development, I couldn't agree with you more. I do think we can work with it, and other countries have shown that we can. It's difficult. I think it's fair to say that as the WWF, we recognize our own job in building those ties with the fishing industry as we've done in other industries like forestry. We're starting to, but it's difficult.

I might defer to Mr. Johnson. Lorne worked, and still does some work, on the forestry file with industry and, as I said, was seconded to industry to help them with it. He may have some more lucid comments than I do on how you actually get to that level of engagement.

Mr. Lorne Johnson (Director, Ottawa Bureau, World Wildlife Fund Canada): That was a good question, Mr. Mills.

Just to throw it back to you, I think your question is how we get beyond the mistrust that is there, not just with industry but also with local communities. I can only point to examples that I've seen on land where we have gotten beyond those impasses. To me there are two critical ingredients that have happened in almost every instance I can think of in Canada where we've made jumps or leaps in terms of establishing protected areas on land.

One is that we have a government that's said we're going to do it. It's not, “Should we do this?” or “Maybe we'll do this”, but “No, we're going to do this”.

The second thing the government says is, “We're not going to do it without you; we're going to do it with you at the table, and a few other folks”, and there is often a long process of relationship-building, etc. But without the clear guidance from government up front—not asking if we should or saying maybe or if, but “Yes, we will, because they're needed and we've committed to them internationally”—then we haven't seen it move forward. We've seen many government processes, particularly provincial processes, on land fail because the government has set up a stakeholder consultation process around protected areas without actually saying, “This is something that you shall do. Come back to us with it done”. Often those groups are given terms of reference, and they come back saying they can't reach consensus, but they weren't given a clear mandate in the first place.

I think those two things would be helpful.

● (1605)

Mr. Bob Mills: Regarding the Queen Charlotte Islands area, the mountains and the sea, where is that in relation to where the reserves of oil and gas are supposedly located? They're not proven reserves, but suggested reserves. What is the relationship? Are they close?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: There's going to be a great discussion in B.C. about allocation of resources and when and if to access the oil and gas. That's ongoing. Happily, the Bowie Seamount area is well outside the Queen Charlotte Basin. It's well outside of any of the mapping areas, the potential oil and gas areas, that I've seen.

So on this one at least, happily, that's one of the reasons we think it can get some movement; it's outside of that contentious issue.

Mr. Bob Mills: In that area again, what about the native population there? Are they aware of this, and are they supportive of it? Is there anything there that could be holding it up?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: The Haida are the closest first nation in the area, and they do claim some historical rights. They say they've sent boats out there. They have a name in the Haida language for the site, which I couldn't begin to pronounce.

The Haida are a pretty savvy, sophisticated group, and they have said that they're all for protecting Bowie Seamount; they're not at all against an MPA on the area. But that also means on their terms. So I do know that DFO has been in negotiations with the Haida. I don't understand that's been—to my knowledge—the conflict, but clearly DFO would proceed without consulting the Haida at their peril.

Mr. Bob Mills: For these three ecological reserves that have been set out and have obviously had a good case put for them, what would be the cost of government commitment over, say, a five-year period?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: I'm not sure, because you have to separate the cost of the process to establish them. The cost of management on these would be fairly minimal. The enforcement would likely come from existing boats, overflights that are there. There would be some increase in costs there.

Certainly in Igaliqtuuq, for example...well, I'll give two. Bowie is tough to say, because there would likely be the need for some enforcement. But most of that would be done by existing sources.

In Lake Superior, the money has already been allocated, as I understand it, within Parks Canada. The money is sitting, essentially waiting for the process to be complete. It's somewhere in the nature of $20 million or so that's well identified in the budget.

In Igaliqtuuq, money is the issue. It's the negotiations around solving the Inuit impact and benefits agreement. We understand it's down to about $1 million spread out over seven or eight years. I may not have my number exactly right, but that's the nature of the money we're talking about there.

In our best estimation and from what we're being told by the department, except in that small sliver in the negotiations on the IIBA, money is not the holdup in the sites

Mr. Bob Mills: Is there bureaucratic resistance within those departments? Do you detect that? Obviously there isn't the political will, but are there bureaucratic obstructions?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: It's really hard to judge that as an outsider. There's no question they are identified within the departments as priorities. I can't but conclude that there is resistance in different parts of the departments, especially on Bowie—internal conflicts on how to proceed, when to proceed, what we are trying to achieve here. That, to me, really is an inescapable conclusion.

Mr. Bob Mills: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): Thank you, Mr. Mills.

Monsieur Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I will be brief. I wish to ask two questions. First of all, what strikes me, upon reading Chapter 1 of the Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, is the absence of transparency with regard to the data and information the public should have access to in the same way as parliamentarians.

Secondly, we do see to what extent it is difficult—this is obvious throughout—to adopt an integrated approach for the various marine protected areas. One can read on page 33 of the Report that:

> The Department has not fulfilled its promise to report on the state of the oceans and has not updated the information posted on its Website.

