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Chair

Mr. Tom Wappel

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• (0940)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are conducting a study on the Atlantic salmon. We have the following witnesses with us today: from the LaHave River Salmon Association, we have Lowell Demond, director and past president; from the Nova Scotia Salmon Association, we have Carl Purcell, vice-president; and from the Margaree River Salmon Association, we have John F. Hart, past president, and Leonard Forsyth, director and technical resource adviser.

Gentlemen, before we start I have to brief my committee on one or two things, so just take a breath, and then we'll get going.

Committee members, I appeared before the Liaison Committee. I regret to inform you that the Liaison Committee has determined that there will be no travel anywhere by any committee authorized until the fall. There are a variety of reasons for this. It means that we have a hole in the schedule for the second week in May, so I'm proposing that next Tuesday and Thursday we are going to be dealing with invasive species, and then we break for a week. Then we return and deal with the estimates, and then we have two days, a Tuesday and a Thursday, for which we have not scheduled anything.

I would like to deal with what happened at the Liaison Committee, the reasons for refusing our travel request, and suggestions for a new date for the trip we had proposed on that Tuesday when we otherwise would have been travelling. It is critical that we deal with it at that time so I can put something in to the Liaison Committee that week, because we're meeting on May 19 to determine what's going to happen with travel requests for the fall.

Based on the discussions we had at the Liaison Committee, I don't believe there is any need for urgency beyond the date I've suggested. But I would suggest that we not leave it any later. I'm suggesting that you think about a possible travel date of the last week in September, and I'm going to get all of the facts and figures based on that travel date in the various places we were discussing. I would suggest that we not discuss those things until it's absolutely certain, because to do so is to build up expectations only to have them dashed.

That's the update. Are there any question on that?

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, on the two days that we have extra now, I highly recommend a trip to a fish-bearing stream that runs through one of the Ottawa golf courses. I thought it would be important, if we could

arrange a game of golf, to examine the peril to fish stocks of what goes into that stream. I'm sure that day would be very fruitful to all the members of the committee.

The Chair: I'm sure the standing committee will take that suggestion in the spirit it was given.

Mr. Hearn.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I must say I admire your faith when you're planning long-term meetings. I wonder now, in light of the fact that we won't be going to Newfoundland and Labrador on the study on the northern cod, if the committee, or a large portion thereof, could attend the major conference in St. John's the week before.

I certainly think Newfoundland members would want to go—but also yourself and anybody else on this committee—because this is supposed to be the be-all and end-all of meetings to deal with overfishing. I mean, that issue wouldn't be on the table without yourself and the members around this table. So I think we should certainly have a major presence there.

The Chair: Well, Mr. Hearn, all I can say is, who can disagree with that statement? But if you go, you go on your own dime and you pay for your own hotels and you use your travel points.

We have numerous people lined up as far as estimates are concerned for that Tuesday and Thursday. If it's the will of the committee to move that business to May 10 and 12, we could always do that, but let's not encroach into the time of our witnesses today to talk about that. Certainly that would be an option.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Or even Tuesday....

The Chair: I don't know whether it's been investigated or not. The clerk underlines for me that it's by invitation only, and I don't believe we've been invited, which is of course no surprise, but that might be something....

Mr. Cummins.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Chairman, the Williams committee, as you know, released its first report recently, and one of the difficulties they had was getting the Melvin report. The Melvin report was a report that was done by fisheries officers in the Fraser River, and it was concerned about poaching, and in actual fact about armed poachers. The committee was denied that report, and eventually, on the day they submitted their report, the chairman of the committee was given a copy and no one else.

Given the committee's interest in that report, I think we should try to get a copy of it. I think it would be informative for us.

I'll just read you a very brief quote from the Williams report, referencing that Melvin report. It says:

The Committee finds this very troubling because the information in the report would seem to go to the core of enforcement policy and practices with respect to one aspect of Fraser sockeye fisheries. The fact that DFO wishes to withhold this evidence from the Committee seems representative of the enforcement policies which have in part contributed to the disappearance of a substantial number of Fraser sockeye.

I think the committee might find that report interesting, Mr. Chairman. Not knowing whether I was going to be here or not, I did prepare a letter, which I'll give to you, suggesting that the committee try to get a copy of that report.

The Chair: I agree with you.

I don't think you need to give me a letter. I'll ask the officials to bring it with them when they come for estimates and/or to provide it to us in advance of those meetings.

• (0945)

Mr. John Cummins: Thank you.

The Chair: On that issue, we were well advised to issue our report when we did because a great number of the recommendations of the Williams report basically echo what we said. We would have been doing the echoing if we had delayed the report any longer. So I want to thank committee members for completing it when we did so that we could get it in.

You now have two separate reports on the same issue, singing the same song, and that tells me there's a major problem with DFO enforcement on the west coast. Hopefully we'll be able to hone in on that during the estimates process.

It's all very interesting, but we have witnesses here who are raring to go.

Who's going to start off, gentlemen? Mr. Purcell? Okay.

We're going to ask you to keep your remarks to approximately 10 minutes per group, which would make it 30 minutes, and then we'll have questions. You don't have to take 10 minutes, by the way, but if you want, you can have up to 10 minutes.

I'm sorry that we ate into a bit of your time. Please go ahead, sir.

Mr. Carl Purcell (Vice-President, Nova Scotia Salmon Association): Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, on behalf of the Nova Scotia Salmon Association, we would like to thank you for giving us time to present this brief.

The Nova Scotia Salmon Association is connected with the Atlantic Salmon Federation, but we are also a provincial body that stands by itself, on its own, to make its own decisions.

The Nova Scotia Salmon Association has several issues that are of concern with respect to healthy, wild Atlantic salmon. Four of these issues are: acid rain and its negative impact on water quality and Atlantic salmon within the province; the lack of current biological assessment to properly manage and regulate the fishery; the lack of monitoring and enforcement on our rivers; and last, the inner Bay of Fundy.

This brief will concentrate on the inner Bay of Fundy and its great mystery: the disappearance of 40,000 wild Atlantic salmon. The

inner Bay of Fundy has a unique stock of Atlantic salmon. This species of salmon remains in or near the Bay of Fundy for its entire marine life. Something has happened to this unique salmon population.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, there were approximately 40,000 wild Atlantic salmon in the Bay of Fundy. By the year 2002, it's estimated there were probably fewer than 250 wild fish around. What happened? Where did they go?

There are 32 reported salmon rivers that ring the inner Bay of Fundy. In 1980, all of these rivers supported healthy fish populations. DFO biologists—scientists—reported that the freshwater habitat was healthy. These rivers were able to support salmon eggs and juvenile populations. The problem does not lie with freshwater habitat. There is now only one other possible answer, and that is the marine habitat, the waters of the Bay of Fundy.

The scientific community, at the present time, does not know the cause of the demise of the Atlantic salmon in the marine environment. It has raised many possibilities: water temperature, migration pattern, food chains, predators, etc.

The Inner Bay of Fundy Recovery Team was founded in 1992 and it meets on a regular basis. We meet again in two weeks' time in Moncton. We meet twice a year.

By 1998 it was decided that the number of wild Atlantic salmon was so low that measures had to be taken to ensure the survival of the various specific river stocks. Consequently, a collection of juveniles from all the rivers surrounding the inner bay began. This led to the formation of a live gene bank, with work being done in the biodiversity labs in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. The program is now in its sixth year.

There was also some monitoring of salmon in the post-smolt stage within the inner bay. Research was done on migration and marine surface temperatures. All of this is very interesting, but there are several problems with this research and data collection. For instance, the live gene bank that I referred to just previously is considered essential by scientists of both DFO and the Atlantic Salmon Federation, but it does not secure any aid-based funding from the DFO budget. It takes moneys from other sources within DFO to keep this program in operation. What does that mean? That means that somewhere else there's another program that's being cheated.

Data from marine research is very slow to reach the scientific community and other concerned communities such as ours. For instance, work that was done in 2002 has not yet been published. Very little research is being done on such things as food chains. Marine research fostered questions regarding the health of post-smolts from the Stewiacke and Gaspereaux rivers in Nova Scotia, but this research does not appear to be a high priority for DFO officials. The marine life of Atlantic salmon appears to hold the missing link, but the research is not done on a continual basis.

● (0950)

Here I would like to introduce another possible reason for the disappearance of the wild Atlantic salmon, and this is an area in which rapid and vital research is essential. Even now it may be too late.

Could the main cause of the disappearance of the 40,000 wild Atlantic salmon from the inner Bay of Fundy be salmon aquaculture? In today's society, salmon aquaculture is necessary as an industry and for feeding the population. So when I talk of salmon aquaculture, I'm not talking about modern-day 2005 aquaculture, because it's very different. I am concerned with the first 12 years of industry. Scientific papers are now suggesting that since 1997, there may have been a correlation between the rise of salmon aquaculture and the fall of the wild stocks. The aquaculture had its true beginning in the inner Bay of Fundy in 1986. Eleven years had passed without any data collection.

There are some interesting facts that would draw a connection between aquaculture and the disappearance of the wild stocks. The federal government and the Province of New Brunswick heavily promoted, supported, and subsidized the growth of salmon aquaculture, and they were therefore in no position to regulate the industry. From the first cage in 1979 until 1991, there was virtually no regulation.

It should be noted that since salmon aquaculture was a private business, there was no obligation to report escapees, but they occurred in the thousands. According to a World Wildlife Fund report, 50,000 farmed Atlantic salmon escaped in the fall of 1999. In December 2000, the same report stated that a further estimated 100,000 farmed fish escaped into the Bay of Fundy from the state of Maine. In 1994 as many as 40,000 farmed salmon—and this is equal to the original wild stock of 40,000—escaped in southwest New Brunswick and entered the rivers.

The aquaculture industry has brought with it undue stress in caged salmon, which produced various diseases that had to be treated with antibiotics and pesticides. Post-smolts, which used this area within the inner bay as part of their migratory route during the summer and fall migrations, were brought into close contact with these caged fish and pesticides.

Salmon aquaculture has produced three situations that have had a negative impact on the life of wild Atlantic salmon in the Bay of Fundy.

The first one I refer to as genetic pollution of wild stocks. This is caused by the mating of wild stock with escapees. The mating results in a reduced survival and fitness and eventually the elimination of wild populations and their unique genetic characteristics. In North

America, this was brought to the public's attention by the Atlantic Salmon Federation. In 1994 the number of aquaculture fish represented 90% of the total fish population in the Magaguadavic River in southwest New Brunswick. In the fall of 1998, electro-fishing in the Stewiacke River produced only one adult salmon, and this was of aquaculture origin.

There are many scientific papers from both Norway and Great Britain that point to fitness reduction and extinction of wild Atlantic salmon stocks as a result of mating with aquaculture escapees.

Earlier I referred to the live gene bank. This collection process began in 1998, but by this time three generations of salmon had had a chance to be around. So by 1998 they were three generations late for the possible dilution of the genetic pool of wild stocks. There is scientific evidence that aquaculture genes have invaded the genetic makeup of wild Atlantic salmon in the inner Bay of Fundy.

Could part of the answer to the disappearance of the wild salmon stock lie in the pollution of genetic stock?

Another negative is the use of antibiotics and pesticides. Keeping salmon in cages produces stress and disease. The mortality rate of farmed salmon increased from 5% to 20% in the early stages of the industry. It's now much higher than that.

To keep the industry economically viable, treatment for these diseases had to occur. Some of the chemicals used were off-label, and in many instances the effect on other marine organisms, including wild salmon, was often unknown.

● (0955)

In some cases, there was mortality of lobster, crab, sand shrimp. One drug used produced bacterial resistance to that drug, which affected DNA synthesis of micro-organisms. All in all, very little research was carried out on the after-effects of drugs on off-target organisms during the early stages of salmon aquaculture.

Many questions need to be answered. It may be too late. Did the drugs being used have a cumulative effect? Was there an effect on feeding patterns, or growth, or spawning, or migration of wild stocks? Is there an effect on the food chain?

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I notice you're reading your presentation verbatim. You're at the bottom of page four and 10 minutes have already gone by. If I allow you to read the presentation verbatim to the end of it, it will probably be at least 15 minutes. Could I ask you perhaps to summarize? You can be assured that the committee members will be able to read your full presentation. Maybe you could bring a couple of points to our attention about the sea lice and what your recommendations are.

Mr. Carl Purcell: I'll skip to the last page, to the recommendations on page 6.

First of all, there must be financial support given on a regular basis to support the live gene bank program and the biodiversity lab. DFO scientists have stated this in their publications, yet there is no funding.

More marine research is needed on a continual basis to answer questions regarding migration, feeding patterns, prey-predator relationships, food chains, and interactions with aquaculture fish. This research should be done on an ecosystem basis, not on an individual, not-connected basis. It must be put together.

Further research must be done on smolt release programs in the Stewiacke and Gaspereaux Rivers, where DFO scientists have indicated there's a problem. Research on the possible cumulative effects of pesticides and antibiotics on non-target species is also needed. And since the salmon aquaculture industry is associated with the demise of wild Atlantic salmon stocks, it should share in the financial burden of the research.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you. I'd like to end by saying a tremendous thank you for the \$30 million that has been found for the Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund. This will go a very long way to helping Atlantic salmon in the Atlantic region. We'd like to work with DFO to ensure it is put to good use, but hopefully this is not to take the place of DFO research. DFO research is a necessity, and this is something extra, which would be used by organizations such as ourselves.

So, sir, thank you very much.

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

We'll go to Mr. DeMond.

Committee members, Mr. DeMond has a unilingual map, which he would ask to distribute only for the purpose of being able to show where his community is in Nova Scotia. Would that be all right?

Okay. Thank you. Merci.

Mr. DeMond, go ahead.

Mr. Lowell DeMond (Director and Past President, LaHave River Salmon Association): Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to come here today and to appear before you.

I'm passing around a little card. It has really nothing to do with the acid rain mentioned on it, but on the bottom there's a little arrow that points to the LaHave River, the river I'm representing. It's a river about 60 miles west of Halifax, and you can see it on the card.

At one time that river was one of the better salmon rivers you could angle on in Nova Scotia. There were sometimes as many as 4,000 adult fish that went up over a fish counter there known as Morgan Falls.

In 1984 it became apparent that with the large salmon—we talk about two sea winter fish—there was a problem such that they were in danger, so anglers could no longer at that point keep a large salmon. All we could keep was what we called a one sea winter fish or a grilse. In 1994 that ended, and at that point we could move into only a hook-and-release season.

This river has very important significance for the southwestern part of Nova Scotia. The little part that's enclosed in red is the only river that has a fish counter, by which the adult fish that migrate up that river can be counted. It has another factor that is important. It's the only river where you can actually count the juvenile fish—we refer to them as the smolt—that are migrating down.

We know there is a serious problem. Last year only 700 fish migrated up over that counter. We know there are little fish going out, but we don't know why they're not coming back. They're limited in number—we're not getting the numbers we need—but they're not coming back.

Mr. Purcell mentioned a few reasons. I'm going to mention the following.

There are some people who believe the problem is an overpopulation of seals. At one time when there were a lot of salmon, the seal population was estimated to be between 2 million and 3 million. Now it's estimated to be between 5 million and 7 million.

There seems to be an overpopulation of cormorants. These are birds that gather in the estuary areas. They eat fish, and they consume a lot of small fish. There used to be a culling of these birds. That no longer happens.

A third possibility is the aquaculture and the relationship between the wild salmon and the aquaculture fish. Mr. Purcell has referred to that.

Another possibility might be the greenhouse effect—the warming up of the climate, the cooling off of the North Atlantic by the breaking off of ice, which is going out and might have forced out their food supply. We don't know that.

Another factor, of course, is acid rain. And another factor that is sometimes considered is the overfishing by foreign trawlers. We're not sure what the total effect of that is.

The point I want to make is that the only way we're ever going to know what happened to the Atlantic salmon or is happening to them is with scientific research, and the only way that can possibly be financed is by the federal government. There is no way anyone else can do this.

I'm going to read the next little paragraph.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans in the Atlantic provinces is in dire straits. They are deprived of funding to the point where they are short of manpower and equipment, and their morale is so low that the majority of the employees are anxious for a career change or early retirement.

I have two examples I would like to give you to support that.

Last April, one of our directors attended an acid rain conference in Saint Andrews, New Brunswick. It was an international conference. One of the DFO biologists from Halifax presented a paper in which he said that in one of the rivers to the west of the LaHave, known as the Medway, they could no longer find juvenile fish or smolt in the river.

Our director didn't say anything at the time, but went to the biologist after that and said, "Look, I fish on that river every year and I am finding a few juvenile fish on that river." So the biologist asked him, "Would it be possible for you to help us out a little bit here?" He said, "Sure, what do you need?" The biologist said, "If you have a digital camera, I'd like a picture of six. I'd like a scale sample of those fish. I'd like a little piece of tissue off their tail." What he wanted to do with that was DNA testing.

So our director went out and caught six of these fish and mailed in the requested data. The biologist was very excited about this and dispatched some fishery officers, and they picked up 12 of these little fish that they took to a hatchery or a gene bank.

At the gene bank they were a little afraid they might contaminate the hatchery, so they needed to do an analysis of some fish. They asked him if it would be possible for him to catch 10 trout that they could use to analyze, because if there were diseases in the trout, there would be diseases in the salmon. Our director went out and got 10 trout. He delivered them to the hatchery and they had them there to do the work.

• (1000)

The major point I want to make here is simply this: we old guys in the afternoon of life don't mind helping out a little bit, but you can't do scientific research with volunteers. You have to have scientists doing scientific research.

• (1005)

The Chair: Mr. DeMond, if I could make a point, it's amazing that you could just go out and catch 10 trout. That, to me, is marvellous. I can't catch a baby pickerel or even a sunfish—I'm just a lousy fisherman—so good for you guys.

Mr. Lowell DeMond: We'll give you an invitation.