I would first of all like to know where we are at with regard to the indicators that were developed in the past and that inform us as to the state of our oceans. And then, in order to have a good idea of the status of our oceans, what would be important to produce and disseminate to the public? I will then have another question to ask.

● (1610)

Mr. Joshua Laughren: My apologies, Mr. Bigras. I think you are aware that my French is not...

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I know.

Mr. Joshua Laughren: ...very good.

[*English*]

I think the questions are where we are on publishing indicators that would help us get a handle on the state of our oceans, and what the most important bits to produce for the public would be to help us get a handle on this. I hope I've characterized them rightly.

Good question. I guess I'd start with a caveat of a sort. I wouldn't want to hold up some of the obvious actions we can take in the short term until we have complete information, because as we know, we never do really have complete information, especially on oceans. However, what's most important to produce and distribute to the public?

There is a shift, I think, in the type of information that we have to make available. Much of the DFO machinery is built around gathering information to be able to produce stock assessments and allocation decisions, and for good reasons. Every year we have to make these decisions to allow boats to go out there, but that means we often lose the forest for the trees, I would say.

The best work on the indicators of oceans that is being done is not being done within government, in part because of the lack of funding that's curtailing the ability to get to it. For example, it was a study by two Dalhousie professors, Boris Worm and Ransom Myers, that came up with the analysis that showed we had lost 90% of all our large fish. Indeed, after about fifteen years of a fishery opening up, you lose something like 80% of the biomass. It was not a government analysis that showed that. It was Dr. Daniel Pauley, out at the University of British Columbia—a really excellent, top-notch fishery centre—who started mapping out the state of trophic decline, or the fact that we were fishing further and further down the food web, as they say.

Once we fish out the top predators that are really valuable, we move further down the food chain until we're fishing things like snow crab and shrimp where we used to be fishing cod and halibut. One of the most worrisome things about that is that if we fish out the snow crab and the shrimp, there's nowhere else to go. Dr. Pauley said he used to jokingly refer to the fact that people would be fishing for jellyfish, until he got straightened up by reports around the world of thriving jellyfish fisheries and a market emerging in Japan for jellyfish.

But those are the types of indicators that give you a sense of the true state—and that's just fisheries—that never emerges from the atomized stock information that comes out of DFO due to their incredibly tight focus on what they call turning the crank, or getting out the information to be able to make the stock assessments in the amount of time.... That kind of analysis would be tremendously helpful, I think, in making the case for conservation, making the case to the public about what matters. To me, that small number of pithy indicators is far more important than a huge, broad tome on the state of our oceans that measures everything in every way and is outdated by the time it hits the shelf.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: My second question relates to the integrated approach. I am very familiar with this concept because in Quebec we would like to see a more integrated management of the St. Lawrence. God knows it is difficult to put in place an integrated approach for the St. Lawrence, to gather the people around the table, be they from the world of finance, the fisheries or tourism, to have them work along with those whose concern is for the preservation of the ecosystems, to have them understand that when you protect the ecosystems, you are enhancing economic growth. When you encourage economic growth, you create jobs. That is what an integrated approach is all about.

The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development tells us that the work done by an interdepartmental committee has its limit and that often this has not delivered results. It was a surprise to me to see that a national oceans strategy has indeed been developed. However, the Commissioner writes on page 9 that work is underway for five large ocean management areas, but no plans are in place.

My experience tells me that if we are unable to gather around the same table the economic, social and environmental stakeholders of a basin or a zone, then we will not be successful. We can simply not ask departments to speak to each other if the stakeholders themselves are not participants alongside.

We are told that the shipping industry has concerns with marine protected areas. I am therefore wondering what kind of forum would in your view be the most appropriate in enabling us to move from a strategy to action plans, which, according to the Commissioner, are still being worked on and are not yet ready. What forum or discussion table should be created in order for us to move from simple words to concrete action with regard to marine protected areas?

● (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Lorne Johnson: Monsieur Bigras, I would offer two suggestions, and to me they're two separate issues. One is what the government can do internally in terms of its committee structure, and then

[*Translation*]

what can be done with the stakeholders. To my mind, these are two separate issues.

[*English*]

As the commissioner has highlighted, horizontal initiatives or cross-departmental initiatives are very challenging. We're not experts on the machinery of government or how to employ the machinery of government. We have no rabbit in the hat or no great suggestion for how to tackle it differently, other than to say that horizontal initiatives or cross-departmental initiatives that lack firm timetables, targets, and deliverables are going to be very hard to implement. So our recommendation would be for the oceans action plan to actually flesh those out, to have some firm targets, timelines, and deliverables.

That could also come back to your question earlier, Monsieur Bigras, in which you asked what types of reporting we need for the public. Josh said we need some reporting now on the health of oceans, and I think we need reporting now on progress that Canada is making on some targets or deliverables that we can communicate to the public.