Here is the second example I wanted to give. In the 1980s it became very apparent we were having serious problems with acid rain. Nova Scotia is the catch-all area for it. There was a grave concern about those rivers in southwestern Nova Scotia.

A biologist by the name of Dr. Walton Watt came to our little association, the one I've belonged to for the last 30 years, and said if we would commit ourselves to a 10-year liming project to put powdered limestone on the headwaters of this lake, on our particular branch of that river, in 10 years' time the international agreements on emission controls would cut in and we wouldn't have to do this any longer.

We said yes, we'd do this. So we made our own limestone spreaders, we used our own ATVs, and we set up a little shack on this place up on the lake. It's a serious problem to do this; you've got to have three clear days, everything has to be coordinated, and anybody who has ever put powdered limestone on a lawn knows it's a dirty, miserable job. Add the cold to that; we put it on the ice in the wintertime. We did this for 10 years. For 10 years this little crowd I belong to went out and put this powdered limestone on this lake.

At the end of 10 years we didn't see DFO; they didn't come near us. At the end of 10 years we asked them two very simple questions: number one, did we do any good; and number two, what happens if we quit? We couldn't get an answer from them. We tried and tried,

and finally we've gotten an answer. The answer is on the last page of my brief here.

There were the two questions. DFO has finally replied to these questions, indicating they do not know if the project was successful because of lack of assessment data. Our interpretation of their answer to the second question is very much the same. The lack of assessment data resulted from the diadromous fish division being stripped by program review of its mandate in habitat, including acid rain issues, which resulted in early retirement and transfer of staff. This example further emphasizes the lack of funding and personnel for scientific research. They just don't have people; they can't do it.

In conclusion, the Pacific coast has received approximately \$500 million from the federal government during the past few years for science research. On December 18, 2004, an announcement was made for a plan to conserve wild salmon on the west coast. No mention was made of the Atlantic salmon in eastern Canada.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is often short-staffed, has outdated equipment, and has no personnel or money for Atlantic salmon research. Unless there is a change to this concept and money is made available for scientific research for the Atlantic salmon, the LaHave River Salmon Association believes we can say goodbye to this fish.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. DeMond, for that uplifting presentation.

Now, for our third presentation, we'll hear from Mr. Hart.

Mr. John Hart (Past President, Margaree River Salmon Association): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, good morning. Bonjour. If it doesn't cut into my time, Mr. Chair, I've had days very similar to yours, so don't worry about not catching your pickerel.

The Chair: Mr. Hart, you've had days; this is my life.

Mr. John Hart: May I invite you to come to visit Nova Scotia?

The Chair: I was angling for that.

Mr. John Hart: Pardon the pun.

The Chair: And no, it doesn't come out of your time.

Mr. John Hart: It would be like other members fishing for compliments, dare I say.

On behalf of the Margaree Salmon Association, I would like to extend our appreciation to the committee for the opportunity to meet with you and make this presentation. We are a non-profit, community-based, volunteer organization with approximately 270 members. At the committee's invitation, we are here to speak on behalf of our members to emphasize our concerns for the well-being of the Atlantic salmon.

The Margaree River has been synonymous with Atlantic salmon going back to the mid-1700s, and since 1865 it has been a significant component in our local economy. It has been important for tourism. It has formed part of our culture.

The mission of the Margaree Salmon Association is the conservation, protection, and enhancement of Atlantic salmon, trout, and their habitat. Under our mission statement, both formal and implied, our association has worked in partnership with groups such as the Atlantic Salmon Federation, the Nova Scotia Salmon Association, Trout Nova Scotia, the Aquatic Development Association of Margaree, as well as federal and provincial government agencies in the rebuilding and rehabilitation of habitat and fish stocks in the Margaree River system.

To accomplish this, we have initiated self-restrictive measures, intended to benefit our resource, and we have been able to work with first nations and other partners in seeing that some of the necessary scientific research has been carried out. We are currently investigating new ways of addressing erosion and studying flow characteristics using best-management-practices techniques that assure cost-effective benefits with the least amount of environmental impact.

Historically, the salmon resource did not have to face the challenges of the 20th and the 21st centuries. It didn't have acid rain, clear cutting, or exploding seal populations, as referred to by our colleagues. Now, in addition to the above, the resource faces factory-freezer trawlers and global warming, which has disrupted the food chain and fish in it at both ends.

With all of the threats now facing the salmon, it is vital that habitat restoration and maintenance programs, better science, monitoring, research, and stock enhancement programs be maintained. These same support programs seem to have virtually disappeared from the federal mandate, at least in our region.

The old adopt-a-stream program, which was funded under the Canada/Nova Scotia Cooperation Agreement, provided for \$1.15 million to be spent over five years on habitat restoration and saw a total realized value of \$2.7 million. That was through money that was put forth by volunteer organizations—in-kind, time spent by volunteers such as us. The adopt-a-stream program has been re-initiated through funding provided by angling licence surcharges and is the only habitat rehabilitation program available to us. Through partnerships with various agencies, government departments, and land owners, our association has since 1982 been responsible for more than \$800,000 worth of habitat restoration and repair.

Mr. Cummins and Mr. Kamp are both well aware of the impact the aquaculture industry is having on indigenous stocks in the rivers of British Columbia. Aquaculture was supposed to remove the impetus for harvesting wild fish by creating a farm-raised marketable product. Millions of dollars have been lost due to disease in these facilities. These same diseases are now being spread to wild stocks as a result of escapes from fish farms. They're impacting on migrating juveniles due to the high incidence of sea lice along their migration routes, and aquaculture escapees are diluting individual river stocks of wild fish. A prime example referred to earlier is the Magaguadavic River in New Brunswick, where aquaculture escapees now outnumber wild fish by at least an 8:1 ratio.

Long before the closure of the Greenland fishery, it had been suggested to government that if the commercial fishery in the Atlantic were to be shut down, the stocks would naturally regenerate, with the premise that some support programs, including hatcheries,

might not even be necessary. The fishery was closed, the stocks did not rebound, and the hatcheries themselves were shut down. The prey-predator balance in the oceans was skewed for the sake of political expediency.

Our purpose here today is not to berate the mismanagement of the species by DFO, as tempting as it may be. We have been told that budget cuts are responsible for the lack of programs. Essential field work and research programs are being minimized, or have been minimized.

• (1010)

We heartily applaud the creation of the Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund, and those who lobbied on its behalf, many of whom are in this room today. We applaud the minister's decision and position on having the fund work with grassroots organizations, such as ourselves, to offer funding to carry out the vital conservation work required. We regard it as a good start towards rebuilding the resource; however, DFO must continue their mandated and legislated obligation. DFO, as the agency responsible, must take a leadership role in ensuring proper consultation and collaboration among user groups and government agencies for the management and utilization of Atlantic salmon, for habitat and stock enhancement, as well as for education and public awareness.

Mr. Stephen Chase, formerly of the Atlantic Salmon Federation and currently with DFO, will be a principal figure in the development of the endowment fund, and we look forward to working with Mr. Chase and his team in collectively finding and implementing solutions.

We have watched in anguish as habitat and enhancement programs in Atlantic Canada have been decimated, while the Pacific salmon resource in B.C. is bolstered by \$400 million worth of habitat restoration and hatchery funding. It is only right that our friends in British Columbia receive an investment in their resource. However, we submit that the Atlantic salmon resource warrants similar consideration. It has always been our concern that the resource has been managed to maintain only the bare minimum conservation levels; this does no service to the resource or to the economic benefits it generates for the communities.

As stated earlier, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, our group wishes to convey the message that we are asking for help for a community, a resource, and a river. The Margaree has long relied to a great extent on the salmon fishery, and today that fishery is of importance not only to our own community, but to first nations communities as well. The resource continues to have considerable economic significance, even as we see the overall numbers of fish diminish. As the fish populations in general have declined, so have the number of anglers on the rivers and the dollars they bring. For example, from 1989 to 2001, Nova Scotia saw a drop of 78% in the sale of salmon licences. An economic impact study commissioned by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in 1993 indicated that enhancement of the summer run on the Margaree River alone could generate as much as \$250,000 extra to the local economy.

The Margaree continues to have a reasonably health population of Atlantic salmon, when many others have witnessed a virtual eradication of their stocks. Why? We feel it is due in part to the ongoing habitat rehabilitation initiatives being carried out, as well as a modest enhancement program, both of which are being spear-headed and driven by volunteers.

The historical significance of the recreational salmon fishery was the major factor in the Margaree being declared a Canadian heritage river, and it is one of the last reasons we have healthy rivers in Atlantic Canada.

Volunteers have shown through programs such as the adopt-a-stream program the value of the rehabilitation of habitat. Over the years, hatcheries across the region, including the Margaree hatchery, have shown that stock enhancement does work. With a renewed but limited enhancement program, the numbers of fish returning to the Margaree have shown a marked increase in the past couple of years; this is in conjunction with a considerable amount of habitat work being done. Although some have credited the increase to the Greenland closure, many other rivers have not seen increases as a result of the closure of Greenland.

On a note closer to home, much has been made of the exodus of youth from our larger community of Cape Breton. The Margaree River has the potential, if given the opportunity, to be a research facility for a variety of educational disciplines. It can allow at least some of our young people from the Margaree, trained and educated in the necessary sciences, to remain in their own communities. The opportunities for them to apply their educational specialties are limited due to the absence of the appropriate programs and funding. The Margaree River offers a prime opportunity for science students to gain practical knowledge and experience, which can aid in career development and possibly be utilized in other systems.

• (1015)

Let me say in closing, Mr. Chairman, we are not asking for handouts. We are simply asking for the necessary tools and the financing to do the job so we may be better able to assist those whose government-legislated mandate and responsibility are the conservation, protection, and enhancement of Atlantic salmon. We again want to emphasize that the endowment fund, which we all applaud, must not be used to replace programs that have traditionally been the responsibility of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Groups such as ours must be made aware of the fund's criteria and of its implementation, goals, and objectives. Public consultation is a necessity, as is the great need for transparency in the decision-making process.

The people of the Margaree River, whether full-time or part-time residents, those recently arrived, or those with long ancestral roots, have struggled to maintain the integrity of the river and keep it alive with little more than hard work. MSA does its best to provide habitat for the fish that are returning to spawn by providing cover and shelter for developing juveniles, whether they are born in the wild or in the hatchery environment—

• (1020)

The Chair: I'm sorry, the 10 minutes is over. We'll be able to read the rest of your conclusion—and it's a good conclusion.

I'd like to get to questions.

Mr. John Hart: If I may, sir, I'll take 30 seconds to cover three quick points.

One, DFO must reinvest in the resource. Two, the endowment fund must not be used to replace DFO programs. Three, when the endowment fund comes through, it is public dollars on public waters.

It is more than hard work that has kept these rivers going. I feel it is quite fair to speak on behalf of my colleagues here in saying it is not work; it has been a labour of love—although you probably wouldn't want to look at any of the four of us here at the end of the table in the morning or over breakfast.

The Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen, all of you, for your presentations.

As you said, Mr. Hart, many members of this committee individually, both past and present, have been working towards an endowment fund for Atlantic salmon. This entire committee put its weight behind that recommendation in its May 2003 report, and subsequent to that, at every opportunity, has pushed the department and the minister in order to get some money for an endowment fund for Atlantic Canada. So this committee has been doing whatever it can in that regard, and we're very pleased to see that there was money in the budget for this fund.

We hear your points loud and clear, and no doubt you'll be able to expand on them as a result of the questions.

Just so members know, I'll mention that in the first round we'll have Mr. Keddy, Monsieur Roy, Mr. Stoffer, and Mr. Cuzner.

We'll go with Mr. Keddy for 10 minutes.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I do intend to try to save some of my time for Mr. Hearn; he has a couple of questions. This is a subject that's certainly near and dear to my heart.

First of all, I'd like to thank all of our witnesses for appearing here today. I realize that for some of you, Mr. DeMond and Mr. Purcell, it was on a bit of short notice. It's really important that you took the time out of your schedule to be here, and I much appreciate that.

Lowell, just as a personal comment, I'll mention that you and I fish some of the same area. You're catching fish that are that long, and I don't know if the rest of you guys noticed, but that's a big fish. His grilse are about that long, and that's a big fish. I never saw a par that long in my life.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lowell DeMond: We just refer to them as juvenile fish.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: That was just a point.

Look, this is a very serious issue, and I think it's critically important that all of you were able to appear here today and tell the committee as a whole exactly what's going on, on the rivers of Nova Scotia.

I wrote down a couple of questions, and I do intend to leave some of my time for Mr. Hearn.

There's the whole issue of the Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund, the setting aside of those moneys, and the budget of DFO as it exists today. I want to just go into that subject a little bit. It's my understanding—and you may be able to give more information and shed a little more light on the subject—that the DFO officers dealing directly with Atlantic salmon have suffered another budget cut. I've noticed all of you in your presentations brought forth the idea that the endowment fund shouldn't be used to replace funding for the science on Atlantic salmon. All of your river associations are willing to help, but you can't do it on your own. The endowment fund should be stand-alone, and that means DFO's budget should stand alone as well and not be continually cut back simply because the endowment fund is there.

I think, Mr. Purcell, you mentioned that first, so I'd ask you to comment on that.

• (1025)

Mr. Carl Purcell: After the endowment fund was announced, within three or four days, we also received word that the head biologist from the Moncton office had his budget cut by 40%. This was three to four days after the endowment fund. This biologist is responsible for research on the Margaree River and the Northumberland Strait rivers in Nova Scotia. There has not been any scientific research done on the Northumberland Strait rivers since 2001. These are not my words; these are his words, taken from a meeting that we had with him a month ago. So it is important. Yes, we'll put on our rubber boots and do all our work and so forth, but we are not DFO, and we cannot allow DFO to shirk its duty. It has a future responsibility. We're looking forward to this fund to assist and broaden the field.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Thank you very much.

I'm just going to try to get a couple of other quick questions in, because as you realize, 10 minutes goes by a lot quicker than you think.

For the members of the committee, if you look at this map, you see the red part on it, and you look at the western end of Nova Scotia, down towards the Yarmouth end; that's the area we call the South Mountain Batholith. That's a granite formation that's been scraped off by glaciers. There's not a lot of soil. It's fairly well treed, but there's still a fair amount, especially inland.... If you look, in the

centre of that little town there called New Ross—you can't see it on the map—that's where I grew up and live today. It's pretty barren, rocky, wooded country. That's why we've got a real problem with acidification. We've done very little research. Mr. DeMond has been at the forefront of the little bit of work on the acidification of rivers that's been done in Nova Scotia, where they've had some remarkable success with actually liming the river, but the program is totally underfunded.

I wonder, Mr. DeMond, if anyone has ever estimated what it would cost. I understand on the Bay of Fundy side there's a limestone background, so they don't have the same acid problem that they have in southwestern Nova Scotian rivers, but I wonder if anyone's ever really looked at the cost of what it would take to actually bring the pH level back to be able to sustain salmonoids.

Mr. Lowell DeMond: I'm not sure there's anybody going to live long enough to do it.

As Mr. Keddy has mentioned, particularly southwestern Nova Scotia has very shallow soil. The acid rain started descending in that area some time in the late 1940s. The graph of it would angle up like that, and it peaked in around the 1970s. Since then, with catalytic converters and scrubbers on stacks, and this kind of thing, there has been a decrease in the acid rain that comes down. The problem with this area here is that when the rain came down, the elements in the soil which were going to give it a buffering were calcium and magnesium, but these became depleted. As they became depleted, the acid began to run into the river.

The best information I can get from a Department of the Environment chemist says we're looking at 50 years for any sort of a recovery, and maybe even 100 to get back to where we would like to have it.

We don't know the success of our project. I didn't want to imply that we haven't had a good relationship with DFO. DFO has been supportive. They just don't have personnel. They don't have people who can help, and the research can't be carried out. That's what happened to our project.

Presently, there is a project that's going on east of Halifax—Mr. Purcell might want to speak to that—where they're going to experiment with liming a river.

• (1030)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: If I can just get one more question in, then I'm going to allow Mr. Hearn the rest of the time.

The difficulty here is this. You've got your licensing fees tied to habitat restoration. If you listen to these gentlemen, licences have gone down by 78%. So you have an even smaller pool of money to deal with to do what little bit of work has been done. I don't even want an answer to that. I just want to allow Mr. Hearn to ask the questions.

The Chair: Mr. Hearne, state your name, and then your time is up.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Oh, come on.

The Chair: You have two minutes and twenty seconds.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: I'll just ask one question, Mr. Chair.

I was surprised—I'm sure Mr. Matthews was also—when Mr. Keddy was talking about the huge fish they had, because ours are certainly not that big. But then I found out that they measure theirs in Nova Scotia from the nose to the tail; we measure ours between the eyes, so it's a bit different.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Chair, I have just one question. It's great to see a group that's not just coming here to list complaints or to look for a handout. They're coming after having put a lot into it and are willing to put a lot more, asking for cooperation and continued support.

I want to ask one question, and we can go quickly across the board for answers. If you were the minister and you had a chance to make a difference, what is one thing, the prime thing, you would do? Maybe each of you could tell me. If you had the choice today, what's the first thing you would do to try to help your situation?

Mr. Lowell DeMond: The first thing I would suggest is that you give DFO some money and some resource personnel in biology and chemistry to do the research to find out what in fact has happened to them. That would be my answer.

The Chair: Mr. Purcell.

Mr. Carl Purcell: I don't think I can argue with that one, except that I'd also like to add that most of our rivers in the province that were very healthy at one time are also the ones that are now affected by acid rain. I think we need some research on acid rain.

The Chair: Mr. Hart.

Mr. John Hart: I would have to agree with the gentlemen here. I'd be on my hands and knees to Mr. Goodale looking for funding, looking for tools to get the job done.

If I could add one thing to that, I would have the Department of Fisheries and Oceans get out of the aquaculture business. You cannot be a regulator and a promoter at the same time.