Right now, the oceans action plan doesn't mean anything to the average person on the street. But there's some great stuff there that could mean something, and I think we need to have some firm targets and timelines that we, the government, can report on annually in terms of the progress we're making.

On the other part of your question, which is what the forum for stakeholders is, we should give Fisheries and Oceans a bit of breathing room on this one, in that integrated management is a new concept in the oceans. They just set, through the oceans action plan that they released, a goal of five integrated management plans. In the one they had already started, the eastern Scotian Shelf—where I think they actually did a pretty good job at bringing the diversity of stakeholders to the table—I think they'll have learned some lessons that they can hopefully apply elsewhere. The thing we might add to what they did there was having up front, for the multi-stakeholder committee, some firm targets and timelines that they had to meet.

● (1620)

Mr. Joshua Laughren: If I can simply add to that, there's a tendency for all of us to think it's easier elsewhere. It's a “grass is greener on the other side” kind of argument. We hear, “Australia did it, and it must have been easy there. I mean, heck, they have coral reefs and they have more tourism. Surely it's more difficult here”. On the east coast, we say, “Well, surely it's tougher here on the east coast than it is on the west coast”. On the west coast, I hear the same thing.

I spent some time over in Australia with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority when they were going through the process of really upping the amount of protection in the Great Barrier Reef, which was essentially done through an integrated management program. It was tough. It took several years. It was rancorous, it was conflicted. They had first nations concerns. They had fights between tourism, sport fishing, and commercial fishing. It was as tough as you'll see anywhere. It was not easy.

I'm a big believer in the integrated management approach, which is essentially what that was, which is why we've invested so much in integrated management for DFO. One of the keys to integrated management—and Lorne hit on it—is help to define and give direction to what it is that can be accomplished and to letting the stakeholders work out the best way how. But without some direction on what it is you're there to accomplish, it just descends into bickering, really. As long as some players at the table are better served by the status quo, then slowing down the process and not reaching any consensus is the end in itself. That's when you get no traction and no results out of a process.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): Thank you.

Ms. Ratansi.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you for being here. It's nice to see human beings who are so concerned about the environment, about the ocean. I commend you for it.

My question is a follow-up for what you say: Australia has succeeded where we have failed.

I come from an accounting background, so I ask if there are best practices. Can these best practices be transferred here? If so, where have they succeeded where we have failed? I have a multi-pronged approach to it. If you could, give me the answer to not the accountability-leadership-funding issue, but how they address their issues.

Mr. Joshua Laughren: -Unfortunately, it leads me back to some of those issues.

One, there was very strong leadership, in the way that Lorne described it, which was, we are doing this, this is important—this is important to Australians, this is important to our natural heritage, our culture, our sovereignty, our security, our economy—we are doing this. So how we achieve results is yet to be seen, but that was a first part of it.

Second, they gave the resources. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, for example, in this case—and they've done some work on protecting areas outside of it—had resources to work with to engage stakeholders, to bring together whatever scientific studies they needed. They didn't have endless resources, but they had enough to get on with the job on it.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: While you're at it, do you know how much money they invested in it?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: No, but I can forward that to the committee. I can find that for you, but I don't remember the figure now.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: The reason I ask you is that you talked about funding and you talked about the fact that you are pragmatic, and in that pragmatism you have to look at the holistic approach that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is probably taking. So it does provide funding, but then it does a cost-benefit analysis.

So I'm not laying the blame on anybody. I'm just trying to understand in my head what makes them successful versus our not being successful, despite the fact that we have put.... For our seafood exports, is that where our cost-benefit is? Is that where our economy is? You have to take a sustainable approach. You just can't say environment versus this; you have to take a sustainable approach.

So perhaps you could proceed with that line of thinking as well, please.

Mr. Joshua Laughren: First of all, I couldn't agree with you more. We are always chafing at the characterization of the debate on environment as environment versus jobs. For heaven's sake, on oceans, if we haven't learned that lack of conservation of the resource is the worst thing you can do for jobs, where else have we learned it? In no other resource area has it been proven so catastrophically that if you don't take care of the resource, the jobs are gone. Newfoundland has made that case stronger than any words that I could ever speak on it. So you're absolutely right, there is a cost-benefit analysis on it.

In terms of being realistic, I would say part of our pragmatism on it is looking at the mandate of Fisheries and the precision that's needed under the current way we allocate fisheries. When we look at what they're forced to do, what they really must do on the allocation of stocks, and then what they're committed to doing and what they're required to do on the conservation agenda, it's hard for a realist to look at the bottom line and accept that both of those can be done.

As a realist, I say that's not going to happen. It's unfair to ask that of the department, in a way, to deliver—I want to be careful here that I'm not catching myself on both sides of an argument—on the full slate of the oceans agenda. There is no question that it's going to require more funding, no question at all. Is that the excuse for a lack of progress on some obvious sites, some obvious areas to get done?