The Chair: Okay.

Monsieur Roy, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was looking at this map while you were presenting your briefs. When was this map prepared? What is the year? Is it recent?

[English]

Mr. Lowell DeMond: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Yes? It is a recent map?

[English]

Mr. Carl Purcell: Yes, it's within the last five or six years.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: What is your evaluation of the situation? Based on the situation you have presented, there is almost no hope. Mr. DeMond was saying before that it would take at least sixty years to rehabilitate some rivers, 60 years' worth of intervention, follow-up

and monitoring of both the shores and the river itself to bring the pH back to normal.

Is it still worth the investment? Listening to you, I get the impression it is not worth it anymore and that the situation has reached such a catastrophic level that even if we did invest, we would not be settling the problem. Should we not concentrate only on some rivers to save at least a few of them with the funds we have available, rather than trying to save them all?

I will let you answer.

●(1035)

[English]

Mr. Lowell DeMond: It's a good question. Some rivers have been very seriously affected and other rivers haven't. For example, the LaHave River has two branches with a pH that will sustain life. It was only the one little branch that wouldn't do that.

And we have some rivers along our south shore where the pH, for example, is fine. But those rivers where the pH is fine are experiencing problems similar to the ones the other rivers have. Some have become extinct.

But we are now losing our stocks, and we believe if we could do research and find out why, these rivers would be able to sustain salmon.

Mr. Carl Purcell: Because of thousands of years of genetics, a lot of the salmon in Nova Scotia do not need a pH of 6. If they have a pH of 5 or 5.1, that is sufficient to hold the stocks.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: For sure, acid rain is not the only problem. You have mentioned that already. You have mentioned the seals as well as other problems. I will come back to my question.

As far as your work is concerned, if you had to make a choice here, today, would you concentrate only on a few rivers and not on all of them?

[English]

Mr. Lowell DeMond: I guess the answer is that even the rivers that have good pH are on a slippery slope. I'll go back and give you one more little example.

For the river I work on we are able to count the upward migration and the downward migration of these fish. This year we thought our little group would like to get involved in a scientific exercise, and we wanted to put some implants in little fish that were going out, the little smolts, so we could track them at least until they got out as far as the estuary. We have a theory. It's only a theory, and it may not be right, but we somehow think maybe the little fish are running into a serious problem when they come to the salt water, making that adaptation, as the larger fish might have coming up.

So we went to DFO and said that we were willing to help, that we could do some groundwork and we could give them a hand. DFO said they didn't have money to do this. We only wanted about 12 implants, so we looked in our treasury and in our community and we thought maybe we could get involved in this. Finally, we said no, we just couldn't do it this year. We had to scrap it.

This is the kind of thing we believe would be beneficial.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Mr. Chairman, I would like to put a last question, quite technical in nature.

Is the the acid rain falling on Nova Scotia perchance coming from Boston and New York?

[*English*]

Mr. Carl Purcell: A lot of it does. Also, some of it comes from central Ontario. We manufacture some of it ourselves—let's be honest—but about 80% of it comes from other areas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Fine, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stoffer, please.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: First of all, I thank you all for coming, and I do want to extend greetings from Walter Egan, who, you all know, is part of the Sackville Rivers Association. Like you, they do just a great job with very limited funds and with their rubber boots.

One of the concerns I have, and I'd like Mr. Murphy to acknowledge it, if possible, is that the Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund is part of Bill C-43, the implementation act. If that act is not implemented, the salmon endowment fund goes by the wayside. Am I correct?

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): I believe so. I would think so.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Okay. I just thought I'd let you know. Although we have it in principle, you don't have the money in the bank, more or less.

The Chair: That means we have to make sure it gets passed, right?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I just want to let them know what happens in that event, because it's nice to take credit for an Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund, which this committee should, but we're not all the way there yet.

The Chair: Let's get all the way there.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. DeMond, have any of you had the opportunity to sit down, either at lunch or in a meeting, with the minister from Nova Scotia, Mr. Regan?

Mr. Lowell DeMond: I have.

• (1040)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Did you read him that paragraph that you read us?

Mr. Lowell DeMond: Yes, I did. In fact, this is just a revised version of the brief I presented to him, and that information was contained in that brief.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: When did you have that meeting with him?

Mr. Lowell DeMond: That meeting with him was I believe in January of this year.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: We're now in April.

What was his reaction? This is a very damning statement on DFO—not necessarily the employees in general, because I agree with you. But he's the minister. These are employees from his own backyard.

What was his reaction when you told him that?

Mr. Lowell DeMond: I would say that he was very interested in the statement. I don't think he had thought about it in those terms or had the kind of information that we were giving him. That would be my interpretation. And he left us with the impression that he would try to do something on our behalf.

The Chair: Mr. Stoffer—

Mr. Carl Purcell: I'd like to answer that as well. I personally met with Mr. Regan twice, once in November and once a couple of weeks ago. I'd just like to say that Mr. Regan is the latest. He hasn't been in office very long. I'm not sticking up for him, but he promised us a couple of things at our meeting and he came through.

One of them was.... The research that's being done on the inner Bay of Fundy takes a long time to get through the system, and he did make sure that we were able to at least listen to some of this research. In the short time he's been in office, I think he has done well for Atlantic salmon.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. John Hart: Mr. Chair, I certainly don't want to be involved in any partisan politics, considering the esteemed group from all sides of the fence here. Too late, sorry, Joe.

In the original presentation, when we were putting it together, we were trying to put names and faces to rivers. Mr. Cuzner I feel is probably the most fortunate man in the room, as he represents the Margaree in his riding. Mr. Stoffer represents the Sackville-Musquodoboit Valley. Mr. Keddy is certainly familiar with it. Monsieur Roy represents the Matapédia-Matane.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Yes.

[*English*]

Mr. John Hart: We are all concerned about it. I'm sure they do some salmon fishing on the Burin Peninsula. Mr. Simms, unfortunately, had to leave; he represents the Gander.

I don't want to get along party lines, but if this was one of our meetings at home, I'd say, people, let's get on with it and let's band together. If you want to quote Supertramp, here we are, gentlemen, brothers in arms. Let's pull the trigger. Let's get this thing done. We have a resource that's in deep, deep trouble.

The Chair: Mr. Hart, I'm from central Ontario. The closest river to me is the Rouge River, which we just heard about last week, and there are Atlantic salmon in the Rouge River, and we hope to keep them there.

Go ahead, Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Chair, my assertion wasn't whether or not I thought Mr. Regan was doing a good enough job. My assertion is and always has been—because we've had four ministers in seven years—the advice that minister gets from within his department, which I think is rather screwed many times, but that's my own biased comment.

Mr. Hart, I have a question for you. When we met with the Atlantic Salmon Federation, there were some concerns, and at the time they didn't seem to be 100% fully behind the hatchery program. I'm just wondering, what is the relationship now between the hatchery program of, say, the Margaree and the Atlantic Salmon Federation?

And also, Mr. Purcell, regarding aquaculture, as you've indicated, aquaculture has changed some of its habits over the years. Has your organization had an opportunity to sit with the aquaculture industry in order to come up with ways to either promote the dialogue or promote the issues you've addressed here?

Those are my two and final questions.

Mr. John Hart: Mr. Chair, Mr. Stoffer, I think there is a problem with those within the upper echelon of the fly fishing community, the salmon community, the purists, who will look at wild fish, period.

The more practical and reality-based individuals in this look at salmon hatcheries as being the tool, a necessary tool. Our organization has had, as part of its mandate, habitat. We have also lobbied on behalf of the hatchery locally, and not to put too fine a point on it, we work hand in glove, and at times we don't know who's the hand and who's the glove. We work for habitat. There's no possible way a lot of these rivers would be sustained without stock enhancement.

We were at the Nova Scotia Salmon Association annual meeting about a month ago, and senior folks in DFO admitted that the only way the inner Bay of Fundy stocks, the acid rain-impacted stocks in Nova Scotia, stand any chance or ghost of survival or rehabilitation is through assistance from stock enhancement programs, gene-banking hatcheries—a rose by any other name.

• (1045)

The Chair: Mr. Purcell on aquaculture.

Mr. Carl Purcell: The short answer to whether we've sat at the same table is no, but we have been in the room together, usually in an adversarial type of meeting.

I attended a three-day seminar at the Bedford Institute of Oceanography in January. It was on aquaculture, sponsored by DFO. A lot of money went into it. I was probably the only person there from non-aquaculture.

At the end of the meeting, I spoke on the problems that I thought might come up. I did not get a response from the aquaculture industry. I firmly believe they didn't respond because they knew there might be a connection somewhere.

Recently, the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture asked for a meeting of all user groups. We met with them and gave them our comments. We didn't talk about not having aquaculture. We said that if aquaculture occurs, it ought to follow

the present technology to a T. If that is done, things can occur on a positive note.

My concern is the harm done years ago that we do not have any research on. I am convinced that this was at least part of the reason for the demise of those 4,000 fish in the inner Bay of Fundy. It may be too late.

The Chair: Next we have Mr. Cuzner.