Can we deliver on the eastern Scotian Shelf integrated management plan with current resources? Yes, I think so. Can we deliver on the sites that I've talked about, and more? Yes, I really, truly believe so. Can we deliver on the oceans agenda and the full sustainability debate with current resources? I don't think so. I don't think we can sustain the fisheries that we have now, the jobs that are associated with those fisheries, with current resources that DFO is given.

● (1625)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Fair enough.

Mr. Joshua Laughren: We are costing ourselves by short-changing that part. I think in the commissioner's report it said the oceans provided some $23 billion to the economy. I would bet—I haven't done this analysis—if you look at our inputs into management compared to the return of that, an input into the conservation compared to the return, it's pretty paltry.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I will share my time with Bryon.

Bryon.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): Please go ahead.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Otherwise I will ask another question.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I will be very brief.

First of all, I'd like to know if you could make your presentation available to my office and the committee. I'm familiar with the issue of the park at Lake Superior; I think you've described it fairly accurately. I will undertake to get back to you and the committee on that as to its status, and hopefully to get it moving ahead.

I don't believe the other ones fall under the jurisdiction of Environment Canada directly, or at least under the areas I'm responsible for. But I can certainly do an undertaking regarding Lake Superior. My understanding is we are close, but again there are some first nation issues that have to be dealt with.

There's no question, Mr. Chairman, that in the 2005 budget we invested $28 million over two years to implement phase one of the ocean action plan. There's no question we want to make our commitment to the 1997 Oceans Act. Much of this is DFO. Yes, I would agree with you that DFO needs to be the lead and obviously work collaboratively with other departments.

I wanted to say—and unfortunately I have a commitment with the minister—that I will get back to this committee with the answer on Lake Superior. Mr. Laughren, if you would give me your card before I leave, we'll see where we can go on that. Obviously we'd appreciate any assistance in moving forward on what would be the largest park of its kind in North America and the world.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): We do have copies of the brief. Unfortunately, we weren't able to get them translated in time for the committee today. I can assure you the clerk will provide you with a copy. So, Mr. Laughren, you don't need to do that. We'll get it to you as quickly as we can. Since we called the witnesses on short notice, we weren't able to get that done prior to the meeting.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you. And congratulations on your chairmanship. Whatever we're paying you, I'm sure it's worth it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): Yes. Now, was there anything else you'd like to say?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: No, that's it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): Well, you come back soon.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Absolutely.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): Now, do you want to go ahead? We have about three minutes left, Mr. Scarpaleggia, if you'd like to take a quick one.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Yes, thank you very much.

You said something that really caught my ear. You said there was disagreement within Fisheries and Oceans about how to proceed on some issues. Normally, you see disagreement between departments that come to an issue from opposite perspectives—for example, Industry and Heritage Canada on copyright. It's rare that you see it within a department.

I understand you want to be diplomatic in your response, but is there something awry at Fisheries and Oceans? Is there an internal power struggle? You don't have to answer that directly, but I don't believe that you're not experts in the machinery of government. You've been able to follow these issues for a long time and do some comparative analysis and so forth across the country. I don't know if you have a comment to make on that.

● (1630)

Mr. Joshua Laughren: Sure, and I'll try not to be overly diplomatic. As a matter of fact, I am sympathetic on this one.

DFO is an extremely large organization, and I'm continuously astounded at how large and how diverse it is: whether it's the offices working on Arctic issues versus the Prince Rupert office; or the east coast versus Ottawa; running the coast guard versus the fisheries management side, versus the science side. It's a tremendously complex department that has a long history of managing fisheries, I would say. That's the raison d'être of the department.

Since 1997 is a fairly short period of time ago—we're talking about less than 10 years to change the culture of the organization—I don't think it's unusual to find, in that big and that wide an organization, large pockets that would argue that with scarce resources we ought to be doing more science. Heck, DFO isn't funding any work that I'm aware of. I think they just pulled the last funding from cod research in Newfoundland. So you can see people in the science branch saying, why the heck are we messing around with integrated management when we don't have this research on cod going on? That's an understandable conflict.

Again, that's not an excuse; I'm quite sympathetic to that within DFO. But at the same time, the paradigm we've used to manage fisheries over the last hundred years clearly has not worked—not worked for fishermen, let alone the oceans. So that switch, that turning around of a very large ship, is absolutely imperative, but I'm not shocked that it's been slow or choppy. I think part of the base is a real changing of the culture that's happening slowly.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): Thank you.

I think we're ready to move to Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to the both of you for being here as well.

You mentioned the two central roles to be played. One is how government operates, between departments and within departments, and the role it must take with respect to our oceans. The second is the role of the community, the stakeholders who are actually involved—and the convergence of the two, if there is one.

In reading over the auditor's report, perhaps it's because the drum has been beaten so often here in Ottawa and through the press, but it's a bit surprising that this section of the auditor's report, when it came to oceans, didn't get more attention and more press, because it's pretty condemning. It's showing that, time and time again, when the government makes the plan the follow-through on the plan has been difficult and it hasn't happened.