Before Mr. Cuzner starts, I have just a comment to committee members. I can't talk about what happens in our caucus, but Mr. Cuzner had a very amusing example for us to think about. I can't tell you all about it, but suffice it to say that yesterday he was talking about wearing milk-bone underpants, I believe it was, in connection with dogs. So I'll leave it at that. It was just an interesting picture.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): I'll fill the committee in. The reference was that politics is dog-eat-dog, and in the last few weeks the Liberals have been wearing milk-bone shorts.

But seriously, thank you very much. I know the four of you gentlemen hold the respect and admiration of everybody around this table.

I'm not being gratuitous when I say that this committee works well together. We try to work in the best interests of whatever the fisheries issue is. I think everybody is comfortable in stating that position.

The reference was made to the cutbacks in the program and some of the flags that have gone up in the wake of the endowment fund announcement. Could each of you take a moment to identify what those triggers are, what you've seen as some of the alarms indicating that DFO might be stepping back?

Mr. John Hart: The endowment fund was announced on a Wednesday. Excuse me for not remembering the exact date. Salmon conservationists from across Atlantic Canada—if not literally, then figuratively and mentally—turned cartwheels, raised their hands on high, and said thank you to the powers that be.

By noontime, less than 48 hours later, our association had been informed that the science and technology youth internship program had been cut. This is great news. As Mr. Purcell has already indicated, the senior biologist for Atlantic salmon research on the Northumberland shore of the gulf region has recently had his budget cut by a further 40%.

We have friends in DFO who have been doing habitat work. I am not sure where they're finding the money. I have been told that around the Antigonish office there is not a refundable left to be found in the ground, so I can only assume they are picking beer bottles and pop bottles to keep their programs going.

So with the announcement of the endowment fund, we've seen that for one piece of good news, we take a kick in the stomach right afterwards—this program has been cut, that program has been cut, and so on.

I think I speak on behalf of all my colleagues here when I reiterate most strongly that this is not right. The endowment fund cannot be used to replace programs that are DFO's legal, mandated, legislative obligation. DFO has dropped the ball. We ask them to pick it up. The volunteers have helped them for years. We will continue to help them. We will not, however, do their job for them.

• (1050)

The Chair: Mr. Purcell, do you have any comments?

Mr. Carl Purcell: On a positive note, just before coming here, I happened to bump into one of the officials who will probably be involved, I would think, in working with that endowment plan. His comments were that we have to make sure this fund supports—does not take the place of—DFO and its responsibility. He also said we have to make sure very little of this money is used for administrative fees. That was a very positive comment by a DFO official. I trust that individual very much, and when I hear that, I become happy. But I was also very disappointed a couple of days before that, knowing this chief biologist from Moncton, who does all the research, had his budget cut 40%. So who do I believe? I don't know.

The Chair: Mr. DeMond, do you have any comment?

Mr. Lowell DeMond: There's nothing I can add. I agree with both Mr. Hart and Mr. Purcell, and with what they've said.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Being the great champion for Atlantic salmon, I would fully anticipate my colleague, Mr. Stoffer, will bring forward a supply day motion in which the NDP want to advocate to have the Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund pulled out of the budget implementation legislation and have it addressed. So we can anticipate that.

Should things go forward here—and we're looking at the Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund—what I see is when groups come forward with a problem, they have to come forward with a solution. The answer that somebody has to do something doesn't work. What we need is a cohesive plan.

Let's say we look at four principal areas of salmon health in our rivers—science, habitat, enforcement, and stock enhancement. Would it make any sense for the community groups...because you guys are going to keep on putting it back in. There's a great willingness, and you guys are going to be there for the long haul. Does it make any sense to dial in on a couple of areas of responsibility that DFO steps back from, and that you people have... that are in the bailiwick of the volunteers to...?

Let's say DFO is responsible for science, you guys look after habitat restoration and supplementing the stocks, and maybe you'll work together cohesively on enforcement. Does it make sense to drill down and take on those specific areas of responsibility, as we move forward with the endowment fund and a plan to go forward?

• (1055)

Mr. Leonard Forsyth (Director and Technical/Resource Advisor, Margaree River Salmon Association): Could I comment on that?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Sure, I'd love you to.

Mr. Leonard Forsyth: I think DFO should certainly be totally responsible for conservation and protection. Volunteer organizations

do not have the legal jurisdiction to confront people who are poaching or anything else, and there's always a strong possibility somebody's going to get hurt.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: But Leonard—

Mr. Leonard Forsyth: We can act as informants when we know stuff is going on, and we do that. We have a river watch program and everything else, and it's been very successful. We try to assist DFO in doing their job, as far as conservation and protection are concerned, but they have gutted that department also, as far as fresh water is concerned. They're leaning more and more toward the provinces to help in that regard. That is being done because the provinces realize the impact of not having conservation and protection. Salmon are very vulnerable in rivers in the summer, especially when the water gets low. They've always been sought after by poachers.

The other real responsibility I see DFO being involved in is assessment of the stocks. They have the expertise and the trained people. Unfortunately, because of the cuts to a lot of the programs, they have not been hiring any new people, and the other people are getting older. Most of the fellows there are retiring. In three to five years the baby boomers who came in and were the scientific community in DFO are going to be gone, and there's going to be no one to replace them.

There's another thing that really disturbs me. I spent 30 years with the department and worked in five different hatchery facilities in Nova Scotia. I was also involved in doing a lot of assessment work when some of the acid rain problems were first detected. I worked at the Mersey hatchery and in Yarmouth. We found out that acidity was a serious problem in the really early stages of juvenile development, from the egg, to the fry, to the alevin.

A lot of those river systems down there will support the growth of juveniles in the par stage, but the really critical point is right after hatching when they have to depend on the nutrients stored in the sac and everything. Once they start feeding they can get some of the stuff they need from the food chain. We found at Mersey hatchery that we could lose 35% to 40% of the hatchery overnight, just from acid rain coming through from a big rain or a snow melt.

A lot of the systems would support par, and you could enhance the stock or protect a life stage at a particular time. That was done in Newfoundland and in some of the Exploits River system. They rehabilitated that through incubation, stocking of fry, and everything. That can still be done. It's done in other countries and it's very successful.

In the East Ranga and West Ranga Rivers in Iceland, the two largest producing angling rivers in Iceland, they have completely enhanced stock. Those rivers were destroyed in 1947 from volcanic action. They collect a certain percentage of the stock returning to the river every year, raise them in the hatchery, and release them as smolts. They go to sea, grow up, come back, and contribute to the economy through recreational sport fishing.

DFO dropped the ball big time when they started developing aquaculture. They took all the money that used to go into the enhancement and assessment of wild stocks and poured it into aquaculture. In the 1995 program review, there was no consultation with groups and communities that depended on salmon angling and everything. They just took the money and diverted it to something that, as far as I'm concerned, should have been the responsibility of the private sector.

In the long haul, especially with acid rain being the problem it is, we have a problem in the inner Bay of Fundy right now. No one really knows what's going on. Unless you run a few hatcheries, protect, and do some gene banking, or whatever, the Atlantic salmon population in Nova Scotia and a lot of the Maritimes will be gone forever.

Everyone's singing the praises of the Margaree River. It's the crown jewel of Atlantic salmon. It's the only river in Nova Scotia. Where was it in 1975? There were 100 salmon angled on the Margaree River, and we were told at the time that 300% to 400% more salmon were in the North Atlantic than there are today. Where does it stand today? It's producing over the conservation target, and has been for the last 20 years. Some years it's as high as 300% to 400% over the conservation target. But that was a result of a very intensive enhancement program that was conducted by hatchery stocking.

It commenced in 1978 and in three to four years—less than one generation of salmon stocks—they were angling 3,400 salmon in the Margaree River, and 75% to 80% of them were large, multi-sea winter fish. About 6% to 8% were repeat spawners. You're looking at salmon in the 30-pound-plus range. Last year they caught fish in that river that were 48 to 49 centimetres long. Those are the fish that are really sought after by anglers. We have people coming from all over the world to fish the Margaree. But that wasn't the case in 1975.

• (1100)

Last year when we seined for our root-stock collection we only took 170,000 salmon eggs. Some years that contributes to up to 55% of the total summer run. Those are fish that can be completely identified as hatchery-returned fish. This doesn't include the progeny from those fish that are spawning naturally in the river—which has been going on pretty extensively, because all large salmon have had to be released, as of 1984, for conservation purposes. A lot of the fish that are not adipose-clipped so that they can be identified as hatchery fish are called wild fish, but they're the progeny from hatchery-returning spawning adults.

It all contributes and it's all part of the overall program. I know from working in other areas—the LaHave River, the Medway River, the Tusket River, and other rivers, including the Sackville and a lot of the inner Bay of Fundy rivers when I was at the Cobequid hatchery—all those rivers were stocked.

The documentation is there. In a lot of years, over 50% and in some cases 70% or 80% of the returning adults to those rivers, all through the seventies and eighties, were a direct result of stocking programs. Those programs are gone, and the fish are gone.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Chairman, the response went beyond the realm of my question, but any time a Cape Bretoner can

enlighten people from other areas, yes, we'll just let it go. I know it's to everybody's benefit.