I would characterize the infighting within DFO as severe. I come from a riding that very much depends on commercial and sport fishing, and there is no federal face within our communities that is more reviled than the DFO. I say that unequivocally and without any hesitation, and it's not difficult to perceive. It's been a colossal disaster.

The question I'd like to ask you is, with respect to the capacity of local communities and stakeholder groups to manage their own fishery, do you find a willingness within the federal government to sincerely allow for these integrated management plans to have the force by which to make the decisions in terms of allocation, conservation—all those key issues? And have those stakeholder groups' management plans been successful in other regions that we need to look to?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: That's a smart and pithy question, which no doubt reflects your experience in the region you come from, and it's very difficult to answer. I'd like to refer that one back to DFO, really, if I could.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Would you make a comment?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: Yes, I think it's fair to say that DFO is schizophrenic when it comes to the sharing of power. They don't have a history of partnering well. I think that's part of the power struggle of central control over managing fisheries to giving over control. That's one area where I really stray beyond my area of expertise on how to set up locally managed fisheries, other than that there are examples of where it's happened.

There is always a role for a management agency, whether it's for science or whether it's for fairness issues. I think of the Queen Charlotte Islands, for example, Haida Gwaii, where the issue is about who gets the fish, whether it's the fishermen coming from Vancouver Island or the local folks—how much does adjacency come into play? If you left that simply to a stakeholder table without direction, I think you'd have bloodshed in a hurry.

But you're asking the really difficult question about how we best manage the allocation of fisheries. I'm searching for ways to add wisdom to my answer on this and not coming up with much.

● (1635)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let's take on the first nations aspect for a moment. In British Columbia, and I know on the east coast as well, this has been an extremely controversial issue as we wade through constitutional uncertainty, historical precedents, and all of the rest.

When it comes to the management of oceans, what do you see as the ideal placement or the key role that first nations communities can play? I'll preface this by suggesting that under the law currently, as it's been decided over the last number of years in Delgamuukw and Sparrow and other key landmark decisions, first nations are beginning to occupy an increasingly powerful place at the decision-making table when they're dealing with the federal government. Yet there have also been groups like the Cheam Band in British Columbia, who have represented an aggressive style that's caused a lot of problems, both for themselves and their neighbours and for other first nations.

So I'm looking to see if there's a role, from your perspective, that first nations may be able to play at the table in terms of enhancing the things you talked about in your presentation.

Mr. Joshua Laughren: Here I'd love to defer to Michele Patterson, our director in B.C. out of our Prince Rupert office, who is far more experienced in this than I am.

But clearly, looking at the first nations fisheries issue, you can come at it from two angles. The first is the legal and constitutional angle. There are folks who complain that first nations have been given some constitutional priority to the fishery, but they have. It's the law of the land and there's a certain amount of acceptance of that. The second angle is as local communities and stewards—like any fisherman—with information and ecological traditional knowledge to bring to bear on it. So it depends which side of that you're pushing on.

Also, it's clearly a mistake—you're well aware of all this, but some people do make this mistake—to think of first nations as a kind of single bloc that thinks of fisheries or management in the same way. There's tremendous diversity, which you would be far more aware of, not just within bands but within regions, that doesn't lend itself well to single characterization.

Other than respecting the constitutional right, there's also the role in first nations, like in any local fisheries community, to provide information to buttress the science, question the science, add to the science, and refute the science in some cases. There's tremendous opportunity that we somehow have to tap into about placing the users of the resource in the stewardship position. Instead of having a race to the last fish, which we get into so often, there's the economic prisoner's dilemma, where you'd really like to save the fish, but if you don't take it somebody else is going to, so you might as well. There are examples where the community itself, whether it's a first nations community or another large or small community, takes responsibility for managing that resource.

I have a feeling I'm only picking around the edges of your question, and I'm probably not going to do any better than that on this.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, how are we doing for time?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): You have three minutes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let me take this to just another place for a moment.

Reading through the auditor's report again and some other reports we've seen, if members of the committee ever want an entertaining day, sitting in on the fisheries and oceans committee is absolutely fascinating and terrifying, with respect to environmental concerns, when you hear witnesses come forward and talk about our fisheries and the way our fisheries are approached, if they are the Department of Fisheries, and...[*Inaudible—Editor*]

One of the tools available to the department and the federal government is the environmental assessment process. It's got some really key priorities in it and things that must not be given over. One of them is around the precautionary principle, and one of them is around sustainability of whatever resource you're talking about, whether it's a mining road or an ocean resource.

I'm wondering if you can comment for a moment on the way that process has been used with respect to oceans and the increase, particularly on the west coast—let's look to the west coast for a minute—of commercial open-net fish farms. I talk to department officials and say there seems to be a lot of science out there shedding some light on the fact that we should be cautious, at the very least, about open-net farms. I'm hearing from the auditor's report about inefficiencies and inaccuracies within the department—their unwillingness to listen to local advisers. They come back and say that they do an environmental assessment on the farms before they go in, and that's enough. The assessments are, from most perspectives, shaky at best.

I wonder if you can comment, for the committee members' sake. It's worth noting that there's been a 650% increase in fish farms since 1988, so this is significant.

● (1640)

Mr. Joshua Laughren: Certainly one of the shortcomings of the environmental assessment process has always been on the ability to look at cumulative effects. It looks case by case, and far too often it doesn't look at the foreclosing of other options and the cumulative effects that happen.

I think the aquaculture issue is a classic case of that. Each individual case is looked at in isolation rather than the aggregation of sites. On the east coast, I think Grand Manan still has the highest concentration of aquaculture sites in the world. I bet the Broughton Archipelago is not far behind and may even have caught up.

There are a few things that really got under my skin on the aquaculture issue. Yet again, there were lessons about the spread of infectious diseases, ISA, the spread of sea lice, and escapes that happened in Norway and Scotland. They had been down this road ahead of us. There was a feeling that it wouldn't happen here and that we'd learned our lesson, but of course it happened.

I don't think placing heavy concentrations of aquaculture cages right at the mouth of one of the most productive wild salmon streams in the world, with very little baseline work to set it up, is a precautionary way to proceed. I think that DFO gets caught through being a proponent and a regulator. You see that occurring several times, but in the aquaculture case that did happen.

When the pink salmon crashed in the Broughton Archipelago, there were charges that it was due to sea lice transmission.The initial response from the ministry and the department was almost indistinguishable, in my perspective, from the industry's response, which was that it couldn't be happening because there was no evidence, rather than immediately looking into whether it could be happening and what information was there. I think it's an example of where both DFO and the environmental assessment process failed to put into place the fundamentals of the precautionary approach.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, presenters, for coming today.

My first question deals with what we've been doing over the last 10 years in this country compared to other countries. From my involvement in the past, I know that many groups such as yours see more of an international perspective and you sometimes see more of a general approach rather than a specific approach. Could you enlighten us today on what Canada has been doing over the last 10 years compared to other developed countries, such as Australia, which you referenced, and the U.K., in setting aside reserves, protecting them, and utilizing the money to do so?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: I'll start with the good news. I am an eternal optimist, but you kind of have to be in this job.

I'm not being dismissive when I say that Canada has the best legislation and some of the best policy in the world. It's a tremendous asset. I really mean it when I say that I talk to my colleagues in other countries around the world and even in the U.S. and they tell me that they wish they had something like the Oceans Act. They're fighting to get protected areas in place under fisheries acts and the Magnuson-Stevens Act, with really ill-equipped tools to do so.

That's the good news. The toolbox is there. We have great legislation that's actually quite sophisticated, well thought out, flexible, and participatory. We really have leading-edge tools that, in my mind, put us in a position to be able to deliver on the oceans agenda. That's no small thing. It puts us in a very good position, a position that other countries such as the U.K., Australia, Russia, and the U.S. are not in.

However, there's certainly no question that in Europe they are already proceeding on protecting areas, even in the high seas, through the OSPAR Commission, which is a regional oceans commission.

In Australia, it's not only the Great Barrier Reef where they have a very good system in process. They just set up the largest protected area, the largest no-take area in the world, off the Heard and McDonald Islands, which is one of their protectorates well out in the ocean, to deal with an illegal fishing problem that is similar to what we're facing on the Grand Banks.

Obviously, the Galapagos Islands should have been a clear-cut case. It's an incredible place of biological value. They had riots there, literally burning down the fisheries management buildings, and staff was threatened and moved off the islands, because they put in place a reserve to protect it from overfishing.

We are great in terms of legislation and policy, and that is really a strong, good thing, but there is no question that we are lacking when it comes to progress on the water.

● (1645)

Mr. Brian Jean: So we have lots of tools but no carpenters for the implementation.

I spent some time in Australia, and it seemed, quite frankly, from my perspective at that time, 10 years ago, that they were far in advance of what we have as far as protecting the areas is concerned, though maybe not in the legislation. I've seen very little by way of action here. Of course, I'm in a landlocked constituency, but from my travels to the east and west coasts I find that very little is being done with respect to oil dumping, bilge dumping on the high seas, and just setting aside areas.

So in essence what you're saying is that nothing has been done over the last 10 years, if I'm listening to you right. Although we have the tools, they're not being used.

Mr. Joshua Laughren: Yes.

Again, being an optimist, I'm loath to say nothing has been done. I think Bill C-15 was a tremendous success. We worked long and hard to see the gully protected off the coast of Nova Scotia, which DFO did, and the management plan is quite good, quite strong. That's a real success, so I wouldn't say nothing has been done; that's stronger.

But it's not at the pace that is necessary, and I don't say that because WWF says so. I hope there's agreement that it's just evident we're not meeting the demands that are out there, and it's costing us, both in terms of our natural heritage and in terms of jobs and the economy as well.