The Chair: That's exactly why I did it.

Mr. Cummins, please.

Mr. John Cummins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I must preface my remarks by saying that my comment about Atlantic salmon was somewhat tongue-in-cheek, because I know you don't want those genetically massaged fish back.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Cummins: The other point I'd like to make is that a couple of the presentations had a notion about \$500 million that went to B.C. for research. If you guys can find that, you can have it, because that's news to me. I've heard that point before, and I'd sure like you to find it. One of the problems we have, of course, is a problem of research.

But to get on to the issue of the day, the issue of acid rain, how big an impact does it have on the Bay of Fundy? Is it the same? I see on the map that from the Nova Scotia side it does not. Does it on the New Brunswick side?

Mr. Carl Purcell: If we are talking about healthy river systems, some of the healthiest rivers themselves are in the inner Bay of Fundy. Nova Scotia has 23 river systems that have a very good quality of pH. They are not affected at all. Their problem is no fish.

The New Brunswick side probably has about nine or ten rivers that are very healthy. No, there is no acid impact on the inner Bay of Fundy at all.

Mr. John Cummins: There was a very good article in the *Atlantic Salmon Journal*, I think it was, last fall on inner Bay of Fundy salmon. Correct me if my assumptions are wrong, but inner Bay of Fundy salmon come from a variety of small rivers, and their entire life cycle is spent in the Bay of Fundy. Is that correct?

Mr. Carl Purcell: Some of them travel as far as the Gulf of Maine. That's as far as they've been found, yes.

Mr. John Cummins: So if we're trying to determine what happened to Bay of Fundy salmon, it's not as if they were going into some great black hole in the middle of the Atlantic. These are fish whose life cycle we can pretty much track, once they leave the streams. Is that correct?

Mr. Carl Purcell: That's correct.

Mr. John Cummins: So if you wanted to look at a laboratory experiment to try to determine what's happening to Atlantic salmon—maybe even the bigger picture, but particularly with the Bay of Fundy fish—the experiment is almost controllable, is it not? If these fish aren't travelling far, you can monitor water conditions, you can monitor predators, you can monitor catch by commercial trawl fleets, and so on. You have a pretty good handle, do you not, on what happens at sea?

•(1105)

Mr. Carl Purcell: That's correct. And in some research—I refer to it in my notes as 2001, 2002, and 2003—there was one year when smolts were tracked by trawl, and another year when they were tracked by satellite pingers or that type of thing. They were able to find out where the post-smolts—the young salmon—were going.

But the research is done one year and not done another year. It's very hard to find the final analysis, and that therefore affects any type of future research. That's part of the problem.

Mr. John Cummins: The other issue is that we could track these inner bay Atlantic salmon and probably see some sort of circulation throughout the year they spend at sea. They probably come into the bay, they may go out of the bay, but one would expect that there's some sort of circulation, that they're not stationary. They don't just come and plunk themselves at the mouth of the river or move down to the Gulf of Maine and stay there; there's probably some circulation.

That brings us to the question you raise in your article about the impact of aquaculture on the southwest corner of the Bay of Fundy. The aquaculture there is quite congested. I think there are some of the most concentrated aquaculture operations in the world. What studies are you aware of that would show the impact or the relationship between inner Bay of Fundy Atlantic salmon and this aquaculture industry that operates in New Brunswick?

Mr. Carl Purcell: First of all, before the aquaculture industry started, this was an area that was fished by shore fishermen with seines. It was found that the post-smolts, the young adult salmon, spent a great deal of their life in that area in the fall and in the late summer as part of their migratory route. There are no seines there now; it's been taken over by aquaculture, but the wild smolts would certainly not have changed their migratory routes, and some have been caught from time to time. There is a very big possibility this is where they are being headed off.

Mr. John Cummins: Could I just have one very quick question?

The Chair: Very quickly, Mr. Cummins, because you're over your five minutes.

Mr. John Cummins: Thank you. I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman.

From what you're saying, I gather you can demonstrate some sort of relationship between the aquaculture operations and these wild inner bay Atlantic salmon. Would it not follow that if the department had in fact been practising the precautionary principle it throws about, it might have taken some action to minimize, if not eliminate, that interrelationship between these inner bay Atlantic salmon and the aquaculture operations?

Mr. Carl Purcell: It's very interesting that you should use that word “precautionary”, because we were sitting down for coffee this morning—we couldn't get in here at 8:30, so we had to go have a coffee—and we said, where was that precautionary approach when it came to aquaculture in its beginning stages? It was not there; it's as simple as that. It disappeared.

Mr. John Cummins: Is your Inner Bay Atlantic Salmon Recovery Team meeting in two weeks a public meeting?

The Chair: I gave you the one question. Now you've taken another one.

Mr. John Cummins: I know, but I just snuck that other one in. You know what I'm like.

Mr. Carl Purcell: We could give you an invite, certainly.

The Chair: Mr. Hart, you wanted to make a comment.

Mr. John Hart: Yes, Mr. Chairman, very briefly.

I don't have the expertise my colleague Mr. Purcell has on the inner Bay of Fundy, but I think we cannot directly pin a smoking gun on anyone in the relationship between aquaculture and the demise of the inner Bay of Fundy stocks.

For your own part of the world I would offer two words: Broughton Archipelago.

On the western side of Scotland, I was fortunate enough to attend a salmon conference there in 2002, at Edinburgh. Every river on the west coast of Scotland that had an aquaculture operation or a fish farm in close proximity saw a decline in the returns of sea trout and Atlantic salmon. One goes up; one goes down.

It's a biological divergence. I've heard it addressed on PA systems, and usually the announcer says, snowbirds split now. One goes one way, one goes the other way, and unfortunately, never the twain shall meet.

My last one is that if we're going to use the term “fish farms”, put fish farming under the Department of Agriculture, environmental renewal, the Department of Highways, or something, but DFO cannot be in the promotion and regulatory business at the same time. In small volunteer organizations I know someone would stand up and say, “Mr. Chairman, excuse me, this is a conflict of interest”. I can show you the ad where DFO was bragging about putting \$400 million into B.C.

•(1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hart.

[Translation]

Mr. Blais, if you please.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I represent the riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. Even though in the Gaspésie we do not know the situation of the salmon rivers very well, we do have a great number of them. We have had some problems over the years. As for me, I am the son of a fisherman, but my father was fishing for ground fish. I do not fish for salmon. However, some people, for a number of years now, have been busying themselves to get me to discover that activity.

My question has to do with what you mentioned in your intervention, aquaculture and so on, but also what you described immediately before that. I am from Port-Daniel, where there used to be a salmon river. After it was stocked once again, we had to deal with a major poaching problem. That problem has not been mentioned yet, and I was wondering to what extent it has contributed to the disappearance of those thousands of salmon.

[English]

Mr. John Hart: I think that would have to be, Mr. Chairman, on a very major commercial scale with a lot of it being done at night. There is poaching. Poaching is always a concern on any Atlantic salmon river or on a Pacific salmon river. Poaching is one of the things we deal with. It will be up to our own individual consciences and the conscience of the community as to how we choose to live with it, if we choose to live with it. This is one case in which I feel we can be the architects of our own misfortune or we can step up to the plate. I don't think that illegal activity on its own would have been the single, sole reason that the inner Bay of Fundy disappeared.

Mr. Carl Purcell: I didn't quite understand your question in the beginning, but yes, there may be some poaching going on, but that would not account for 40,000 Atlantic salmon disappearing in a matter of seven or eight years. We've had poaching on rivers for hundreds of years.

Mr. John Hart: Unless the navy was in on it?

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Purcell, in your presentation you mentioned that salmon farming could be a major cause of the problem. I would like to gain a better understanding of how the situations in Nova Scotia and Quebec compare in terms of regulations. You doubtless know that in our province, salmon farming has gone in a whole other direction. How do you explain this absence of regulations? Based on what you were saying in your brief, could you tell us in what way the regulations were deficient?

• (1115)

[English]

Mr. Carl Purcell: The first real salmon aquaculture in the Bay of Fundy, on a sea basis, probably began in 1979. It didn't become a major employer until 1986 when they started growing commercial smolts for the aquaculture industry. At that time you have to also realize that this area of New Brunswick had a great deal of unemployment. There were people looking for jobs and so forth. We also realize that it was the time that commercial fishing was taken away from many people. And here was this new-found way of employing people, and so forth. Both New Brunswick and DFO, on the federal side of it, saw this as a way of employing people. During the first five years of this industry there was \$34 million put into this industry by ACOA.

They tried to get the first regulations through Parliament I think in 1991. The first regulations on aquaculture did not come through committees in the federal government until I think 1994. So there was virtually no one looking after the regulations.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: In your brief, you mentioned...

The Chair: Your five minutes are up. Time flies.

[English]

We have Mr. Cuzner, and then we have Mr. Keddy, and then we have 11:30. Well, I might have a question.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I see the salmon endowment fund as being an opportunity. Is it going to make all the headaches go away? Probably not, but I see it as a great opportunity.

So I'd like the comments of each of you on aspects of governance and the model that should be applied. Should we take the model that's being used on the west coast and apply it to the Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund? I just want your own perspectives on the key components of this endowment fund going forward. Since we only have four minutes left, could you be fairly succinct with your comments?

The Chair: Mr. Hart, why don't you start.

Mr. John Hart: I was sitting here in silence in deference to my elders.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Hart: The endowment fund must be used as a supplement; it cannot be used as a replacement, period.

The Chair: What about governance?

Mr. John Hart: As to the governance of it, we have no idea what is going to be taking place with it as yet. I presume that the Atlantic Salmon Federation will be taking a lead role on this. We are hoping to stay in contact and partnership with them, so that the user groups who are affected by the endowment fund will be able to work in concert and in partnership in developing a framework that is appropriate for rehabilitation.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I would think from your perspective, though, it would be necessary to have hatcheries at the table or on the board, so there is a seat for hatcheries.

Mr. John Hart: Honestly, I know of two organizations in the last number of years that have wholeheartedly supported hatcheries. I'm past president of one, as is my colleague, Mr. Forsyth. Out of that support for the hatchery program was born an organization, which Leonard is now a part-time employee of; it is a volunteer group that has kept a former federal facility in operation. Our group does its best to supply good habitat for a salmon river; the Margaree hatchery is producing fish, but it doesn't have to produce all of them. It is a good safety net and has the very real potential of assisting and aiding in rehabilitating other populations across Cape Breton Island and eastern Nova Scotia, as it has historically done.

• (1120)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: As it applies to governments, don't you think it would make sense to have a hatchery seat—

Mr. John Hart: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Purcell.

Mr. Carl Purcell: Nova Scotia has an adopt-a-stream program that is removed from government officials. Yes, they are on the committee, but they are non-voting members who give advice and so forth. I see that type of approach being used for the endowment fund. Yes, DFO should be at the table and give advice when they're asked yes or no types of things, such as, is this a good project and what can we expect, but they would not be part of the final decision-making. That's where I see it being governed, somewhat like that, with the Atlantic Salmon Federation and one or two people from each province, Quebec, and so forth, sitting there and saying, how can we best use this money?

The Chair: Including the hatcheries?

Mr. Carl Purcell: Yes and no.

When we say hatcheries, I get concerned, because they are needed, but if I say, yes, DFO will say, "Oh, we don't have to become involved with that", though they have a fiduciary responsibility to protect wild salmon stocks. It's very expensive running hatcheries. If we're going to use all of our money for hatcheries, what about habitat and research? Research is very important.

That's why I say yes and no. Yes, hatcheries can be part of it for individual groups and organization who need it, but overall, no.

The Chair: Mr. DeMond.

Mr. Lowell DeMond: Well, I agree with the former speakers, but the jury is still out for me on hatcheries, the reason being that I know what's being said—though I'm not really sure—that the figure the biologists throw around in this regard is that one wild fish is equal to seven hatchery fish when you think of a return. I don't think this money should be used at all to supplement the need for scientific research. There's only one group that can do it—and I'm not sure they can—and that's our little group, which is in the afternoon of life. You have to remember that.

I almost think that if you get into ocean research, Canada maybe has to cooperate with the U.S. and use Woods Hall Oceanographic Institute, and some of those people out there who are saying, "If these fish are going off to Greenland, what's happening to them out there? Is this part of this greenhouse effect, or whatever?" But there's certainly scientific research that DFO could do, for example, with regard to the river I'm associated with, to try to answer the question: if the little fish or smolts are going out, why aren't they coming back? It's a marine problem.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Keddy.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Thank you.

Very quickly, I just have to take Mr. Cuzner to task a bit on the \$30 million. We do thank the minister for the \$30 million, but you know, we've heard from every witness that we can't take the money that's already been allocated away; we can't cut the funding that's already there because we have \$30 million in the endowment fund. I think that needs to be on the record time and time again.

On the hatcheries question, I've always been a little fascinated with the whole hatchery situation. I appreciate Mr. Forsyth's background in the hatchery business, but when you look at the hatcheries and aquaculture—I know the aquaculture guys wouldn't want to hear me say this—I've always asked the question, as a salmon fisherman, why do we put aquaculture at the mouths of the rivers that don't contain river-specific fish for those rivers?

I realize the difficulty of the genetic base of the Atlantic salmon farm fish, but if your cage is at the mouth of a river that contains river-specific genetic stock—there aren't any in the LaHave River, but if there were we could say it was LaHave River genetic stock—and if you had one on the Gold River and it contained Gold River genetic stock, and if you could go through every river along the coast and you have escapement, that escapement is your genetic stock from the very spot they escape from. They would go to those rivers to spawn, and it wouldn't be any different than our stocking program used to be in the past.

We had a stocking program that only had two or three bases of genetic stock. We learned, though, a long time ago on the Gold River that if we took Gold River fish and used them for our genetic stock, sent them to the hatchery, our returns increased something like 300%. There was no comparison. I just wonder if that's ever been considered.

● (1125)

Mr. Leonard Forsyth: As far as the aquaculture industry itself goes, in my opinion, that would be the only proper way to conduct it. Salmon stocks are unique to various river systems. I think that's been one of the big problems, even as far as the spread of disease goes. All of a sudden, ISA showed up in the Bay of Fundy. Where did it come from? It didn't come from here. It came from Europe, and everybody knew that.

As far as the genetics aspect of it goes, you're right, Mr. Keddy, that's the way it should be done. It took even the Department of Fisheries in the hatchery and the stocking program 75 years to learn the fact that you should use stock from the river that you're trying to enhance or rehabilitate or colonize or whatever you're trying to do. That is the proper way to go about it. We were just getting to that point when the programs were cut, so now we're back to square one again.

Under the DFO program review in 1995, department officials said conservation in most of the rivers in Nova Scotia is not an issue any more; it's not a problem. That was the justification for getting rid of the hatchery program in the first place. But then after that happened and they divested the hatcheries and got rid of them, all of a sudden they thought, what are we going to do, because some of the stocks, like the inner Bay of Fundy, are in jeopardy of decimation and extinction? They took over two of the hatcheries they got rid of, that they didn't need, and they're now operating them under a contingency fund, because there's no A-base funding for it, to try to save a species from extinction. They're running hatcheries to do it. They're big hypocrites.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: I have one other quick question for all of you, and I know you're all aware of it and I know it's an important issue that hasn't been raised yet; it's the 10-tonne allocation for Atlantic salmon to Labrador. If we're going to have a commercial Atlantic salmon fishery on that scale and magnitude, what's it going to do to the returning fish for all of Atlantic Canada?

Mr. Carl Purcell: First of all, that is an interceptory fishery. Those fish aren't all going to one river in Labrador. They are going to Quebec. They are going to New Brunswick. They are going to Nova Scotia. It should not have occurred.

Second, we have to realize that there's a political aspect here. Canada sits on the council of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization. It's pretty difficult for Canada to make its point when it itself has an interceptory fisher and is trying to get Greenlanders not to fish. I mean, most of the Greenlanders are a first nations group. Technically they have first rights. How can Canada say it wants something done when it's allowing an interceptory fishery to occur? It just should not have ever occurred.

The Chair: Do any of you have a comment on that subject?

Mr. Lowell DeMond: I would agree with Carl, and I'd like to use the rest of my little 30 seconds to say something about aquaculture.

Based on the knowledge and the information I have at the present time, which is just through reading and things that I can pick up from biologists and this kind of thing, if I were starting an aquaculture industry in Canada again, I'd put the pens up on dry land. I'd pump the water through them and I'd be able to control what's happening.

Mr. Carl Purcell: Yes, that's the only way.

The Chair: All right. We're at the end of our time, gentlemen.

It was very illuminating, and I'm glad you came before we have begun the estimates process with government officials, because you've certainly given us food for thought and ammunition for questions on a variety of subjects, including, for example, enforcement issues, aquaculture, stocking, and all these kinds of things. It's been very illuminating.

It should be fairly obvious that the committee would clearly be in agreement that the endowment fund should operate in a transparent way, and that it should operate with the input and help of the local community associations, for the obvious reasons you stated.

We certainly want to thank you very much for your contribution. We do appreciate the fact that it was on short notice. Thanks very much, and we'll do the best we can to make sure Atlantic salmon continue to populate your area of Canada.

Mr. John Hart: Mr. Chairman, I think it's fair to say, from all of us here, that we are greatly appreciative of the opportunity to appear to put our concerns forward. We didn't come exactly with our hands out. We are willing to work with any and all—present government, whoever—in finding solutions. And on behalf of the good folks of Margaree and the independent republic of Cape Breton, I would like to extend an invitation to any and all to come to visit the Margaree. Mr. Chairman, if you're only starting to see salmon in Ontario, come and see what a Cape Breton fish looks like.

● (1130)

The Chair: Excellent.

Committee members, we'll see you Tuesday for invasive species.

We are adjourned.

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