Mr. Brian Jean: Do you think that's as a result of a lack of will, of international pressure, or more of a cost basis? I know they set aside money; the government sets aside money, but very seldom does it seem to be implemented into action. We must have a lot of money out there, because none seems to be spent.

Mr. Joshua Laughren: It's partly cultural. Canada looks south, not out to our waters very much. That's a strike against us on it. It's partly leadership. No government has made oceans a real priority for the government itself. We just leave it to the fisheries minister to deliver or not, as it were, and nobody really cares.

It's worth noting that when Lorne and I did the rounds—Lorne more than I—in Ottawa around why we haven't made progress on this issue, some pretty well-placed people within government said, does anyone care if this gets done or doesn't get done? That put us back on our heels, but it was a good point. If we don't make progress on this, who at the end of the day is looking at that and saying, holy smokes, we have to do this?

So the commissioner's report comes out, and good, there's a pulse around it, but that'll pass. And is that what anyone within this government or within this Parliament, in any party, is really going to see as one of the key things to get done? It does tend to get dropped behind other priorities that are there. That's another issue.

And then as I move down in terms of scale, if you will, the third issue is a department that, in part due to those, is really far more directed towards allocating fisheries than towards the oceans management side of the agenda.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): Thank you, Mr. Jean.

I think Mr. Watson had the same question, coincidentally, so we won't be hearing from the honourable member from Essex this afternoon, and we'll go to Mr. McGuinty.

● (1650)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, gentlemen. I'm sorry I was late. I'm sorry I missed your presentation.

I wanted to pick up on a couple of themes. Question one, do you know what the Government of Canada is doing in its entirety in terms of research on oceans throughout, for example, all the different granting agencies outside of DFO? What's SSHRC doing, what's NSERC doing, and what's the climate change research fund doing? Has anyone put that all in one place? Have you seen that listed anywhere, for example?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: I never have. The best place that might have that is something called the Ocean Management Research Network, which was set up under SSHRC, I think, as a matter of fact. It provides funding for the community of ocean scientists, which just had its meeting in Ottawa, actually, a few weeks ago.

I've never seen that put together. That's an excellent question.

Mr. David McGuinty: I've just looked through the commissioner's report, and I don't see that either. In fact, I don't even see it called for as a recommendation. I'm just wondering if anyone has actually taken the time to find out what we're doing on climate change research in oceans and what we're doing on different fronts in science.

I just wanted to ask that practical question.

The second question for you is this. I understand we have what I call five integrated management demonstration projects right now in the country. This audit has looked at three of the five, and it's found some serious challenges. Can you point to a jurisdiction where there is demonstrable evidence of a better integrated management planning system and give me some idea of why—and I don't know, whether it's Russia, Australia, or another ocean-facing nation state—their integrated management planning processes appear to be better than ours?

Mr. Lorne Johnson: I come from a terrestrial side, as you know, and I think there are examples internationally and domestically on the terrestrial side where we have made leaps and bounds in terms of integrated management involving the resource sectors—forestry, mining, hunting, trapping, recreation—and environmental interests.

There was a question earlier that we answered, and essentially our response was in terms of what the necessary ingredients were for moving ahead on an inclusive, integrated management approach. Off the top of our head, the top-of-mind answers were, one, there were a clear direction and a directive from the government to actually do it, with some actually predefined targets. One of the targets is, maybe, don't sell the farm in terms of the economy, and complete a representative protected area network and let them hash it out. It's a bit more complicated than that, but if you actually give desired outcomes to a group of stakeholders and first nations at a table, they can do some amazing things, particularly with some good government guidance and some facilitation.

The second one was really getting the right folks at the table. As you probably know better than many of us, it's not always easy when you get many folks at the table; you can have some interesting outcomes. But again, if you have clear process goals and desired outcomes that are set before people come, then I think you maximize your chances of success.

Josh, are there some marine IM examples you can draw on that you think are worthwhile highlighting?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: Yes, and I'll go back to Australia as an example. I hate to always go back there—there are others—but it's an easy one. One was that they set what were called operating principles, establishing the rules of the game, as Lorne was laying out, a kind of "what we're here to do". They had socio-economic criteria: we will do least cost; we will look for ways to minimize costs on it. Some of their criteria don't quite fit, but they said they would cover off the full diversity of habitats both north and south and also in terms of depth in the water. Whenever possible, they'd protect the whole reef; they wouldn't cut off a piece of a reef. They had a bunch of targets they set that allowed the stakeholders to really play around with how to get there.

The one anecdotal example I love is where they went to the fishing community in the northern part of Queensland and said, look, tell us the places that are important to you for fishing so we can plot them on the map. Of course, the fisherman said, well, bloody hell, if we tell them where we fish, we're going to give them the most secret information you can get. So the fishermen said, well, we fish over here and over here. They pointed out all the areas that weren't really the accurate spots. Then when the first map came out from the marine park authority, the fisherman freaked out and said all the best areas for fishing had been closed off. The authority said, well, you told us you didn't fish there. Well, geez yes, but we didn't know you were actually going to close them off.

It was at that point the fisheries groups actually sat down and started working with them at the table. They started realizing, holy smoke, it's either become part of the process or get terrible results, because only we can help them get there. So that's an example.

The other areas in the world that have done it with what I would call some similar operating principles—rules of the game that then allow the stakeholders to engage around it—were the Galapagos and the Channel Islands in the U.S., which are a marine sanctuary but a large area that really didn't have much overall conservation bent until they went through an integrated management process. The Florida keys would be the other one.

● (1655)

Mr. Lorne Johnson: I just want to add one thing as a specific example, if I could, very quickly.

I'm not sure this is the best example we have in the country, but I certainly think that the Lands for Life process in Ontario, which many of us still bear wounds from and arrows in our back over, was a clear example of a government showing leadership by saying, well, we're going to do this. The government actually said this to all of us; they said this to industry and to environmental groups. Unfortunately, it wasn't great in terms of first nations involvement, but they said to at least industry and first nations, we're going to go ahead and do this with or without you. Then we all rapidly ran to the table and sorted it out.

I think next time around we'd probably do it in a more inclusive way if we could, but it was an example of government saying "This will be done".

Mr. Joshua Laughren: I just point last to British Columbia, which has a lot of experience on terrestrial land use planning—incredibly contentious, highly charged, with a lot of money at stake in some industries that were being pretty hard hit. As an example, it's worth learning a lot of the lessons, even though it's been on land.

Mr. David McGuinty: I raise it because—and I'm not here to apologize for anybody—I want to be very sober, and the committee to be very sober, about how incredibly difficult it is to do integrated coastal management.

This report, as progressive as it is in pointing out the deficiencies of the department in really getting to integrated management, has a recommendation on page 11 that Canada's oceans action plan should be recognized and managed as a government horizontal initiative. That's language that you could pave the road from Vancouver to Ottawa with, paper that talks about horizontal initiatives but tells us not how to do it. Then on page 22 it goes on and makes another recommendation, saying that Fisheries and Oceans Canada should finalize and implement its operational guidance for integrated management planning, but it gives us no clue as to how to do it. It would be very helpful for the committee at some point to get some indication of which jurisdictions in the world of the theory of integrated coastal zone management actually have governed systems and the adequate devolution of power to those zones and to those players to actually do a better job.

I'd like to get some evidence, Mr. Chairman, if there ever was any, comparatively from our researcher. I keep hearing about Australia, but there's nothing in this report about Australia's apparent leap forward in having done this. I think this is the nut we have to crack as a country. It seems to be the thread that weaves its way through this report. I'm sorry I didn't get any serious comparative examples here, besides Australia, to look to.

I think this is where the report rightly points us going forward. If we're going to do oceans better, we're going to have to find better processes to include those who are oceans actors.

I'd like to leave everybody with that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): I think it's a very good point, and one that Mr. Laughren touched on earlier in the meeting, that this is the direction in which we have to go. It's not going to come when you have diverse departments with their own agendas and their own jobs to do. It will really take a committee like this, or outside organizations like the World Wildlife Foundation, I think, to point the direction and provide that integration, or a plan for that kind of integration, if there are....

Mr. Laughren, are you aware of plans that exist in other countries, as Mr. McGuinty would hope for?

● (1700)

Mr. Joshua Laughren: It's an absolutely pertinent question, and I totally agree with the comment. This is just hard stuff to do, this integrated management. Frankly, globally, fisheries management and oceans management is struggling. Canada isn't alone in having a hard time finding its way on this.

There have been some comparative studies done. I will dig them up and I will forward them to your office. I can't remember how useful any of them may be, but I will go through them and see if I can find some good, accurate documents that give details on that and forward them to the committee, if that would be helpful.

Mr. David McGuinty: In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, it is entirely possible that Canada is leading the pack, in fact, in terms of its attempts to operationalize the notion of integrated coastal zone management. Is that not possible?

Mr. Joshua Laughren: If I get your words right, I think it's fair to say that Canada is leading in its attempts. I think we've tried to be fair in terms of legislation policy and structures, but in terms of the results on some of the measurable indicators, whether you go to proxies like marine protected areas or you go to health of fish stocks, then it becomes more and more difficult to make the case that Canada is a leader.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson): Thank you, Mr. McGuinty.

I thank you again, Mr. Laughren and Mr. Johnson, for your appearance today and also for the brief. It will be circulated to the committee in both official languages shortly. We appreciate your time today and, again, for coming on short notice. It was very thoughtful, for the time you had to put into it, and I appreciate it very much. Thank you for coming.

With that, we are adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique « Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire » à l'adresse suivante :
http://www.parl.gc.ca
